

The dynamics of the communist rise: an analysis of the archival documents regarding the Romanian Communist Party in Mureș county (1944–1945)

Dinamica ascensiunii comunismului: o analiză a documentelor de arhivă a Partidului Comunist Român din județul Mureș (1944–1945)

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Abstract. This study analyses the rise of the Romanian Communist Party in Mureș County after World War II. It utilises archival sources, local press, and specialized works to examine how the Romanian Communist Party capitalized on post-WWII instability to expand its influence in Mureș County. The Party faced challenges like low ideological receptivity and limited resources but overcame them through strategic actions. These included installing left-wing officials, purging opponents, promising social equality, and utilizing propaganda. The Party's success is attributed to both the favorable political context and its effective strategies. However, the numerical growth may be inflated by opportunism or fear, highlighting the need for critical analysis of communist data. This work contributes to the understanding of communist history, party establishment, and propaganda techniques.

Keywords: Romanian Communist Party, Northern Transylvania, strategy, communism, propaganda, control, social tensions.

The period between September 1944 and March 1945 marked a turbulent stage in the history of Northern Transylvania, characterised by the rapid succession of the Romanian and Soviet administrations. This instability led to a series of significant social and political consequences for the local population, including both Romanians and Hungarians.

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The frequent changes in the administration created a sense of unease and mistrust among the population. This uncertainty was exacerbated by the abuses committed by the Soviet administration, leading to resentment among both ethnic groups. The tense situation facilitated the outbreak of inter-ethnic conflicts, fueled by the accumulated frustrations and grievances. The lack of credible authority contributed to the intensification of the ethnic tensions. The population, regardless of ethnicity, was kept in a state of permanent unrest, either due to the Soviet abuses or the lack of security. Last but not least, the predominance of the Hungarian officials in the local administration appointed by the Soviets caused discontent among the Romanian population. The explanation for this situation lies in the fact that “at that time, the majority of members or sympathisers of the Communist Party in the region were Hungarian, which deeply displeased the Romanian population in the area”¹.

These changing situations had a significant impact on the local society, leading to unrest, distrust, inter-ethnic conflicts, and a general state of disorientation². The Communist Party played an important role in shaping the local administration and contributed to the escalation of ethnic tensions in the region. A concrete example of the power dynamics upheld by the Soviets is the Mureș prefecture, where a Romanian administration was established between 1944 and 1945. Initially, Ioan Bozdog³, a member of the National Peasants' Party, was appointed, followed by Victor Groza (honorary president of ARLUS in 1948), Petru Groza's brother, and later Anton Mera (president of ARLUS, expelled in 1948⁴).

¹ Marcela Sălăgean, *Administrația sovietică în Nordul Transilvaniei – noiembrie 1944 – martie 1945*, Fundația Culturală Română, Centrul de Studii Transilvane, Cluj-Napoca, 2002, p. 80.

² The Soviet administration's renaming of streets in Târgu Mureș exemplifies their influence. Names like Mussolini, Hitler, and Horthy were replaced with those reflecting Soviet ideology (Stalin, Malinovschi) or Romanian identity (Păcii, meaning “Peace”). These changes aimed to mark Soviet dominance and, later, independence from Moscow or the rise of nationalism. See Pál-Antal Sándor, *Indicatorul istoric al străzilor, pasajelor și piețelor din Târgu Mureș*, Mentor Kiadó, Târgu Mureș, 1997, pp. 48–50.

³ He was appointed prefect on September 28, 1944, but without support from Soviet-backed Hungarian organizations. His membership in historical parties, the National Peasants' Party (PNT), as well as his attitude towards the Hungarian elite in Transylvania and the Romanian Communist Party, brought him numerous public denigrations, examples of which can be found in a 1946 article in the local newspaper, *Ardealul nou* (nr. 17/17 august; nr. 19/24 august, nr. 33/12 october si others), see more in Ilie Șandru, „Destinul unui personaj din memoriile lui Vasile Netea: Dr. Ion Bozdog”, *Sangidava* (5), Editura Nico, Târgu Mureș, pp. 297–300 and Ioan Ciorca, *In Memoriam Ion Bozdog – românul din Urca și „Statul politist”. Recurs la istorie*, Casa cărții de știință, Cluj-Napoca, 2017; Ana Todea, *Portrete mureșene*, Editura Biblioteca Județeană Mureș, Târgu Mureș, 2013, p. 78.

⁴ Serviciul Județean al Arhivelor Naționale Mureș (S.J.A.N.M.), *Fond ARLUS-filiala județeană Mureș*, dosar 3/1948, Lista Comitetului Județean Filiala Mureș, f. 27–29.

who had a profile aligned with the proletarian ethics. During this time, at the head of the Town Hall there were two members of the Communist Party in Mureș, Adolf Zsak and Soos Jozsef. The latter, Soos Jozsef, proved to be an administrator to the liking of the Soviets, and the newspaper *Scânteia* made a eulogy for him, as a result of the good communist practices implemented in Târgu Mureș: “Next to comrade, Iosif Sos, the mayor of Tg. Mureș, one of the most popular and beloved figures in the region. Thanks to his household spirit, selflessness in serving the interests of the people, and his ability to replace a parasitic and bureaucratic administration with an active one, attentive to the needs of the citizens, this mayor, a true man of the new era, managed to transform the townscape in a short time, significantly contributing to steering life here towards a healthier and more prosperous direction. Comrade Iosif Sos, after being given a long-standing ovation, delivered a short but vibrant speech in which he emphasised the contributions made by the communists in the struggle for recovery”⁵.

The ambition of the Soviets in post-war Romania was to establish a political regime controlled by the Communist Party. Their main objective was to appoint mayors and prefects with a leftist orientation. Hungarian organisations, such as the Hungarian People’s Union, joined the National Democratic Front and supported the establishment of a democratic (communist) government. Not infrequently, they even promoted the Soviet principles regarding the peaceful coexistence of the peoples of the Soviet Union, where there were no majorities and minorities, with applicability in Transylvania⁶.

It is important to critically analyse the motivation behind these alliances, considering the possibility that they were formed primarily to gain advantages and benefits from the local elites, rather than out of ideological conviction. Therefore, it is difficult to claim determinedly that any of the ethnic groups were oriented towards collaborating with the communist regime. The concerns of the Communist Party in Mureș⁷, immediately after gaining legal status, revealed the political and social atmosphere in the town. The documents in the archive provide a valuable perspective on both Târgu Mureș, the town, and Mureș, the county, after the Second World War. They also reveal a significant discrepancy between the interests of the Communist Party and the political affiliations of the

⁵ Andrei Venescu, „Un primar model”, *Scânteia*, 28 Octombrie 1945, p. 3.

⁶ Marcela Sălăgean, *Administrația sovietică în Nordul Transilvaniei*, pp. 91–92.

⁷ The headquarters of PCR Mureș was located in the city center of Piața (square) Stalin, number 43 (today Piața Trandafirilor) as it appears in the header of a report issued by PCR and inventoried in the archives. Also, in 1945 PCR Mureș used the “hammer and sickle” logo both on the letterhead and on the stamp. The files also list documents from other organizations such as *the Plowmen’s Front* or *the Patriotic Defense*.

citizens. A report drafted in 1944 (the specific month is not mentioned, but there is an annotation on the side of the page indicating that the report encompasses activities from September to the end of 1944) reflects the atmosphere of the final months of the year. More significantly, it sheds light on the political affiliations of the residents of Mures County, which did not align with the communist agenda. The report highlights a “doubtful state of mind”⁸ among the masses, marked by the turmoil caused by the war. There was a general distrust of the authorities, but also a desire for stability and order.

It is necessary to bear in mind that, despite the emphatic declarations of the communist leaders, the Party was not representative at the local, regional or national level. The lack of correspondence between the party’s ideology and Romania’s social reality led to a limited support base. On the one hand, the Romanian Communist Party (PCR) adherents mainly came from two categories: the Romanian Railways employees, who wielded some influence, and individuals from regions with ethnic minorities. Despite the pro-proletarian declarations, representativeness was very low, and the peasants were closer to the peasant ideology than to the socialist one. On the other hand, the Party failed to establish a connection with the Romanian population in Transylvania. The region was perceived as being dominated by the Hungarian elites with political, rather than social, interests. Firstly, the archive documents from 1944 show us that within the Mureș County Committee, only three names were Romanian out of a total of 16 on the list⁹; a similar situation appears in 1945¹⁰. Secondly, from the statistics, it can be seen¹¹ that the number of peasant members was considerably lower than that of the workers. Regarding the ethnic distribution, the number of Hungarian members was higher than that of the Romanians. Lastly, after 1944, the Romanian Communist Party attempted to change these unfavourable situations by assimilating the existing satellites like the *Plowmen’s Front*, more appreciated by the peasants, and other mass organisations such as the *Patriotic Defense*. This involved utilising the „logos of both the Party and the *National Democratic Front*”¹², resulting in a significant increase in membership.

The liberation of Târgu Mureș from the fascist occupation, on September 28th 1944, marked the beginning of a new chapter in the political and social history of the town. However, the event facilitated the rise of the ex-illegal Romanian Communist Party. Thus, taking advantage of the favourable context,

⁸ S.J.A.N.M., *Fondul Comitetul Județean Mureș al PCR (I)*, dosar 1/1944, f. 1.

⁹ *Ibidem*, dosar 1/1944, f. 21.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, dosar 2/1945, f. 10.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, dosar 5/1945, f. 29–31.

¹² Gheorghe Onișoru, *Alianțe și confruntări politice din România (1944–1947)*, Fundația Academia Civică, București, 1996, p. 116.

the illegal communist activists regrouped and began to implement Moscow's directives. Although the communist propaganda later glorified the Party's role in saving the country from fascism and claimed massive popular support, the reality reflected by the archives of the early post-war years is different. A thorough research of the archives and other primary sources can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of this significant stage in the town's history.

Victor Frunză's work, *The History of Communism in Romania*, proved useful for establishing a perspective of the communist history in Romania, and for understanding the sovietisation process of the country. Other works are also important: Gheorghe Buzatu, *The Aggression of Communism in Romania* (vol. I), Gheorghe Onișorul, *Stalin and the Russian People. Democracy and Dictatorship in Contemporary Romania, Political Alliances and Confrontations in Romania (1944–1947)* and Reuben H. Markham, *Romania under the Soviet Yoke*. Regarding the status of Northern Transylvania after the Second World War, the studies of researcher Marcela Sălăgean, *Transylvania in the game of interests of the Great Powers (1940–1947)* and *The Soviet Administration in Northern Transylvania (November 1944 – March 1945)* provide a thorough description of the situation in this region. At the same time, the studies on local political organisations conducted by researchers Arthur Lakatos, *The Romanian Communist Party in Cluj in 1945*, Liviu Tîrău, *The Power Structures Development of the Romanian Communist Party in Cluj county 1945–1946*, Tamás Lőnhárt, *The Hungarian People's Union during the establishment of the communist regime in Romania (1944–1948)* give essential information. Equally important are the studies of the researchers Costea Simion, *From the history of Tîrgu -Mureș: aspects of its political -social, demographic and economic evolution in the period 1944–1989* and Zoltán Novák, *The establishment of the political structure of the PCR in the county Mureș 1944–1948*. This list is not exhaustive, the bibliographic references can be supplemented with studies by researchers such as Vladimir Tismăneanu, Cristian Vasile, Ioan Scurtu, Katherine Verdery, and many others.

Despite the triumphalist image of the post-war period promoted by the communist propaganda, which presents reality as a series of victories achieved through the sacrifice of the people and the leadership of the Romanian Communist Party (PCR), a detailed analysis of the archival documents reveals a more complex reality. This study focuses on Mureș County between 1944 and 1945, analysing the political and social climate from the perspective of the Romanian Communist Party. Therefore, this study is based on an analysis of the archival documents from the Mureș Romanian Communist Party files at the Mureș National Archives, as well as on the contemporary local press coverage. The reports, analyses, and statistical data offer a unique perspective on the challenges which the Party was encountering at that time, the political

dynamics at the local administration level, and the political strategies employed to gain power.

After regaining legal status in 1944, the Party encountered a series of challenges in Mureș County. Firstly, some opportunists joined the Party for personal gain, while the majority of citizens had no real interest in the communist ideology. Secondly, the Party struggled with the consequences of the war and the integration of Transylvania into Romania.

The archived documents reveal a more nuanced picture of the reality in Mureș County in the first years after the war. In other words, the Party faced a general apathy of the population towards the communist ideology while struggling to consolidate its political power and control the society. The elimination of the political opponents, the internal reorganisations, and the intense propaganda were just some of the strategies used by the Party to achieve its goals.

Among the first actions of the Communist Party¹³ carried out in 1944, we identify timid attempts to attract workers to the organisation by taking advantage of the actions of the Red Army which “liquidated the Manisto-Guardist gangs and those of the leaders who befriended the neighbouring populations”¹⁴. The political situation encouraged actions aimed at eliminating the opponents, such as the traditional bourgeois parties, the fascist-reactionary forces, or anyone fitting the opponent’s profile. Simultaneously, efforts were made to launch propaganda campaigns to expand its influence and increase the number of members. An article published in the newspaper *Scântea* highlighted the shortcomings caused by the previous governments in opposition to the political, social, and economic measures taken by the new government. This is illustrative of how the image of the opposition was approached. The article also emphasises the importance of the democratic policies in the administration of Târgu Mureș and Mureș County, taking into account the ethnic aspects and the political affiliation¹⁵. The same rhetoric appeared in the local media, specifically in the newspaper *Înfrățirea*, which was conducting a campaign to discredit the opposition by accusing them of organising and participating in public acts of violence: “armed with weapons, they engaged in hooligan and fascist behaviours. This move was premeditated and prepared by the leadership

¹³ Party composition – Lobl Marton (secretary), Schussler Karoly, Csopor Lajos, Csany Karoly (secretary since 1945), Soos Jozsef (city mayor between 1945–1952), Szocs Bela (city mayor between 1953–1956), Vasarhelyi Domokos, Oltean Alexandru and others. Serviciul Județean Mureș al Arhivelor Naționale Fondul Comitetul Județean Mureș al PCR (I), dosar 1/1944, f.21. In 1944, the mayor of the city was Adolf József Zsák (1944–1945), and the prefect (from November 1944 to September 1945) was Victor Groza.

¹⁴ S.J.A.N.M., *Fondul Comitetul Județean Mureș al PCR (I)*, dosar 1/1944, f. 1.

¹⁵ „Situția din Nordul Ardealului”, *Scântea*, 25 ianuarie 1945, pp.1, 5.

of the two previously mentioned parties (national liberals and national peasants), which rallies and conjures up all the remnants of fascism in our country”¹⁶.

An activity report shows that the peasants and the workers seemed to be receptive to the propaganda actions¹⁷ of the Communist Party, the activists being convinced by the success of the campaigns: “Everything can be solved by having the propaganda material available (...) through our work, however, we have also removed these deficiencies by activating the propaganda collective”¹⁸. These claims were difficult to sustain given the incongruity between the apparent public perception of the Romanian Communist Party policy and the actual adherence.

Consequently, another concern of the Party was to increase its influence on various social categories and thereby boost the number of party members. This included workers, peasants, intellectuals, and members of other social groups or political organisations. The diminished influence among the intellectuals and other social groups can be attributed to various reasons, such as the ideological opposition or a reluctance to adhere to the strict control imposed by the Party.

The archive documents related to 1944 do not contain statistical tables that should give us a detailed picture of how the number of adherents increased or stagnated, but from a report we learn that „80% of the workers are with us, the peasantry also 80 %, the intellectuals 20%, the Hungarian People’s Union (UPM) 25% and 15% of the old social democrats and reactionaries”¹⁹. From the same report, we learn that the organisations that formed the Communist Party were mainly *the Hungarian People’s Union* with 48,000 members, and *the Patriotic Union* with 580 members; the communists were only 800 members. Therefore, we note the reduced number of members of the Communist Party, but, as it appears from the report, the leadership of the other existing mass organisations was “in our hands”²⁰.

The sympathy for the communists varied, according to the Party cadres, with the communist agitators attempting to gain favour through their activities,

¹⁶ „Acte de anarhie provocate în capitală de către Maniu şi Brătianu”, *Înfrăţirea*, 15 Noiembrie 1945, p. 1.

¹⁷ See Gheorghe Buzatu, Mircea Chiriţoiu, *Agresiunea comunismului în România. Documente din arhivele secrete 1944–1989*, Volumul I, Paideia, Bucureşti, 2019; Eugen Denize, *Propaganda comunistă în România (1948–1953)*, Cetatea de Scaun, Târgovişte, 2011; Michael Shafir, *România comunistă – O analiză politică, economică şi socială 1948–1985*, Meteor Press, Bucureşti, 2021; Stefano Bottoni, *Transilvania roşie: comunismul românesc şi problema naţională: (1944–1965)*, Editura Institutului pentru Studiarea Problemelor Minorităţilor Naţionale, Kriterion, Cluj-Napoca, 2010.

¹⁸ S.J.A.N.M., *Fondul Comitetul Judeţean Mureş al PCR (I)*, dosar 1/1944, f. 2.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, f. 3.

which they promoted as “work in the service of the people”²¹. The report is also relevant for observing the attitude that the inhabitants had towards the Red Army, an attitude which shifted from hostile, in the early stages, to favourable thereafter, “this sympathy depends to a large extent on the attitude of the soldiers, of the non-commissioned officers, and of the red officers”²². However, The Red Army contributed to the challenging integration of Transylvania into Romania’s borders by preventing the installation of the Romanian authorities. Unfortunate cases have been brought to light by researcher Marcela Sălăgean in Cluj, Oradea, and Târgu Mureș. The prefect’s report reflects the disorder in the local administration: certain departments lacked officials, part of the officials did not return after being released; in other departments, there were only Romanian or only Hungarian officials; numerous shortages prevented proper functioning²³. Nevertheless, the presence and attitude of the Red Army fueled the controversies and social dissensions that already existed, increasing the population’s distrust of the communist activists²⁴. Furthermore, this situation contributed to the denigration of the public authorities’ image and the population’s lack of trust in the officials. Taking advantage of this opportunity, the Romanian Communist Party positioned itself as a moral compass advocating for the reorganisation of the society based on egalitarian principles, where anyone has the potential to become a leader within the local community.

Among all the political organisations in Mureș mentioned in the 1944 reports, the Social Democratic Party received the harshest criticism. This criticism likely aligns with the general communist agenda to eliminate and absorb left-wing organisations. The report states, “the human resources here are composed of individuals who are nostalgic for the so-called democratic regimes of the past, the influence can be seen in the sclerotic and senile intellectuals and in the circle of unscrupulous merchants who see their exploitative positions as being jeopardised”²⁵. The inclusion of the socialists in the Romanian Communist Party culminated in a request made at the end of 1947 for the headquarters of the PSD by the *Romanian Association for Strengthening Ties with the Soviet*

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² *Ibidem*, f. 4.

²³ Marcela Sălăgean, *Administrația sovietică în Nordul Transilvaniei*, pp. 54–58.

²⁴ For studies relevant to the actions (robbery, murder, destruction, etc.) of the Red Army based on memorials and archives are Arthur Lakatos, „Primele luni ale Armatei Rosii în orașul Cluj, 1944–1946. O abordare socio-antropologică”, in Iosif Marin Balogh (edit.) *Multiculturalism, identitate și diversitate. Perspective istorice*, Editura Mega, Cluj-Napoca, 2015 pp. 693–707; and Andrea Furtos, „Amintiri și reflecții despre primii ani ai „democrației populare” în România”, in *Anuarul de Istorie Orală*, Cluj-Napoca, Argonaut, 2012, pp. 159–172.

²⁵ S.J.A.N.M., *Fondul Comitetul Județean Mureș al PCR (I)*, dosar 1/1944, f. 4.

*Union (ARLUS)*²⁶ due to the fact that the organisation was operating in an unsuitable location. At the national level, historiography has documented the self-destruction of the Social Democratic Party through its division into the socialist opportunists who viewed the Communist Party as a quicker way to their political advancement and a smaller, powerless faction that aimed to preserve the traditional socialism²⁷. In most cases, as in the quote from the report above, the politicians who opposed the formation of the communist common front were publicly vilified or harassed, regardless of their political affiliation. Finally, the communist propaganda exploited the old social tensions, such as nationalism and inter-ethnic conflicts in Transylvania, systematically blaming the previous authorities.

In addition, as a propaganda potential activity, the communists insisted on organising the workers in unions²⁸ for better control, thus expanding the unions by adding members from different fields of work, such as workers in constructions, in the railways, in the wood industry or the processing of iron. Consequently, the conclusions of some reports show us that the trade union organisation was a real success, but also a necessity considering that the main stated objective of the party activists was the propaganda against nationalism which could be achieved through the control of the workers²⁹. The situation of the trade unions in interwar Romania and immediately after the communist occupation is described by Reuben Markham, who carried out a review not only of the increase in the number of the trade unionists but also of the trade unions' leaders, most of the time with deeply communist attachments. The obsession with forming unions was disguised as helping workers who were exploited by the capitalists or providing protection against employer abuses. The union leaders presented themselves as the workers' saviours, but they surrounded themselves with violent men who terrorised both workers and employers, with the support of the State. The union meetings were ideal occasions for propagandistic speeches with promises to eliminate the enemy and improve the quality of the worker's life. During this time, the trade unionists formed cartels whose real aim was to attract as many workers as possible to the Party, and not infrequently through coercion. In the furious attack on social injustice, workers,

²⁶ S.J.A.N.M., *Fond ARLUS-filiala județeană Mureș*, dosar 2/1947, f. 9–10.

²⁷ For a brief history of the Social Democratic Party, see Gheorghe Onișoru, *Alianțe și confruntări politice din România (1944–1947)*, Fundația Academia Civică, București, 1996, pp. 127–134.

²⁸ The statistics from December show that of the total number of workers and officials employed in factories in Mureș (with over 100 workers), i.e. 3383 workers and 445 officials, 3828 were unionized, but only 529 are registered in the Party. *Serviciul Județean Mureș al Arhivelor Naționale, Fondul Comitetul Județean Mureș al PCR (I)*, dosar 6/1945, Table 3.

²⁹ S.J.A.N.M., *Fondul Comitetul Județean Mureș al PCR (I)*, dosar 1/1944, f. 12–17.

factory owners, students, or anyone who opposed them fell victims of the trade union leaders, aided by the police and the State³⁰.

Among the propaganda techniques, the visual agitation techniques were also used, such as organising public demonstrations, offering flowers or orchestrating marches on the occasion of the communist celebrations. In 1944, the archival documents counted 3,000 workers who would have participated in a march, not authorised by the Romanian authorities, where the participants carried red flags. Then, a trade union meeting of 2000 people was organised at the Palace of Culture in Târgu Mureș, also by the communist activists³¹. The pro-Soviet demonstrations peaked with a march of 5,000 people on November 7th, in front of the Town Hall, where speeches about peace and the eradication of fascism were held, and the red flags were the representative sign of the participants³². There are specifications regarding the celebration of November 7th, in an address dated the same year³³, but there are no details concerning the number of people, organisers, or other information that could lead us to conclude that these events were, in fact, the same or if there were two marches with different organisers. The address in question reveals, however, the programme of the event, namely four lectures, Mihaly Iosif – *about the significance of the day*, Antalffy Andrei – *about democracy*, Soos Iosif – *about the glorious Red Army* and Vasile Ignat – *about the importance of the day for Romania*. We have no information concerning the way it was carried out, except for the meeting places of the workers and the formation of a 60-man guard to maintain order. We don't even know how many workers were expected, and there was no mention of flags, billboards, or town embellishments. We are entrusted to state that, regardless of the number of participants or the way they participated, these demonstrations were organised for political purposes, and used as a channel for indoctrination.

Less than a year apart, the celebration of this holiday was much better organised and visibly more heavily politicised. The programme for the celebration of May 1st 1945 resembles a Soviet holiday that opens with the singing of the Soviet anthem, and the raising of the flag of honour in the presence of organisations and parties, such as the Romanian Communist Party, the Plowmen's Front, the Union of the Patriots, the Union of the Hungarians, followed by the choir that sang *The beloved Transylvania* and *Katiusha*. From the

³⁰ Reuben H. Markham, *România sub jugul sovietic*, Fundația Academia Civică, București, 1996, pp. 225–234. The author of the work, an American journalist, makes an X-ray of Romania, after the 30s and the fall of the Romanian people into the hands of the Soviets, originally published in Boston in 1949.

³¹ S.J.A.N.M., *Fondul Comitetul Județean Mureș al PCR (I)*, dosar 1/1944, f. 8.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ *Ibidem*, f. 22.

programme kept in the archive, we notice that the initial moments such as the opening of the celebration in national costumes and the singing of the Romanian royal anthem were introduced, then cancelled. In addition, the instructions show a considerable deployment in terms of efforts, trains being prepared to bring all the workers to the celebration, and also a careful selection of them so that there would be no fascists or reactionaries among them³⁴. We can state that the workers' holiday³⁵ was a eulogy to the USSR and an opportunity for propagandistic speeches.

The Red Holidays played the role of intoxicating the public opinion, by promoting the Leninist-Stalinist ideology, eroding the image of the opposition, and eulogising the heroes of the struggles for the dignity of workers and peasants. These campaigns turned into propaganda shows where amateurs had the opportunity to climb the social and career ladder by showing their attachment to the Party. As a result, the *red wrapping* of social events had the role of integrating the Romanian Communist Party into the mentality of the local population. An illustrative moment is the first anniversary of the liberation of Târgu Mureş; the main themes of the festivities were in this order: first the tributes to the Soviet army, then the thanks to Stalin, and then to the Romanian army. The article ends regretfully, the author expresses his dissatisfaction regarding the small number of intellectuals who participated in the event in question: "The great crowd of workers lined up in compact ranks and, to the sound of the workers' fanfare, headed towards the Soviet headquarters, paying homage to the victorious Soviet army and the great Stalin, the magnanimous liberator of nations from the crushing heel of fascism"³⁶.

As the studies have shown so far, the weak influence of the communists in Transylvania, the low interest in the promoted ideology, and the internal weaknesses of the Party are just some of the situations that endangered the rise of the left party. As a result, to accumulate more political capital, the Romanian Communist Party in Mureş turned to the existing mass organisations before the re-entry into legality, not only to attract members but also to promote the workers' rhetoric. Thus, through the activities of these mass organisations, an attempt was made to promote the Soviet model in all areas of life³⁷.

³⁴ S.J.A.N.M., *Fondul Comitetul Judeţean Mureş al PCR (I)*, dosar 6/1945, f. 1–2.

³⁵ The local press publishes a short article about the *first free* May 1st, where the liberators are praised and where, on the same page, Mihai Sadoveanu is also promoted as the greatest artist of the Romanian nation. See „Primul 1 mai liber” *Înfrăţirea*, 30 April 1945, p. 3; „Ziua Armatei Roşii”, 25 februarie 1945, p. 1.

³⁶ „Aniversarea eliberării oraşului”, *Înfrăţirea*, 30 Septembrie 1945, p. 1.

³⁷ One of the most relevant cases both at the national and regional level is *the Romanian Association for strengthening ties with the Soviet Union (ARLUS)*. See Adrian Cioroianu, *Pe umerii lui Marx. O introducere în istoria comunismului românesc*, Editura Curtea Veche, Bucureşti, 2005.

The reports on the mass organisations reveal an almost dramatic situation, caused by the lack of involvement of the Cluj-Napoca Regional Organisation, despite the numerous requests. The lack of logistical and financial support significantly affected the organisation's ability to carry out its activities; and its passive attitude did not stimulate good coordination in Mureș. Therefore, we observe significant deficiencies, such as the absence of informative and propaganda materials which had a negative impact on attracting followers: "Sometimes I feel like this Organisation in Cluj does not function, or instead, it is not effective because if it were, the impact of that action would extend and be felt even in Târgu Mureș"³⁸.

In addition to these shortcomings, the Communist Party also faced the weak management within other mass organisations such as the *Progressive Youth* or the *Union of Patriots*, while organisations like the *Antifascist Women's Union*, the *Patriotic Defense*, *ARLUS*, and the *Plowmen's Front* were developing at a faster pace³⁹. Although the number of party members was relatively small, i.e., 2832 in December, the statistics show large percentage increases from one month to another. For example, from May to June, there was an increase of 61%, and from August to September, 66%.

The majority was represented by the Hungarians, but the number of Romanians increased from 50 members in June to 227 in December. In the last six months of 1945, the number of intellectuals doubled, while the number of officials tripled. The most spectacular increase is seen in the case of the peasants, with numbers rising from 69 members in June to 836 in December⁴⁰. From this perspective, the mobilisation of the activists during 1945 is remarkable, establishing dozens of new Party cells, more precisely 11 cells in enterprises, 98 in villages, and 18 in institutions. There are many explanations for this increase, but not all the affiliations were based on ideological conviction, and the accuracy of the data recorded by the communists is not entirely reliable: "The significant rise in the communist numbers, a surge attributed to the desire to avoid persecution, led some to conceal their past out of opportunism [...]. The figures are debatable and often contradictory, even in the Party's statistics"⁴¹.

The political and social situation in Mureș were only two of the challenges in organising the Communist Party effectively. The presence of nationalism, the public distrust of the new administration, and the desperate attempts to

³⁸ S.J.A.N.M., *Fondul Comitetul Județean Mureș al PCR (I)*, dosar 4/1945, f.4.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, dosar 4/1945, f. 3–4.

⁴⁰ Complete statistical situation in Table 1 of the S.J.A.N.M., *Fondul Comitetul Județean Mureș al PCR (I)*, dosar 4/1945.

⁴¹ Gheorghe Onișoru, *Alianțe și confruntări politice din România (1944–1947)*, București, Fundația Academia Civică, 1996, p. 118.

eliminate the reactionaries or fascists were equally significant. A report at the end of May 1945 indicates the internal reorganisation of the Party, with Csanyi Karoly being appointed secretary. However, it also highlights that the organisation's policy was misguided: "From the beginning, the Party pursued a misguided leftist and sectarian approach, failing to take a clear stance on the national issue. It turned a blind eye to chauvinism, and even trusted party members which promoted reactionary ideas"⁴². At the same time, it emerges that the nationalist propaganda was perpetuated by various groups, including the Hungarian lower middle class, as well as the authorities and the Gendarmerie.

Part of the shortcomings in the Party activity was clearly due to the lack of proper management, but also to the existence of officials with wrong intentions and supported by the Gendarmerie and the Police, such as the mayor Adolf Zsak⁴³ or even the former secretary, Lobl Marton, accused of concentrating the power in his hands and making biased political decisions, together with other close people where the "familiar spirit is in full swing"⁴⁴. Until the report's date in 1945, it was evident that little attention was paid to the individuals who were joining the Party, allowing unwanted elements to infiltrate.

The conclusions of the report also highlight that, despite the efforts that were made, the political direction of the Party was inadequately developed. This is obvious from the non-operational status of the departments until May 1945, as well as the underdevelopment of the mass organisations like *ARLUS*, which was formally established but inactive, the nonexistent *Workers' Front*, the *Union of Patriots* – a group of Romanian intellectuals not under PCR control, and the *National Democratic Front* consisting of unregulated elements.

The new Secretary of the Party, Csanyi Karoly, elected after march 1945, followed the pattern promoted by the communist leaders, namely that of criticism and self-criticism. Most likely, he was trying to demonstrate his devotion to the principles of the Leninist ideology and the new government. The exclusion of nationalism became a directive after the installation of the Petru Groza government. This was an attempt to integrate Transylvania into Romania's borders and to smooth out the inter-ethnic conflicts that were seen as obstacles in the development of the Party. The criticism of the former local administration, as well as the past communist leadership of the Mureş organisation for their arbitrary actions, could be interpreted as an attempt by the new leadership to gain favour with the Groza government. After the middle of 1945, the archival documents reveal the development of the propaganda among the population, targeting peasants, workers, and intellectuals.

⁴² S.J.A.N.M., *Fondul Comitetul Judeţean Mureş al PCR (I)*, dosar 2/1945, f. 43–44.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, f. 43.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, f. 44.

The sympathy for the Romanian Communist Party was also increasing due to the organisation of popular gatherings. For instance, a demonstration was organised by the trade unions in front of the Communist Party headquarters, where approximately 15,000 people participated. Another spontaneous gathering occurred when the Government delegation returned from Moscow, with approximately 3,000 people celebrating the moment⁴⁵.

The improvement of the Party's image involved the internal reorganisation, enhancing the political influence, expanding the peasant base, and raising awareness through the propaganda. The increasing influence among peasants was particularly emphasised, utilising various indoctrination channels such as schools, trusted individuals, teachers, and the press. The awareness campaigns were notable for denigrating the political opposition and bringing extra glow over the peasants' rights heroes, including the ex-illegal communist activists. In order to create a positive image of the Party, the propaganda also explored the economic situation and the social conditions of the inhabitants of Târgu Mureș. It associated the organisation with the town's reconstruction and the improvement of the daily life, offering hope for the future. The press actively participated in shaping this image. We can also find informative articles in the national press that highlight the Party's involvement in the local development, in cooperation with the community⁴⁶.

Last but not least, the sympathy for the Communist Party was also increasing as a result of improved organising of the propaganda and agitation department, as well as the growing number of human resources. For example, in October 1945, three personnel schools were operating in Târgu Mureș, including an agitation school and a human resource school that provided instruction in the Romanian language. Additionally, there was a staff school in operation in Reghin and another one in Miercurea Nirajului. The success was also attributed to the intensified processing of propaganda materials in the cadre schools. Subjects such as the socialist concept, the history and organisation of the Soviet Union and the Romanian Communist Party, and the materials from the Party's conference in Bucharest, aimed to raise awareness and to familiarise peasants and workers with the Party's ideology. Along with the training personnel, the activists were also concerned with distributing books and editing pamphlets, such as the *History of the Bolshevik Party*. Intense activity was also noted in the organisational section, which – in addition to preparing the scenery – focused on creating portraits of the socialist heroes such as the fathers of socialism, Lenin and Marx, Stalin and the national heroes like Groza, Bălcescu, Tudor

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, f. 75.

⁴⁶ „Populația din Târgu Mureș în frunte cu muncitorii comuniști a redat lumina și viața orașului”, 28 octombrie 1945, p. 3.

Vladimirescu, Horea, Cloșca, and Crișan, as well as the local figures, Solomon Erno and Petofi Sandor. The portraits, executed in October 1945, were created in the context of the National Conference of the Romanian Communist Party⁴⁷.

The press section dealt with the dissemination of the newspaper *Scântea*, in which the local activists collaborated, but also with the newspapers *Igazsag* and *Înfrățirea*. The latter was considered a newspaper edited almost entirely by the communists, called the Romanian Newspaper of democracy. No less important was the involvement of the propaganda and agitation section in reading and explaining the newspaper articles when necessary, particularly in areas with fewer book enthusiasts⁴⁸. At the same time, cultural products such as poems, songs, and plays, all passed through the ideological filter, were also distributed within mass organisations⁴⁹.

Regarding the political education, the reports show a significant number of pupils, students, and workers enrolled in the courses offered by the Party. Some of these efforts were aimed at creating or perfecting agitators and propagandists. In Mureș county, as many as 2789 agitators were counted in August, of whom 1434 were party members specialised in various fields such as inoculating or popularising peace. In 1945, courses for agitators were completed in 10 factories, and 291 seminars were held with 6146 participants, a number that most likely included the courses of the Evening University of Marxism-Leninism⁵⁰.

In terms of public education, the communist activists focused more on training and selecting the staff based on ideological criteria, which results in the exclusion of the educational staff for political reasons. At least some of the teachers who were excluded from education did not meet the new socialist requirements and were labeled with “deviations from the proletarian morality.” The selection of the teaching staff was taken seriously. A report mentioned a warning that among the teaching staff assigned from the center to the county, there were individuals described as “sons of bastards and priests”⁵¹. The practice of dismissing or selecting teachers based on the political ideology or pro-communist performance was intended not only to create a partisan group but also to instill fear among those who held different ideas. At the same time, the activists had the opportunity to control the way the information was delivered in schools or the cultural environment. The purge of the teaching staff had a

⁴⁷ S.J.A.N.M., *Fondul Comitetul Județean Mureș al PCR (I)*, dosar 6/1945, f. 20.

⁴⁸ For techniques used by agitators, see Corina Hațegan, „Propaganda și reconversia conștiințelor-agitatorul comunist. Studiu de caz: „Carnetul agitatorului”, in *Anuarul Institutului de Cercetări Socio-Umane „Gheorghe Șincai”*, Editura Academiei Române, București, 2022, part I, pp. 79–94 and 2023, part II, pp. 25–42.

⁴⁹ S.J.A.N.M., *Fondul Comitetul Județean Mureș al PCR (I)*, dosar 6/1945, f. 21.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, f. 22.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, f. 23.

significant impact on the educational system in Romania. This policy led to a decline in the quality of education, a diminution of the academic freedom, and an increase in the sense of fear and paranoia among teachers. The purge also contributed to the consolidation of the communist regime's ideological control over the society⁵².

The end of 1945 marked some successes in the work of agitation and propaganda, as well as in the political education, for which Simion Fuchs was responsible⁵³. At the end of the year, the propaganda section boasted about establishing several schools for agitators and propagandists, setting up bookstores, and launching a campaign to distribute books or brochures with ideological content⁵⁴. Equally important was the increase in the number of newspapers, the distribution in *New Ardeal* was 10,000, in *Nepujsag* 8,300, and a total of 23,750 newspapers were delivered.

Conclusions

Historiography has shown that Northern Transylvania experienced significant political and social instability after the end of the Second World War. The frequent changes in the Romanian and Soviet administrations generated mistrust and inter-ethnic tensions. Therefore, the Romanian Communist Party capitalised on this situation to expand its influence in the region.

In Mureș County, the Romanian Communist Party faced several challenges, including low receptivity to the communist ideology among the population, poor organisation, and limited resources. However, the Party managed to overcome these obstacles by implementing effective strategies. In the first phase, the Romanian Communist Party installed mayors and prefects with a left orientation, purged elements considered "reactionary" from the administration, accused previous authorities of nationalism and discrimination, promised social equality, respected Leninist-Stalinist principles, and utilised the local press, public meetings, and various mass organisations to propagate the communist ideology and discredit its opponents.

⁵² For studies regarding the involvement of communist propaganda in education, see Cristian Vasile, „Some Reflections Regarding the Romanian Educational System During the Stalinist Epoch (1947–1953)”, in *Revista istorică*, tom XX, 2009, nr. 1–2, pp. 115–137 and Ionuț Țene, „Procesul de comunizare a universității clujene în memoria studențească (1945–1948)”, in *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie Orală*, Cluj-Napoca, 2005.

⁵³ See Cornel Sigmirean, „Ideologie și istoriografie la Baza de Cercetări Științifice a Academiei Române din Târgu Mureș (1957–1971)”, in *Anuarul Institutului de Cercetări Socio-Umane „Gheorghe Șincai”*, Editura Academiei Române, 2023, pp. 5–16.

⁵⁴ S.J.A.N.M., *Fondul Comitetul Județean Mureș al PCR (I)*, dosar 6/1945, f. 34.

The strategies implemented by the Party resulted in a significant increase in the number of members, particularly among the peasants and the Hungarian minority. It also managed to consolidate the control over the local administration and the social life in Mureș County. The rise of the Romanian Communist Party in Mureș was a complex process, influenced by the favourable political context, as well as the Party's skillful strategies. The numerical growth of the party must be analysed with circumspection, taking into account the possibility of adhesions motivated by opportunism or fear. Therefore, a critical approach to the statistical data presented by the communists is important.

By utilising sources from the archives, the local press, and specialised works, the present work can contribute to completing the history of communism and of the Communist Party, as well as to a better understanding of the communist propaganda phenomenon.

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