

Political Police in the Romanian Public Sphere: Controversies and Representations – a Pragma-Dialectical Approach (1): 1999-2006

Prof. univ. dr. Anca Gâță
"Dunărea de Jos" University of Galați

Abstract: *This paper discusses the conceptual representation corresponding to the term "political police" in the Romanian contemporary setting. The archives of the National Council for the Study of the Security Services Archives (CNSAS) consist of personal files made up by Ceaușescu's regime "Securitate", more or less seen today as secret police. These files are gradually accessed by the members of the Council and revealed to the public. The paper is concerned with an analysis from an argumentative perspective of the discourse in the Romanian public sphere aiming at clarifying the content of the expression "political police". It is based on the use of the concept of dissociation as an argumentative technique.*

Keywords: *argumentation, political police, pragma-dialectics, "securitate"*

Introduction

The conceptual representation of the notion of "political police" in the Romanian contemporary setting is a disputable case. The controversies that have taken place in the Romanian public sphere and in political contexts in the first decade after the Romanian "Revolution" (December 1989) show that there are either several representations of the notion of "political police", corresponding to what is seen in the international context as "secret police", or one very ambiguous notion. The phrase "political police" (Rom. "poliție politică") is very generally used to refer to the activity of the agents and collaborators of the "Securitate" Service, which acted as a branch of the communist regime police.

The word "securitate" was used informally especially during the last 30 years before 1990 to speak about all the secret activities which

Romanians presumed to be conducted at the national level in order to identify, control and repress possible threats to the communist regime in Romania, especially since Ceaușescu became the general secretary of the communist party and, later on, president of Socialist Romania. This term was also used with the same meaning in radio programmes abroad (Deutsche Welle, Radio Free Europe – in Romanian), which constantly acted during this regime as opponents to Ceaușescu's regime and to the moral and physical oppression against dissidents of the regime and, more generally, against any member of the Romanian nation who was a potential opponent of the regime.

The study of the present case is important for several reasons, one of the practical ones being that the Romanian public opinion has been confronted during the years following the events in 1989 with a number of actions and decisions of the National Council for the Study of the Security Service Archives (CNSAS). These archives consist of personal files made up by Ceaușescu's regime "Securitate", seen today more or less as a secret police. These files may be gradually accessed today by the members of the Council and revealed to the public. The files are owned by the Archives of the Romanian Information Service (considered by many, in some respect, as a continuator, on the institutional level, of the "Securitate" Service), so that CNSAS members apply for access to specific files and when they are forwarded these files they can make the required investigation.

A second reason for examining the discourse on this subject is that the notion of "political police" has been discussed on various occasions, CNSAS members, politicians, intellectuals and other members of the Romanian civil society not being all in agreement on what can be included in the notional content of the term "political police" and what should not.

The events

I give a brief chronological presentation of the main events I have identified as representative for the evolution of the concept of "political police" in the Romanian contemporary setting from 1999 to 2006:

- 1999, December 9th – Law 187 / 1999 on access to personal file and on unmasking the “*Securitate*” Service as *political police*
- 2006, February 22nd – Amendment Act 16 / 2006 (Rom. *Ordonanță de urgență*) issued in order to modify and complete Law 187 – Title Modification of Law 187: Law on access to personal file and unmasking the *communist political police*
- 2006, August 11th – Deputy Mona Muscă, standing member of the Romanian Liberal Party, admits having signed a personal agreement with the “*Securitate*” Service in the 70’s in her position of a university assistant, by committing herself to provide information under the code name Dana. However, she denies having acted as “political police”, mentioning that she “only gave information to the Dean” on some foreign students she taught Romanian; according to her, the agreement was “strictly concerned” with information on foreign students and was of use for national security reasons. (www.realitatea.net)
- 2006, August 14th – Open Letter to Mona Muscă by Gabriel Liiceanu [1]. One of the most prominent figures of the Romanian citizen and intellectual life, Gabriel Liiceanu, a University Professor, philosopher, and director of a prestigious Romanian publishing house (Humanitas) blames Mona Muscă for not having confessed earlier her collaboration with the “*Securitate*” Service and given up her political career.
- 2006, August 16th – The CNSAS director is of the opinion that the phrase “political police” should be given up since it is synonymous to the “*Securitate*” Service. Yet, he draws a separation line between people such as “typists, caretakers, doorkeepers” employed by the “*Securitate*” Service, who cannot be supposed to have acted as political police. (Amos News)
- 2006, August 22nd – Mircea Dinescu, representative CNSAS member and figure of Romanian public life, gives details on Mona Muscă’s file, mentioning that her notes for the “*Securitate*” Service

were not political police reports, but reasonable characterizations with positive accents such as “a hard-working fellow, who has problems at home but comes to work regularly”. She did not remember all this, we showed these notes to her, but since it was not an obvious denouncement, we have nothing to say about it, no matter whether she remembered or not all this ...

(Romanian Television, *News*)

2006, November 8th – Rejection by the CNSAS judges of Mona Muscă’s action against the CNSAS decision concerning her involvement as a “collaborator” of the “Securitate” Service as “political police”.

Notional and discursive representations

In declarations, speeches, and media contexts, various distinctions and definitions are at issue connected with the notional and discourse representation of “political police”. The most important ones can be identified as such:

- 1) Law 187 makes a distinction between “Securitate” *agents* and *collaborators*;
- 2) what exactly is a “collaborator” of the “Securitate” Service, that is, what kind of collaborations can be identified? – distinguishing between several categories of collaboration with the “Securitate” Service;
- 3) how can one tell whether somebody was or was not a “collaborator” of the “Securitate” Service? – distinguishing between various degrees of involvement with the “Securitate” Service or with like activities;
- 4) what exactly is “political police”? – identifying various types of activities performed by the “Securitate” Service

There is a lot of interest in clarifying these concepts since representatives of intellectual and citizen life consider that maintaining the phrase “political police” in the present context allows many people to escape judgment and accusations of belonging, in one way or another, to the “Securitate” system. In such a case, people who could be found guilty as

former “Securitate” agents and “collaborators”, are less guilty if they have not acted as political police, by not contributing to violations of human rights and maintaining the terror regime. In a similar way, people who informed on their work or study fellows and gave positive appreciations could also be found not guilty of having acted as political police.

Mona Muscă’s lawyer redefines “political police” as mainly and essentially involving

violation of human rights and support provided to the “Securitate” Service in establishing or maintaining a regime of terror and oppression,

while evidence in Mona Muscă’s file does not show such actions in her case. One of the arguments pleading in favour of the exclusion of some categories of involvement from the category of “collaboration” is thus lack of evidence about violation of human rights, about establishing and maintaining the regime of terror.

- The main criterion used to distinguish among degrees of involvement is represented by the activity various individuals deployed or in which they took part. This distinction is obviously aimed at in Law 187, but it is further developed in the Romanian public sphere discourse. Law 187 distinguishes between agents and collaborators, to which other several categories can be added or else these can be seen as subclasses of the latter category, that of collaborators.

Agents

Unmasking the “Securitate” Service as political police is seen as equivalent to unmasking people who, during the communist regime, were part of the system as agents, mainly officers and staff:

It is “elementary” to unmask the names of all “Securitate” officers ... while the “reformed” CNSAS should establish whether their actions violated human rights and freedom. [2]

The same analyst is of the opinion that most of the actions directed towards “unmasking” various individuals presumed to have acted as members / agents of the political police results in a *scandal* mainly directed to political figures instead of revealing names of people who acted as agents of the political police (thought to be about thirteen thousand at the end of 1989, *out of which only 131 “Securitate” officers’ names have been made public so far* [3]). He implicitly dissociates between “Securitate” officers and collaborators:

We witness the unmasking of the collaborators, not of the “Securitate” Service, whose officers are forgotten.

It is difficult to draw a line between various categories of people who were involved in a definite manner in activities of the political police. Romanian intellectuals, journalists and other representative figures of the political life have started a “clarification” campaign meant to give, at least from a conceptual point of view, a clearer representation of the so many types of involvement and collaboration. The law does not make clear-cut distinctions within the category of agents. Voices in the media identify them more or less to *first order criminals* (Rom. *vinovații de gradul I*) [5]. If the law mentions especially “Securitate” officers and employees under this category, one can identify, to help interpret the very imprecise law, at least three subclasses of people having an equal degree of guilt:

- “Securitate” officers making political police work in a concrete way
- *Aparatchiki* (technocrats [6], intellocrates, artists, authoritative members of the Communist Party) involved in the functioning of the “Securitate” Service

- *Staff of the Communist Party*

Although they performed activities of different kinds (*they threatened, intimidated, humiliated, ill-treated, tortured or even killed people*), they were part of the system, which could not have worked without their contribution.

Collaborators and Informers

Another large category of offenders is that of collaborators, or informers. These (the *mercenaries* [7]) can be supposed to have acted by enthusiasm and trust in the communist cause, by cowardice, or for material advantages (such as money, a better flat [8], professional promotion, better employment, studies abroad, and even food). One of the most sought benefits was power itself, or at least potential influence.

According to clarifications passed in the media,

an informer cannot be «technically» accused for having acted as political police, but only for having provided evidence to the “Securitate” Service employees who acted as political police. [9]

Yet, there is a theoretical distinction to be made, even if it is difficult to put it into practice. A guilt of second order, almost as important as the agents’ first order guilt, is that of collaborators and informers who

denounced, slandered innocent people, and perhaps even catalyzed their being put under arrest or ill-treatment by the “Securitate” Service. [10]

A guilt of third order, of moral nature, is that of collaborators and informers whose activity did not result in any violation of human rights.

Collaborators are usually assimilated to those who provided information that finally led to violation of human rights, while informers, not identified as such by the law, provided 'harmless' information, which could not lead to any violation of human rights.

Kinds of collaboration and participation in the "Securitate" Service activities

A criterion for distinguishing among various kinds of collaboration is the reason for which the collaborator / informer accepted to become involved with such activities.

Mean denouncement: One and the same person, Alexandru Paleologu [11], is seen by some people as a *mean denouncer* (Rom. *un delator ordinar*, as reported in the media [12]), paid by the "Securitate" Service, and simply as a

former political prisoner / convict compelled to provide reports even after his release from prison. [13]

Mean denouncement is assimilated to collaboration recompensated by money that the "Securitate" Service paid to informers. Other material and moral advantages, as mentioned above, could also be expected.

Compelled collaboration: Another type of collaboration could be justified by the position of the individual identified by the "Securitate" Service as able to participate in such activities. The reference above reminds of situations in which former convicts became (paid) informers after being released from prison. This could be also extended to people whose relatives were convicted for political reasons and who were also compelled to accept this form of collaboration for the sake of their convicted relative and their families.

Another criterion for distinguishing among various types of collaboration is the confession of political or intellectual figures about their former collaboration with the “Securitate” Service.

Confessed collaboration: In some cases, confessing one’s former activity as a collaborator or informer of the “Securitate” Service is viewed as a slighter guilt, as a reason for morally accepting that the former collaborator admits his/her guilt. It usually brings about auto-exclusion from political life. It is again the case with Alexandru Paleologu [14], who publicly admitted his collaboration and yet has not been declared by the CNSAS to have acted as political police.

Unconfessed collaboration: A representative case is Mona Muscă, a representative member of the Liberal Party after 1990, who did not confess publicly her collaboration and consequently was much more blamed by intellectuality, politicians and public opinion for her unconfessed guilt.

Supporting Fellows and Passive Collaborators

Agents and collaborators used to be active in a more or less secret or disguised way in all Romanian institutions (commercial, industrial, academic, research institutes, schools, hospitals, theaters, etc.).

There is no reference in legal texts to people who supported in various ways the activities of the “Securitate” Service, by mediating between agents and collaborators, by making available their own houses or flats for meetings of agents and informers.

There are anonymous voices saying that all Romanians, with very few exceptions, are guilty since they accepted the communist regime as such and tolerated obvious violations of human rights.

Discourse Analysis Applied to Discourse about Political Police

Although these distinctions are more or less admitted even by CNSAS members, there are occasions on which intellectuals are not willing to admit any distinction at all. Such behaviour brings into question a controversy that emerges from time to time in the Romanian media, in which two opposite standpoints are confronted, which could be put as such:

- 1) agents and collaborators of the “Securitate” Service are guilty of crimes of a different type;
- 2) agents and collaborators have the same moral sins and are equally guilty.

The nature of the crimes seems a criterion upon which the distinction is based in the first case, while refusal to admit such a distinction is motivated by the identity of crimes when the moral criterion is applied. Such distinctions or dissociations would allow a large number of individuals to escape moral judgement and legal trial.

The Open Letter mentioned in the short chronology at the beginning of this study provides several instances of refusal to admit any distinction, or dissociation, between agents and collaborators. The text of the letter, written in a rhetorical mood, uses argumentative techniques and presentational devices meant to convince that no distinction is possible and that no dissociations are to be made between various types of activity having to do with the “Securitate” Service.

1. Reporting, by exact repetition of words, the denial of Mona Muscă who said she had not acted as political police combined with an elaboration on the “Securitate” Service activity by reiteration of the same phrase – *did not act as political police*:

It is true, you **did not act as political police**, since all the “Securitate”, collaborators included, **did not act as political police**.

This repetition is ironical by a violation of the sincerity rule of the Communication Principle since the audience cannot accept that the speaker is sincere in admitting that the addressee is right and that he accepts her standpoint. This violation leads the audience to interpret the utterance as violating the sincerity rule and meaning, by irony, the opposite of what is said. Which is in fact confirmed later on, in a different way.

2. Definition, equating the “Securitate” Service to political police – This tough redefinition of the service is meant to eliminate ambiguity and imprecision generated by the first title of Law 187, in which the phrase *unmasking the “Securitate” Service as political police* left aside numerous activities decided and guided by representatives of the communist party who gave orders to “Securitate” agents:

The “Securitate” Service was the political police.

Such a redefinition allows no distinction to be made between agents employed by the service and collaborators, who acted on their request, according to their rules and, especially, under cover. Being a collaborator or an informer of the “Securitate” Service meant acting not as political police, but in the name of it and as its more or less official representative.

3. Providing various examples of representatives of the political police, irrespective of their activity within the service:

...from the caretaker who cleaned the floors of the service up to “Securitate” generals, from the «contacted» person who had not signed an agreement but was willing to «flirt» with the “Securitate” officer who paid him / her a visit up to the «employee» with a regular employment file and a code name (like yours), from the employee acting in the country up to the one who was a spy abroad for the sake and welfare of the nation, they all made work, dear Lady, the most fulfilled system of repression and fear generation.

The variety of categories illustrated above pleads, by enumeration and accumulation, in favour of an “amalgamated” representation of guilts, since these distinct activities had a common ground: they were in some way connected with the “Securitate” institution whose mechanism functioned owing to this mixture of well-done activities, each in its own right. At the extremes, two very different categories of individuals (caretakers having nothing to do with generals), which could be easily distinguished and should be as such, are found a common guilt, that of belonging to the same system. Refusal to admit distinctions results in putting together in the same basket all individuals having had anything to do – more or less under the cover – with the service.

4. Grammatical person change – After directly calling to the addressee of the letter, grammatical person change is used, from third person plural to second person plural, to eliminate all possible distinctions and include as well the addressee in the same unique category:

You all made terror possible.

...**All of you** took interest – taking advantage of the others – only in yourselves, all of you had some advantage or hoped to get one ... **All of you**, in the light of this institution, had a better living owing to us and to our fear. **All of you** felt more important, **all of you** had a dirty contract signed behind our back and with our backing and **all of you** paid for your security, assurance and dareness with our fears, humility and insecurity.

Repetition of the same phrase, *all of you*, rhetorically pinpoints common shared guilt.

5. Redefinition of the “Securitate” Service is provided by appealing to lexical units endowed with emotional content:

The “Securitate” Service ...was, in Romania, the institution of **murder**.

6. **Analogy** is made use of, in the form of definitions, with other services abroad which were and are viewed as political police:

[The “Securitate” Service] was the Romanian version of the **NKVD**, the Romanian **Gestapo**.

7. **Metaphor** is used to equate the activity of the “Securitate” Service with practices of terror and fear generation:

All of you were in the service of a **mafia** at state level.

8. **Antithesis** is constantly used throughout passages of the Letter to contrast either political police to *the others*, or states of mind belonging to either of the two categories:

...**All of you** took interest – **taking advantage of the others** – only in **yourselves**, all of you **had some advantage** or hoped to get one ... All of you, in the light of this institution, had a **better living** owing to us and to **our fear**. All of you felt more important, all of you had a dirty contract signed **behind our back** and **with our backing**, and all of you paid for your **security**, **assurance** and **impudence** with our **fears**, **humility** and **lack of security**.

Some of the lexical units used in the excerpt above are also characterized by emotional content added to the notional one (*fear, humility, lack of security*).

9. **Explicit refusal to make distinctions** among categories of “collaborators” is at some point justified by the speaker by the “dead end” where Romanians find themselves at the time:

We are in such a position that we have no more time for nuances. **Do not ask me to distinguish** between the caretaker in the corridor, you as an informer and the General Pleșiță who ill-treated people or planned murders.

Explicit refusal is performed by means of an indirect commissive which consists for the speaker in assuming responsibility for not operating any distinction among the various categories which are nevertheless distinguished by other speakers in other contexts. There is implicit reference to Law 187 itself which grounds the distinction between agents and collaborators and as well to various speeches and interventions pleading for degrees of guilt [15].

Final Remarks

This paper emphasizes the need for a conceptual approach of the controversy on the Romanian communist political police. The need for such an approach is motivated by the existence of the two standpoints at issue in the Romanian public sphere and even in legal contexts: 1) agents and collaborators of the “Securitate” Service are guilty of crimes of unlike types; 2) agents and collaborators have the same moral sins and are equally guilty.

The first standpoint is based on dissociations:

- a) between agents and collaborators, both categories being viewed from a legal perspective;
- b) among various types of guilts, and of corresponding punishments (legal and moral or only moral);
- c) between voluntary denouncement and forced collaboration;
- d) between confessed and unconfessed collaboration or involvement with the “Securitate” Service.

The dissociations mentioned above (as well as other distinctions and dissociations from the same range, but not taken into discussion in the present paper) are used argumentatively to open side-discussions in which the terms distinguished are redefined by reference to the activities deployed by individuals and by labelling such activities as political police or not. Labelling such activities as *political police* serves as an argument pleading for legal judgment and punishment. Not labelling them as such serves as an argument against legal judgment and punishment, and for

moral punishment and exclusion from political and citizen life. Voluntary denouncement is seen as an argument in favour of legal punishment; forced collaboration serves as an argument against legal punishment and in favour of only moral punishment.

The second standpoint is based on refusal to distinguish among agents, collaborators, informers, “supporting fellows”, by attacking the dissociation made in Law 187 and those commonly voiced in the public sphere by representatives of intellectuality, politicians, etc. Refusal to admit such distinctions is equivalent to the standpoint that any kind of involvement with the “Securitate” Service is to be taken to court, whether it has been voluntary or forced, confessed or not confessed, pure and harmless information, description, narration of facts or obvious violation of human rights and freedom. One of the main arguments advanced in favour of equal treatment to be applied to those guilty of any type of involvement is that any of these activities made the political police system work; in an implicit way, lack of such involvement on anybody’s part would have led to the ruin of the system.

From the perspective of argumentation theory, this controversy is of importance since it allows to examine the way in which a legally established distinction, working argumentatively as a dissociation, is attacked by explicitly refusing to admit it and by providing more or less sound reasons for this refusal: urgency of legal and moral punishment of offenders in the contemporary Romanian setting.

There is no winner in this controversy fed by the lack of clear and strong criteria for distinguishing among actions of people involved in the “Securitate” Service activity. Opinions stay polarized as long as investigations concern only the files in the archives and neglect the main consequences – clearly leading to causes and responsables of these consequences – of the communist political police actions: thousands of people’s death (in prison, on building sites or in mines), economical and cultural decline, loss of national spirit, present political involvement of persons formerly linked in some way to the “Securitate” institution.

Notes

- [1] Published in the daily newspaper *Cotidianul*, August 14th, 2006.
- [2] All translations from Romanian to English in this study are mine, A.G. Romanian Television, News, August 23rd, 2006, citing political analyst Cristian Pîrvulescu.
- [3] See note 2 above.
- [4] See note 2 above.
- [5] Ruxandra Cesereanu, "Vinovăție și sancțiuni: penală, lustrală, morală – în țarcul Dosariadei", in 22, October 13-19th, 2006.
- [6] Psychiatrists serving the "Securitate" Service diagnosed opponents of the communist regime as insane; as a consequence, they were taken to the asylum and given specific medication so as to silence them more 'smoothly' (see Cesereanu, note 5 above).
- [7] Idem, see note 5 above.
- [8] Idem, see note 5 above.
- [9] Cristian Teodorescu, "Conu Alecu se vinde mai bine postum", in *Cotidianul*, November 15th, 2006.
- [10] Idem, see note 5 above.
- [11] Alexandru Paleologu was a standing representative of the Romanian intellectuality and civil society and an Ambassador of Romania in France after December 1989. He died in 2006.
- [12] Idem, see note 9 above.
- [13] Idem, see note 9 above.
- [14] Idem, see note 9 above.
- [15] See note 1 above.

Bibliography

- Cinpoes, Radu, *Nationalism and Identity in Romania: A History of Extreme Politics from the Birth of the State to EU Accession*, Tauris Academic Studies, London/New York, 2010.
- Doury, Marianne, « La fonction argumentative des échanges rapportés », Communication, Colloque *La circulation des discours : les frontières du discours rapporté*, Bruxelles, 2001.
- <http://www.lcp.cnrs.fr/IMG/pdf/dou-01a.pdf>
- Eemeren, Frans H. van & Rob Grootendorst, *Speech Acts in Argumentative Discussions: A Theoretical Model for the Analysis of Discussions Directed Towards Solving Conflicts of Opinion*, Walter de Gruyter, Amsterdam, 1984.

- Eemeren, F. H. van, *Strategic Maneuvering in Argumentative Discourse. Extending the Pragma-dialectical Theory of Argumentation*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam / Philadelphia, 2010.
- Perelman, Chaim & Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *La Nouvelle Rhétorique. Traité de l'argumentation*, 2 vol., Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1958.
- Rees, Agnes M. van, *Dissociation in Argumentative Discussions. A Pragma-Dialectical Perspective*, Springer, Amsterdam, 2009
- Stan, Lavinia, *Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Romania: The Politics of Memory*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge/New York, 2013.