In January 2007, Romania acceded to the European Union (EU), a few years after having entered the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This was a watershed in Romania’s history, a significant moment in the history of Eastern Europe, and a test for the EU’s commitment to accepting problematic candidates as long as they have complied with the major accession requirements. Sometime ago, in a controversial article published in the *New York Review of Books*, the late Tony Judt argued that the real test for the EU was Romania’s accession, considering its pending structural problems. The piece generated anger among Romanian intellectuals and produced reactions both pro and con. Nevertheless, one cannot deny the nature of the difficulties with which Romania is faced, among them that of an unmastered past. This article proposes to document and critically examine, in a comparative perspective, Romania’s efforts to confront and judge its communist past. The starting point for the analysis is the country’s decision to work through its communist past, a late decision that came about in

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a convoluted fashion. Still, once the process started in late 2005 and early 2006, it gathered a tremendous momentum and resulted in a categorical state condemnation of the communist dictatorship as illegitimate and criminal.

The questions I try to answer with this chapter are as follows: Why did Romania engage so late in the effort to face up to its communist past? What were the main obstacles that prevented this historical catharsis for almost seventeen years after the December 1989 revolution? Why did this catharsis occur precisely in 2006? How does Romania compare to other East European countries in terms of mastering its dictatorial past? What political and cultural conditions explain the resurgence and intensification of the anti-communist sentiment after a long period of relative indifference or even torpor regarding this topic? At the same time, I also wish to explain the *coincidentia oppositorum* of the efforts to “condemn the condemnation,” the common front in negating the Final Report of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship created by unrepentant radical left-wingers, fanatical nationalists, national-Stalinist nostalgics, and Orthodoxist fundamentalists.\(^2\) In short, I consider that it is crucial to identify the political and cultural forces that seem to have invested themselves into the subversion of the process of decommunization in Romania. Going beyond various subjective stands, resentment, or personal vanities (from people such as the former president Ion Iliescu, who most of his life was a Leninist apparatchik), one needs to emphasize that this offensive against the process of working through the past has structural motivations that are deeply rooted in the mentalities of communist times that have survived in the transitional Romanian political culture. This mind-set preserves the elements of an ideological syncretism that I have previously labeled as the fascist-communist baroque. The public sphere is still haunted by unprocessed memories, the refusal by some intellectuals to acknowledge the magnitude of the anti-Semitic massacres, and even efforts to present Ion Antonescu as a hero of sorts. Negationism is present also in attempts to present the communist regime, especially the Ceaușescu period, as an expression of national affirmation.

\(^2\) For an extensive discussion of the various groups involved in this “front” see the contributions in this volume by Cristian Vasile and, especially, Bogdan C. Iacob.
Decomunization is a complex process that comprises political, juridical, and moral elements. The process of therapy through knowledge, what I would call exorcising the spectres of the past by way of accessing nonmythicized truths, is the royal path in achieving such a goal. Furthermore, I contend that decomunization and defascization must be inextricably linked if Romania is to participate in building what German political scientist Claus Leggewie defined as a shared European memory.\(^3\) William Faulkner’s famous line from *Requiem for a Nun* certainly applies to the haunted lands where communism once held sway: “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.” A major source of frustration and discontent in the region and especially in Romania is the widespread belief that ex-communists have been too successful at blunting genuine efforts to reckon with the past.

It is important to point out that the belated nature of Romania’s decision to confront its communist totalitarian past was predominantly the consequence of obstinate opposition to such an undertaking from parties and personalities directly or indirectly linked to the *ancien régime*. The elections of November and December 2004 resulted in the victory of an anti-communist coalition and the election of Traian Băsescu as the country’s president. In spite of political rivalries and the disintegration of the initial government coalition, both the National Liberal and the Democratic Parties understood the importance of coming to terms with the past. Especially after January 2006, the liberal prime minister, at the time, Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu (then head of the Liberal Party), and President Traian Băsescu (linked to the Democratic Party) have championed decomunization. At the other end of the political spectrum, in an effort to boycott these initiatives, former president Ion Iliescu and other leaders of the Social Democratic Party (in many respects still dominated by former nomenklatura figures) allied themselves with the ultrapopulist, jingoistic, and anti-Semitic “Greater Romania Party,” headed by the notorious Corneliu Vadim Tudor, a former Ceaușescu sycophant. The condemnation of the communist dictatorship has become one of the most hotly debated political, ideological, and moral issues in contemporary Romania.

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Unlike Germany, where a parliamentary consensus (minus the radical left) allowed for the relatively peaceful activity of the Enquete Commission headed by former dissident pastor Rainer Eppelmann, the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania (PCACDR—from now on the Commission), which I chaired, was continuously attacked from the extreme left, the nationalist right, and Orthodox clericalist and fundamentalist circles. The inconsistent institutional backing for the PCACDR led some to argue that this Commission was merely a presidential initiative, implicitly allowing them to paint it as a form of political partisanship. Such a characterization is utterly mistaken: the Commission was mandated by the Romanian head of state and it was the result of the successful pressure from below exercised by the most important organizations and representatives of Romania’s democratic civil society. The Commission and its Report are the products of a collective civic effort officially endorsed by the Romanian state.

As its chairman and coordinator, I witnessed the historical event on December 18, 2006, when the Romanian President, Traian Băsescu, presented and adopted before the Parliament the conclusions and proposals of the Commission’s Report. The behavior of those present could be divided into two categories: those who acted like hooligans, vehemently denying the importance and legitimacy of official reckoning with the communist past; and those who, imbued with the solemnity of the event, reacted in a dignified manner. The next day, in an interview with the BBC, the president insisted that the hysteria of the crypto-communists and the nationalists was no reason to be deterred from continuing along the line of working through Romania’s traumatic dictatorial past. On the contrary, their attitude was a sign that the path chosen was the right one, from an academic and moral point of view. A functional and healthy democratic society cannot endlessly indulge in politics of oblivion and denial. Though some have argued along these lines, I do not believe that a collective com-

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municative silence \([\text{kommunikatives Beschweigen}]\) about the past can enable post-communist countries to evolve into functioning democracies.\(^5\)

Reconciliation remains spurious in the absence of repentance. In the short term, the politics of forgetfulness (what former Polish Prime Tadeusz Mazowiecki once called “the thick line with the past”) can have its benefits if one takes into account the newly born and fragile social consensus. In the long term, however, such policies foster grievous misgivings in relation to collective values and memory, with potentially disastrous institutional and psychoemotional consequences. Pastor Joachim Gauck, chair of the authority dealing with the Stasi (East German secret police) files, argued that “reconciliation with the traumatic past can be achieved not simply through grief, but also through discussion and dialogue.”\(^6\) In this sense, Charles Villa-Vicencio, one of the main members of South Africa’s Commission for Truth and Reconciliation, defined reconciliation as “the operation whereby individuals and the community create for themselves a space in which they can communicate with one another, in which they can begin the arduous labor of understanding” painful history. Hence, justice becomes a process of enabling the nation with the aid of a culture of responsibility.\(^7\) Communism wished to strictly and ubiquitously control remembrance. It detested the idea of emancipated anamnesis, so it systematically falsified the past. Until 2006, Romanian democracy had been consistently deprived of truth-telling in relation to its troubled twentieth century past.

The new identity of a post-authoritarian community can be based upon negative contrasts: “on the one hand, with the past that is being repudiated; on the other, with anti-democratic political actors in the present (and/or potentially in the future).”\(^8\) A new “anamnestic soli-

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\(^5\) Herman Lübbe first employed this term in 1983 in order in reference Federal Germany’s transition the democracy after 1945.


\(^7\) Charles Villa-Vicencio and Erik Doxtader (eds.), Pieces of the Puzzle: Keywords on Reconciliation and Transitional Justice (Cape Town: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, 2005), 34–38.

arity” would be based upon the ethical framework circumscribed by both the knowledge of the truth and the official acknowledgment of its history. The destructive power of silence and of unassumed guilt would thus be preempted. This way, according to German political scientist Gesine Schwan, the fundamental abilities and values of individuals are nourished so that to sustain their well-being, social behavior, and trust in the communal life. The moral consensus over a shared experience of reality is preserved making possible the democratic existence of the specific society. In this context, the priority of transitional justice becomes the “deep healing” of society: “the quest for a new quality of life and the creation of a milieu within which the atrocities of the past are less likely to recur in the future.”

The condemnation of the communist regime in Romania can be integrated, from a historical standpoint, into the space circumscribed by two factors that marked the post-1989 period. On one hand, Ion Iliescu, who, during his three mandates (1990 to 1992, 1992 to 1996, and 2000 to 2004) practiced what Peter Schneider coined for East Germany as a “double zombification”: the two totalitarian experiences that plagued Romania’s second half of the twentieth century officially were another country after 1989. This was also a regrettable characteristic for the Democratic Convention during the Emil Constantinescu administration from 1997–2000. Only after his own scandalous comments on the Holocaust in Romania that provoked a strong reaction both in diplomatic and international academic circles did Ion Iliescu create, in 2004, the International Commission on the Holocaust (ICHR) in Romania, chaired by celebrated writer and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Elie Wiesel. The objective of this mis-memory of the totalitarian experience in the country was indeed the fuel of the legitimation discourses of the post-communist political establishment, of the original democracy designed by Iliescu and his acolytes in the first post-communist years.


But why, under Constantinescu, the first president of Romania that was not representing successor parties of the communist one, was it not the hour of decommunization? Leaving aside explanations tied to his personal hubris, I believe that sometimes distance in time can help. In May 2012, in Brazil, President Dilma Rousseff created a truth commission to investigate human rights abuses, including those committed during military rule.¹¹ This is just another example that it is never too late. In 2011, a museum about the Trujillo times was opened in the Dominican Republic.¹² But there is an additional, generational element of significant importance and here I am anticipating my analysis below. Many people, both critics and researchers of the Commission and of its Report, often forget that in 1996 there were very few, if any, young Romanian historians or political scientists with a Western background who could do what the members and experts of the Commission achieved in 2006. The decade that passed between Constantinescu’s election and Băsescu’s condemnation of the communist regime worked in favor of the strengthening of the epistemic reform in Romanian historiography.¹³ The average age of the Commission’s experts was thirty. Ten years earlier, under Constantinescu, the average age of the same individuals was twenty. Most of them were still deciding on their scholarly trajectories, if at all. But by 2006, they either held or were on their way to receiving Ph.D.s either in Romania or at Western academic institutions. They had been equally socialized in the existing international debates on communism and exposed to the incremental nature of Romanian academia, which was seriously marked by its involvement in the regime’s politics and policies. In this sense, there was a consensus among most of the experts and members of the Commission that self-serving narratives of perpetual victimization need to be demystified.


¹³ For a review of the state of Romanian historical studies at the end of the 1990s, see Bogdan Murgescu, A fi istoric în anul 2000 (Bucharest: Editura All, 2000).
More generally speaking, I think that the rise of a new generation of social scientists—I include historians in this category—has already resulted, especially in the past six to seven years, in a different perspective on the nation than the one embraced by the more traditionalist interpretations. These younger historians, political scientists, philosophers, and anthropologists contributed to the writing of the Final Report as a modern, rigorously scholarly document. Between 1945 and 1989, authoritarian myth-making has obfuscated the necessary Vergangenheitsbewältigung. More diluted, but similarly pervasive practices perpetuated after 1989. Generally speaking, most troubling in post-communist societies is precisely the excruciating need to prolong an indulgence in self-pity, myth-making, and a failure to address the wrongs of the past in a demystifying way. It would be hard to deny that the new democratic narratives amount to a repudiation of the belief systems, which are rooted in a self-serving, mendacious rendering of the main events and meanings of the continuum of dictatorship from the late 1930s until 1989.14

I would like to return to the second factor that played into the condemnation of the communist regime. Throughout the years, there were the constant attempts from civil society to speed up the process of decommunization. The latter is defined by several original movements: the Timişoara proclamation in March 1990 that advocated lustration and the June 1990 student protest movements spearheaded by the Civic Alliance. Also encompassed within this framework are various attempts to rehabilitate certain periods of Romanian communism, along with campaigns aimed at recycling aspects of the country’s authoritarian past (e.g., numerous initiatives to “restore the name”

14 For example, historian Maria Bucur judiciously pointed out the ambivalence of the ongoing search for a historical truth about the World War II: “The world of post-communist democracy is proving, however, far more complicated and nondemocratic when it comes to remembering the war dead than political elites would want. How these commemorative discourses change in the next few years will attest to what extent remembering Europe’s world wars can become a nonantagonistic local and continental effort. For now, the tension between these two levels of framing the tragedy of World War II leaves little room for imagining a space for reconciliation.” See Maria Bucur, Heroes and Victims: Remembering War in Twentieth-Century Romania (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 17.
of pro-Nazi Marshal Ion Antonescu or to sanitize the murderous history of the fascist Iron Guard\textsuperscript{15}). In contrast, there were attempts at a “memory regime,” that is, an effort to recuperate “a shattered past” (Jarausch), in addition to movements that demanded other sorts of clarifications—particularly legal ones on the basis of the gradual opening of the Securitate archives and of other institutions that had a crucial role in the functioning and reproduction of the regime—and obtaining moral and material compensations for suffering inflicted by the twentieth-century totalitarian experience in Romania. The essential obstacle to any democratic endeavor to work through the communist past lies in the fact that even though knowledge of the truth is gradually developed, it does not translate into an officially sanctioned acknowledgement of its history.\textsuperscript{16} In other words, institutionalized amnesia could be fully overcome only by an institutionalized memory of the communist dictatorship.

In 1997, a person who was the child of deportees during Stalin’s Great Terror (and spent his youth drifting from one orphanage to another) asked his interviewer the following question: “How can someone be a victim of a regime that has not been officially declared criminal?”\textsuperscript{17} Regardless of the civic initiatives and the scholarly production that stressed, documented, and detailed the communist government’s criminality (Regierungskriminalität), there had been no state

\textsuperscript{15} See my Romanian language volume Spectrele Europei Centrale (Bucharest: Polirom, 2001). I extensively discuss this interesting process of recycling (neo/proto/crypto) fascism by means of integrating it into the identitarian discourse legitimizing the communist regime. In the “Lessons of Twentieth Century” chapter I argue that “the Ceaușescu regime was, at its most basic level, a very interesting mix that brought together both the legacy of militarist authoritarianism from the 1941–1944 period, which was celebrated in a myriad ways, and the degraded mystic inspired by the extreme-right, which was grafted upon the institutional body of Romanian Stalinism.” (246–247).

\textsuperscript{16} Andrew Rigby, Justice and Reconciliation: After the Violence (Boulder: Lynn Rienner, 2001), 82.

admission of misdeeds and any recognition of wrong doing. According to the Iliescu paradigm, the communist regime had been delegitimized and condemned by the 1989 revolution; no further public inquiry and statements were necessary. To paraphrase Tony Judt, the mis-memory of communism nurtured a mis-memory of anti-communism. And indeed it seemed to succeed: as the process of the society’s normalization progressed, decommunization gradually faded into the background. First and rather controversially in Poland, and then in Romania, it came back to the forefront of civic and political agendas. Traian Băsescu, during his electoral campaign in 2004, neither placed decommunization prominently in his platform nor pretended to have been a victim of communism.\(^{18}\)

However, the specific dynamics of Romanian politics and the mobilization of civil society acted as catalysts for a strong return into the public debate of topics related to the communist dictatorship. In March 2006, the Group for Social Dialogue (a major civil society organization of some of the country’s most famous intellectuals) as well as the leaders of the main trade unions endorsed an Appeal for the Condemnation of the Communist Regime, launched by prominent Civic Alliance personality Sorin Ilieșiu. This accelerated the process by which the Romanian state finally took an official attitude toward its traumatic past. In April 2006, convinced by now of the urgent necessity of such an initiative, President Băsescu decided to create the Commission. His position at the time, and during the entire period of decommunization, proves the importance of political will and determination in the attempt to initiate and sustain a potentially centrifugal endeavor. President Băsescu entrusted me with selecting the members of the Commission. In so doing, I took into account the scholarly competence and moral credibility of the people invited to join this body. Among the Commission members figured well-known historians, social scientists, civil society personalities, former political prisoners, former dissidents, and

\(^{18}\) Born in 1951, Traian Băsescu graduated from the Naval Institute in Constanța and spent most of his life under communism as a sea captain for the Romanian commercial fleet. After 1990, he became a member of the Petre Roman government, minister of transportation, then mayor of Bucharest and head of the Democratic Party. In 2004, he won the presidential election against former prime minister and social democratic leader Adrian Năstase.
major figures of democratic exile. President Băsescu charged the Commission with the task of producing a rigorous and coherent document that would examine the main institutions, methods, and personalities that made possible the crimes and abuses of the communist regime. In addition to its academic tasks, the work of the commission was meant to pass moral judgment on the defunct dictatorship and invite a reckoning with the past throughout a painful, albeit inevitable, acknowledgment of its crimes against humanity and other forms of repression. This was a revolutionary step in Romanian post-communist politics: neither ex-communist president Ion Iliescu nor anti-communist president Emil Constantinescu had engaged in such a potentially explosive undertaking. The Romanian case seems to validate Michael Ignatieff assertion that “leaders can have an enormous impact on the mysterious process by which individuals come to terms with the painlessness of their societies’ past. Leaders give their societies permission to say the unsayable, to think the unthinkable, to rise to gestures of reconciliation that people, individually, cannot imagine.”

By creating the Commission, the Romanian President did institutionalize a fundamental tool of transitional justice despite its nonjudicial truth-seeking nature. He offered mandate to an organizational structure that in the former socialist camp comes closest to a Truth Commission: the Enquetekommission. The PCACDR was the first such state body created in the countries of the former Soviet bloc. The only precedent could be found in unified Germany, where the Bundestag created, between 1992 and 1998, two successive Enquete Commissions that investigated the history of the SED (Socialist Unity Party) Dictatorship and its effects on German unity.

At the end of the mandate of the second Enquete Commission, on the basis of its activity and practice, a foundation was established: the Stiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur (June 5, 1998). The creation of the German commissions represents, however, a different situation under circumstances of unification, institutional absorption, and value transference on the West-East axis. There are nevertheless a series of similarities between the Enquete Commissions

and the PCACDR, particularly in what concerned the mandates. Both the Romanian and the German mandates understood the analysis of communist pasts along the lines of the study of the structures of power and mechanisms of decision-making during the history of the regime; the functions and meaning of ideology, inclusionary patterns, and disciplinary practices within the state and society; the study of the legal and policing system; the role of the various churches during the various phases of state socialism; and finally, the role of dissidence, of civil disobedience, and, in Romania’s case, of the 1989 revolution. Both in Romania and Germany, the commissions were meant to provide evaluations related to problems of responsibility, guilt, and the continuity of political, cultural, social, and economic structures from the communist through post-communist periods. The overall purpose of both bodies was to establish the basis for what Avishai Margalit called an ethics of memory.\textsuperscript{21} The PCACDR activity was generally guided by Hannah Arendt’s vision of responsibility and culpability: “What is unprecedented about totalitarianism is not only its ideological content, but the \textit{event} itself of totalitarian domination.”\textsuperscript{22}

The difference between the German and Romanian commissions is that the Enquete Commissions of the SED Dictatorship and the subsequent foundation were created in a unified Germany with the massive support of the Bundestag, under circumstances of thorough delegitimation of the communist party and state, and in the context of a national consensus regarding the criminal nature of the Stasi. In contrast, in Romania there was a flagrant absence of expiation, penance, or regret. Without such premises, any act of reconciliation draws dangerously close to whitewashing the past. I agree with political scientist Lavinia Stan who stressed that “the country’s bloody exit from communism and the revolutionary leaders’ decision to summarily try, condemn, and kill Ceaușescu took the forgive-and-forget option off the table.”\textsuperscript{23} The situation was made worse as Ion Iliescu and the par-

\textsuperscript{21} Avishai Margalit, \textit{The Ethics of Memory} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).


ties that were successors of the communist one entrenched amnesia in state institutions, policies, and in public opinion. They avoided genuine legal accountability for those involved in crimes and abuses from 1945 until 1989. It would have been unrealistic to expect a conciliatory position toward the Commission’s activity and Report on the side of the politicians who had legitimized themselves through obscuring truth-telling about a traumatic and guilty past.

Reconciliation is not and must not be bound to the premise of moral absolution. For example, two historians who had made their careers during communist times, Dinu C. Giurescu and Florin Constantiniu, were invited to be members of the Commission. They refused. Later, CNSAS (National Council for the Study of the Secret Police Archives) would reveal documents that showed their extensive association with the activity of the Securitate either in domestic academia or in the regime’s cultural diplomacy. After the condemnation speech, both were very vocal critics of the Report, as they promoted normalizing narratives toward the Ceaușescu regime. I believe that James Mark’s criticism according to which the calls from the left for a Reconciliation Commission were ignored overlooks the complexity of the commitments and biographies of the actors involved in the debate, especially between 2005 and 2007. Many of the critics of the Report had yet to confront their personal responsibilities from the communist period. The opposition to the Commission was often rooted in individual unmastered pasts.

The transition from an illegitimate and criminal regime to democracy and a culture of human rights is, to paraphrase Charles Villa-Vicencio, a process in situ, it implies a series of compromises and negotiations. However, the act of healing a community must not be confused with the moral consensus about the traumatic past. The historical justice and the shared memory provided by an Enquetekommision opens the path to post-transitional political realignment. The conclusions of President Băsescu’s speech condemning Romania’s communist regime evoke this path of overcoming the past:

24 For example, she the pertinent analysis in Gorsescu and Ursachi’s article about the trials of the Romania revolution in this volume.
We thought that we could forget communism, but it did not want to forget us. Thus, the condemnation of this past arises as a priority of the present, without which we shall go on bearing something like the burden of an uncured disease. The memory of the crimes committed by the communist regime in Romania helps us to move forward with more decisive steps, to achieve the changes that are so necessary, but it also helps us to appreciate the democratic framework in which we live . . . We have escaped the terror once and for all, we have escaped the fear, and so no one has the right to question our fundamental rights any longer. The lesson of the past proves to us that any regime that humiliates its citizens cannot last and does not deserve to exist. Now, every citizen can freely demand that his inalienable rights shall be respected, and the institutions of state must work in such a way that people will no longer feel humiliated. . . . I am sure that we shall leave behind us the state of social mistrust and pessimism in which the years of transition submerged us, if, together, we make a genuine examination of the national conscience. All that I want is for us to build the future of democracy in Romania and our national identity on clean ground [original emphases, n.a.].  

The replacement of a criminal regime with a democracy founded on justice, tolerance, trust and truth can reach a positive outcome only through the assumption and disclosure of individual and political responsibilities, only with a social rebirth founded on real, systematic reform.

In Germany, the parliament’s mandate was the obvious sign of a political consensus over the necessity of mastering and overcoming the totalitarian past. At the same time, it also meant a serious commitment on the part of the state for purposes of investigating and researching the complexities of the communist phenomenon in the country. In Romania, the Commission lacked legislative backing and had minimum financial support, its members working mostly pro bono. The

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parliament proved to be a site of outward and tacit opposition and subversion to the president’s initiative to investigate the history of the communist regime. Moreover, various political factions promoted institutional parallelisms by continuous fueling of opposite, nostalgic, and even negationist interpretations from budget-dependent bodies such as the Institute of the Romanian Revolution (chaired by Ion Iliescu) or the Institute for the Investigation of Totalitarianism (created in the early 1990s and dominated by nationalist politicians and historians). Therefore, the Commission did not have the infrastructure, the resources, and the consensus for a countrywide, state-supported campaign for implementing the Report (with its conclusions and policy recommendations). The permanent squabbles between parties and their representatives and the strong negationist trend characterizing Romania’s political realm prevented the Report and the PCACDR from having a structural impact similar to that of the Stiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur.

Political scientist, Lavinia Stan, invoking data from opinion polls released in the aftermath of the condemnation speech, especially between 2010 and 2012, stated that despite the fact that the Commission “informed the society about communist crimes, but at the same time the number of Romanians knowledgeable about the past did not significantly increase…”27 Despite my own misgivings toward the absence of greater institutional and financial support for the promotion of the Report’s findings and of its recommendations, I would be restrained toward such sweeping conclusions. First and foremost, the dissemination of the Commission’s work is very difficult to quantify. I believe that one ought to pursue a study of the number of references to the condemnation speech and the Report’s content in the mass media or public debates, and in scholarship concerning the communist period. Second, some of the same opinion polls used by Stan did employ the essential terminology of the condemnation speech. For example, in September 2010, respondents were asked “In your opinion, was the communist regime in Romania illegitimate, in the sense that it reached power and maintained it through falsifying the will of the majority of its citizens?” Forty-two percent answered “yes,” 31 percent “no,” and 27 percent “I do not know/I do not wish to answer.” In the same poll, at the question “was the commu-

27 Stan, Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Romania, 130.
nist regime in Romania a criminal one," 41 percent said “no,” 37 percent “yes,” and 22 percent answered “I do not know/I do not wish to answer.” I think these numbers, along with those of other opinion poll from the past years, reveal a sharp division within the Romanian population with a view to the communist historical experience. As I will discuss next, I doubt whether knowledgeability is the crux of the matter, but rather the conflicting memories about overlapping pasts that comprise not only crimes and abuses, but also survival, self-fulfillment, and individual involvement in the regime’s existence over four decades.

In a sense, the Commission comes close to the commissions for truth and reconciliation created in countries such as South Africa, Chile, Argentina, and Rwanda. The PCACDR had the features of a Truth Commission as identified by Priscilla Hayner: it focused on the past, it investigated patterns of abuse over a period of time, rather than a specific event; it was a temporary body which completed its work with the submission of a report, and it was officially sanctioned, authorized and empowered by the state. There are two main elements that distinguish it from cases such as South Africa or Germany: the absence of a parliamentary mandate meant that it had no decision-making power and no subpoena prerogative; and, it did not rely on the collection of testimonies from the victims of the communist regime. It took on the mission to provide the scholarly evidence for its conclusions and recommendations. This did not entail though that the voices of those who suffered were to be blocked behind a pseudo-Rankean analysis of 
wie es eigentlich gewesen. The PCACDR main objective was to impose the primacy of an ethical framework that went beyond the traumatic experience that could be recorded by means of historical positivism. The introduction of the Final Report clearly states its purpose:

The condemnation of the communist regime is today first of all a moral, intellectual, social and political obligation. The Romanian democratic and pluralist state can and must do it. The acknowl-

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28 For the results of the opinion poll in September 2010, see http://www.iiccr.ro/ro/sondaje_iiccr_csop/. The same link provides information on similar opinion polls from December 2011, May 2011, and November 2010.

Judgment of these dark and tragic pages of our national recent history is vital for the young generations to be conscious of the world their parents were forced to live in. Romania’s future rests on mastering its past, henceforth on condemning the communist regime as an enemy to human society. If we are not to do it today, here and now, we shall burden ourselves with the further complicity, by practice of silence, with the totalitarian Evil. In no way do we mean by this collective guilt. We emphasize the importance of learning from a painful past, of learning how was this possible, and of departing from it with compassion and sorrow for its victims.  

The project and activities of the Commission benefited from the previous experience of the International Commission on the Holocaust (ICHR) in Romania. The main difference between the two endeavors is that the proceedings of the ICHR could not be perceived, as in the PCACDR’s case, as a direct threat or involving a personal stake in contemporary society and politics, since the three historical groups involved in the Holocaust (the victims, the perpetrators, and the bystanders) had mostly disappeared. As far as the communist past is concerned, many of the perpetrators, victims, and witnesses of or bystanders to the regime’s crimes are still alive and involved in societal dynamics, some of them even holding seats in the Romanian parliament. The moment on December 18, 2006, when exponents of the radical left and right booed President Băsescu’s presentation of the findings of the Commission, demonstrated that a genuine democracy cannot function properly in the absence of historical consciousness. An authentic democratic community cannot be built on the denial of past crimes, abuses, and atrocities. The past is not another country. It cannot be wished away—the more that is attempted, the more we witness the return of repressed memories. For example, consider the recurring efforts to prosecute former Mexican president Luis Echeverria for his involvement in 1968 student killings.  


Romania, the Commission rejected outright the practices of institutionalized forgetting and generated a national conversation about long-denied and occulted moments of the past (including instances of collaboration and complicity). One of its significant accomplishments is that it simultaneously represented state authorities and important sections of the civil society in making public and admitting truths that broke a hegemonic dominance of partial, mediated, and mystified knowledge about the communist past.

In January 2007, President Băsescu visited the Sighet Memorial (a museum dedicated to the victims of communism) in northern Romania. This institution, because of poet Ana Blandiana and writer Romulus Rusan’s dedication and because of the diligence of historians from the research center affiliated with the memorial, is the most important lieu de mémoire dealing with Romania’s tragic communist past. By January 2007, immediately after having posted the Commission’s Report on the president’s website, there were some reactions which signaled what I consider a false problem. It has been argued that the PCACDR document exonerates certain political figures murdered by communists, but who themselves could hardly be considered democrats. The Commission aimed at a synthesis between understanding the traumatic history through an academic praxis that presupposes distance from the surveyed subject and empathizing with the people who suffered from the crimes and abuses of the dictatorship. The commission pursued a reconstruction of the past along the dichotomy of distance-empathy, focusing upon both general and individual aspects of the past. The Report’s transgressive intentionality lies in the facts, in the more or less familiar places


33 See A.D. Moses, “Structure and Agency in the Holocaust: Daniel J. Goldhagen and His Critics,” 218, History and Theory, vol. 37, no. 2 (May 1998), 194–219. Dominick LaCapra similarly points to the distance-empathy synthesis, as valid method of approaching recent history, in his argument for reconstruction and electivity on the basis of fact within a democratic value sys-
of Romanian’s communist history. The Commission first identified vic-
tims, regardless of their political colors, for one cannot argue that one is
against torture for the left while ignoring such practices when it comes
to the right. The militants of the far right should have been punished
on a legal basis, but this was not the case for the trials put forth by the
Romanian Communist Party (RCP). The communists simply shattered
any notion of the rule of law. The Report identifies the nature of abuses
and its victims, though it does not leave aside the ideological context of
the times. For the Commission, the communist regime represented the
opposite of rule of law, an Unrechtsstaat. However, any attempt at “dis-
covering” a Bitburg syndrome in the body’s document is a malevolent,
bias statement more than a pointed academic argument.

The PCACDR was “a state, public history lesson” during which
the “truth” about the communist totalitarian experienced was “offi-
cially proclaimed and publicly exposed,” that is, acknowledged. It was
an exercise of “sovereignty over memory,” an attempt to set the stage
for resolving what Tony Judt called the “double crisis of memory”:

On the one hand cynicism and mistrust pervade all social, cul-
tural and even personal exchanges, so that the construction of
civil society, much less civil memory, is very, very difficult. On

34 Geoffrey Hartman, Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective (Bloomington:
Indiana University Press, 1986), Charles S. Maier, The Unmasterable Past:
History, Holocaust, and German National Identity (Cambridge, MA: Harvard
University Press, 1988).

35 I am employing here the concepts developed by Timothy Garton Ash and
Timothy Snyder in Timothy Garton Ash, “Trials, Purges and History Les-
sions: Treating a Difficult Past in Post-Communist Europe” and Timothy
Snyder, “Memory of Sovereignty and Sovereignty over Memory: Poland,
Lithuania and Ukraine, 1939–1999” in Jan-Werner Müller (ed.), Memory
and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past (Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 2002).
the other hand there are multiple memories and historical myths, each of which has learned to think of itself as legitimate simply by virtue of being private and unofficial. Where these private or tribal versions come together, they form powerful counterhistories of a mutually antagonistic and divisive nature.\textsuperscript{36}

The post-1989 practice of state-sponsored amnesia created two main dangers: the externalization of guilt and the ethnicization of memory. As both Dan Diner and Gabriel Motzkin argue, the process of working through the communist past raises a crucial problem: “How can crimes that elude the armature of an ethnic, and thus long-term, memory be kept alive in collective remembrance?”\textsuperscript{37} The domination and extermination of a communist regime generally affects all strata of the population, terror and repression are engineered from within against one’s people. Therefore, “the lack of specific connection between Communism’s theoretical enemy and its current victims made it more difficult to remember these victims later.”\textsuperscript{37} When no \textit{Aufarbeitung} takes place, the memory field is left for “alternative” interpretations.

On the one hand, the evils of the regime are assigned to those perceived as \textit{aliens}: the Jews, the national minorities, or other traitors and enemies of an organically defined nation. Such line of perverted reasoning unfolded immediately after my nomination as Chair of the PCACDR. I became the preferred target of verbal assault, including scurrilous slanders and vicious anti-Semitic diatribes, targeting the commission’s president.\textsuperscript{38} The Commission itself was labeled as one made up of foreigners (\textit{alogeni}). Entire genealogies were invented for various members of this body, all just to prove the fact that the “real perpetrators” are forcing upon the nation a falsified history of its suffering. Upon delivering the condemnation speech, the president and some

\textsuperscript{36} Tony Judt, “The Past Is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Post-War Europe” in Jan-Werner Muller, \textit{Memory and Power}, 173.


\textsuperscript{38} See my books \textit{Democrație și memorie} (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2006) and \textit{Refuzul de a uita} (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2007).
members of the Commission were showered with threats and impreca-
tions by the representatives of the xenophobic and chauvinistic Roma-
nia Mare Party. Unfortunately, as an indication of the deep-rooted mal-
aise of memory in Romania, very few members of the Parliament of
the other mainstream parties publicly objected to this behavior (Nicolae
Văcăroiu, then President of the Romanian Senate, did nothing to stop
this circus). A further proof of narrow-mindedness came a few months
later, when a critic of the Report found no qualms in stating that: “if
it weren’t for the stupid, but violent reactions of nationalists, extrem-
ists, etc., the Report would have passed almost unnoticed by the public
opinion that counts, the one from which one can expect change.”\textsuperscript{39}

In reality, however, such utterances are indicative of a very inter-
esting, though worrisome, post-condemnation phenomenon: the argu-
mentative coalition against the Report of a self-proclaimed “new left”
with the national-stalinists (those who perpetuate the topoi of the pre-
1989 propaganda or those who are nostalgic for Ceaușescu’s “Golden
Age”), and with the fundamentalist orthodoxists. Such alliance can
be explained in two ways: first, these are the faces of resentment, the
people who were forced to confront their own illusions and guilt or
those who stubbornly refuse to accept the demise of Utopia (what
in Germany fell under the category of anti-antiutopianism); second,
these are those for whom, mostly because of ignorance, dealing with
the communist past can be resumed to mechanical instrumentaliza-
tion, for whom this redemptive act is a “strategic action.” The result of
their mainly journalistic flurries is one that does not surprise the sober
observer: a counterrtrend of *malentendu* revisionism that does represent,
because of its promise of facile remembrance, a latent danger for con-
tinuation of the strategy of legal, political, and historical *Aufarbeitung*.\textsuperscript{40}

Another peril of a mis-memory of communism is the develop-
ment of “two moral vocabularies, two sorts of reasoning, two different
pasts”: that of things done to “us” and that of things done by “us” to
“others.”\textsuperscript{41} Tony Judt sees this practice as the overall postwar European

\textsuperscript{39} Ciprian Șiulea, “Imposibila dezbatere. Incrancenare și optimism in condom-
\textsuperscript{40} For an extensive analysis of this phenomenon, see Bogdan C. Iacob’s con-
tribution in this volume.
\textsuperscript{41} Judt, “The Past Is Another Country,” 163–166.
syndrome of “voluntary amnesia.” In Romania, its most blatant manifestation was the denial of the Holocaust, of the role of the Romanian state in the extermination of the Jews. As in the case of Poland, the myth of “Judeo-Bolshevism,” frantically embraced and disseminated by the far-right is directly linked to widespread propaganda-manufactured misperceptions about alleged Jewish overwhelming support for the Soviet occupiers during the period between June 1940 and June 1941. I agree with Maria Bucur that: “The most important consideration in rethinking the periodization of World War II, however, pertains to how historians interpret the meaning of specific actions and words. Periodizing the war strictly from June 1941 to October 1944 allows one to easily avoid discussing the important anti-Semitic policies and pogroms experienced by Jews in Romania between the fall of 1940 and the summer of 1941. It also excludes the violence that took place in northern Transylvania in the fall of 1940. Not extending the war beyond 1944 places the experience of violence between November 1944 and the 1950s into a context that is circumscribed to Cold War politics. But the Cold War on the ground was not a mere projection of the Soviet desire for power and control in Romania.” In other words, the origins of the violent confrontations and social tensions in post-1944 Romania cannot be disassociated from the major ethnopolitical disruptions during World War II, including the genocidal actions of Ion Antonescu’s fascist regime against Jews and Roma. It took a long time for Romanian historians to even admit the existence of a Holocaust in Romania. Politically the recognition came in 2004 with the ICHR, but similarly to the PCACDR, its findings were not consistently and convincingly taken up into policies aimed at a widespread and thorough coming to terms with this traumatic and guilty past.

Another manifestation of the syndrome can also be found in relation with the communist past. One of the master narratives after 1989 was, because of the Soviet imposition, the regime was not part

42 An account of this phenomenon is the chapter “Distortion, Negationism, and Minimalization of the Holocaust in Postwar Romania” of the Final Report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania. The English version of this document can be found at http://www.ushmm.org/research/center/presentations/features/details/2005-03-10/.

43 Bucur, Heroes and Victims, 200.
and parcel of the national history. It was a protracted form of foreign occupation during which the population was victimized by foreigners and rogue, inhuman, bestial individuals. This discourse was and is based upon the topical trinity of they and it vs. us. In later years it went through finer qualifications: on the one hand, the ‘High Stalinism’ period (roughly 1947–1953, with maybe the added value of 1958–1962), the so-called haunting decade, was blamed on the ‘Muscovites’ (mostly Ana Pauker, Vasile Luca, Iosif Chișinevschi) and, sometimes, but in a redemptive key on Gheorghiu Dej as well (who also wears a historiographical cap of national awakener on the basis of his later years in power). On the other hand, the Ceaușescu period is seen as one of patriotic emancipation and self-determination from under the Kremlin iron heel. The distortions of such “healthy path” are mostly blamed on Ceaușescu’s personality cult. It is no surprise that in some quarters, his execution was seen as the end of communism, of its evils and/or legacy. The overall conclusion of such normalizing gymnastics was similar to the previously discussed issue: the criminality of the regime lay in its antinational past, while its development of the Nation’s interest and being can be separated from the degeneration of its leaders.

I believe that one of the most important achievements of the Commission’s Final Report, in terms of what Claus Offe called “politics of knowledge,” was the denunciation of the country’s communist totalitarian experience as “(national) Stalinist.” That is, the regime was Stalinist from the beginning to the end and it also experienced a hybridization of an organic nationalism with Marxist-Leninist tenets. The document’s “Introduction” clearly states the thesis: “tributary to Soviet interests, consistent with its original Stalinist legacy, even after its break with Moscow, the communist regime in Romania was antinational despite its incessant professions of national faith. . . . Behind the ideology of the unitary and homogenous socialist nation lay hidden the obsessions of Leninist monolitism combined with those of a revitalized extreme right endorsed by the party leaders.” In other words, there was a continuity between the first and second stages of Romanian communism, which shattered the historiographical consensus that the Ceaușescu regime

44 Raport Final, 32 and 767.
was fully nationalist compared to the first stage and therefore salvageable on grounds of national interest, pride, and loyalty.

I consider that there is an overlying conceptualization of memory in the pages of the Report, one that puts together what Richard S. Esbenshade identified as the two main paradigms in Eastern Europe, shaped before and after the fall of communism, for the relationship between memory and communal identity. On the one hand, there is the “Milan Kundera paradigm,” according to which “man’s struggle is one of memory against forgetting” (that is, instrumentalized amnesia vs. individual, civic remembrance). On the other, there is the “George Konrad paradigm,” where “history is the forcible illumination of darkened memories,” presupposing a “morass of shared responsibility.” In bringing together these approaches, the Commission attempted to answer to Tony Judt’s “double crisis of history” in former Eastern Europe. As the reactions to the Report show, the formation and employment of a society-wide “critically informed memory” (Dominick LaCapra) is challenged by widespread cynicism and distrust for all sociopolitical levels and by multiple historical myths, anxieties, expectations, illusions, and memories (developed during the communist period as resistance to the ubiquitous ideological discourse of the RCP dictatorship) that claim legitimacy because of their private and unofficial character. In a sense, throughout a large part of Romania’s twentieth century history, “time itself was hurt” (R.J. Bosworth). Dealing with both the communist and fascist past (and implicitly Romania’s responsibility for the Holocaust) must become a factor of communal cohesion as it imposes the rejection of any comfortably apologetic historicization.

The Report’s conclusions postulate the moral equivalence of the two extremisms that caused such trauma: “the far left must be rejected as much as the far right. The denial of communism’s crimes is as unacceptable as the denial of those of fascism. As any justification for the


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crimes against humanity performed by the Antonescu regime ought not to be tolerated, we believe that no form of commemoration of communist leaders/representatives should be allowed.”

One of the essential dilemmas of the twentieth century was, to paraphrase Raymond Aron, the relationship between democracy and totalitarianism. This issue remained vital up until today; the struggle between democracy and its enemies is far from over. Communism and fascism were not regimes of opposite nature. They were embodiments of different types of totalitarianism, as novel political systems that came about in the second decade of the last century with roots in the nationalism and socialism of the nineteenth century. They were facets and dimensions of human existence under the attempted total control of a political entity that had not existed before in history and which was undergoing constant development.

With this in mind, I believe, and the Commission was imbued with such an approach, that one needs to take into account a moral imperative that reflects the comprehension of the tragic experience of the twentieth century. In the context, opposition to any form of totalitarianism is fundamental.

Subsequently, the main instrument for the process of mastering the past, employed by the Commission, was the deconstruction of the ideological certainty established by the communist regime upon which the latter founded its legitimacy and that it creatively instrumentalized in its attempt to encompass the entire society. From the appearance of antifascism to the discourse of the “socialist nation,” the topoi (traditional theme or motif) of Romanian Stalinism permeated public consciousness, simultaneously maiming collective memory and significant chunks of the country’s history.

The post-1989 period in Romania was dominated by an absence of expiation, of penance, or of a mourning process in relation to the trauma of communism. Therefore, reconciliation was impossible, for it lacked any basic truth value.

47 Raport Final, 637.
49 Lavinia Stan correctly underlined that in Romania “the nature of the communist past led to a preference for truth and justice—at the expense of reconciliation.” In Stan, Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Romania, 28.
Taking into account all of the above, it can be argued that the condemnation of the communist regime was based upon a civic-liberal ethos and not, as some commentators stated, on a moral-absolutist discourse, as legitimization for a new power hierarchy in the public and political space. Though he does not make this remark approvingly, James Mark is correct to state that the Commission promoted an interpretation of history that was rooted in counterpoising liberal democracy with a dictatorial criminal past. According to him, “it was this vision of democracy—as the rule of law and this as shield for the individual from the abusive state—that would provide the template for the Presidential Commission’s liberally framed condemnation of Communism.”\(^{50}\) But, as Bogdan C. Iacob judiciously stresses in his chapter of this volume, considering Romania’s continuum of authoritarianisms, such a choice is a positive and refreshing departure in both the representation of the past and in local historiography.

In the following lines, I will provide an extensive quote from President Băsescu’s December 18, 2006 speech to clarify the conceptual and discursive complex that lies at the core of the communist regime’s condemnation. During a joint session of the Romanian parliament, President Băsescu accepted the conclusions and recommendations of the PCACDR’s *Final Report*. His address became an official document of the Romanian state, published in the country’s *Official Monitor*, no. 196, on December 28, 2006.

As Head of the Romanian State, I expressly and categorically condemn the communist system in Romania, from its foundation, on the basis of dictate, during the years 1944 to 1947, to its collapse in December 1989. Taking cognizance of the realities presented in the Report, I affirm with full responsibility: the communist regime in Romania was illegitimate and criminal. . . . In the name of the Romanian State, I express my regret and compassion for the victims of the communist dictatorship. In the name of the Romanian State, I ask the forgiveness of those who suffered, of their families, of all those who, in one way or another, saw their lives ruined by the abuses of dictatorship. . . . Evoking now a period which many would wish to forget, we have spoken both of the past and of the extent to which we, people today, wish to go to the very end in

\(^{50}\) Mark, *Unfinished Revolution*, 39.
the assumption of the values of liberty. These values, prior even to being those of Romania or of Europe, flow from the universal, sacred value of the human person. If we now turn to the past, we do so in order to face a future in which contempt for the individual will no longer go unpunished. This symbolic moment represents the balance sheet of what we have lived through and the day in which we all ask ourselves how we want to live henceforward. We shall break free of the past more quickly, we shall make more solid progress, if we understand what hinders us from being more competitive, more courageous, more confident in our own powers. On the other hand, we must not display historical arrogance. My purpose is aimed at authentic national reconciliation, and all the more so since numerous legacies of the past continue to scar our lives. Our society suffers from a generalized lack of confidence. The institutions of state do not yet seem to pursue their real vocation, which relates to the full exercise of all civil liberties. . . . Perhaps some will ask themselves what exactly gives us the right to condemn. As President of Romanians, I could invoke the fact that I have been elected. But I think that we have a more important motive: the right to condemn gives us the obligation to make the institutions of the rule of law function within a democratic society. We cannot be allowed to compromise these institutions. They cannot be allowed to be discredited by the fact that we approach them with the habits and mentalities of our recent past. . . . The condemnation of communism will encourage us to be more circumspect towards utopian and extremist projects, which want to bring into question the constitutional and democratic order. Behind the nostalgic or demagogic discourses, there lies more often than not the temptation of authoritarianism or even totalitarianism, of negation of the explosion of individual energies, of inventiveness and creativity which has taken place since December 1989. We have definitively escaped terror, we have escaped fear, in such a way that no one has the right to bring into question our fundamental rights.\footnote{The speech given by the President of Romania, Traian Băsescu, on the occasion of the Presentation of the Report by the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania (The Parliament of Romania, December 18, 2006), www.presidency.ro.}
The above excerpt indicates several directions along which the meaning of the act of condemning the communist regime was drawn. First of all, this initiative is a fundamentally symbolic step toward national reconciliation by means of clarifying and dealing with the past. Only in this way can Romanian society overcome the fragmentation typical of the “legacy of Leninism.” President Băsescu advocated a reinstitutionalization freed from the burden of the party-state continuities and the possibility for laying the foundation of a “posttotalitarian legitimacy.” It is his belief that only in such fashion can one develop the not-yet-attained national consensus. Two years later, in 2008, at the launch of the first volume of documents of the Commission, he stated that the condemnation speech broke, once and for all, with the continuity with the postwar state, which was born by way of the forceful creation of the puppet government of Petru Groza on March 6, 1945 and through the arbitrary abrogation of the Romanian monarchy on December 30, 1947. In his reading, the revolution of 1989 marked the collapse of the communist dictatorship, but not the final and definitive end of the communist state. The restoration that followed, not so velvet in Romania if one takes into account the bloody repression of the protests in June 1990, aimed to hinder such a total break with the institutional communist past.

The process of Vergangenheitsbewältigung that was initiated by the Commission set up criteria of accountability fundamental to the reinforcement and entrenchment of democratic values in Romanian society. For, as Jan-Werner Müller argued, “without facing the past, there can be no civic trust, which is the outcome of a continuous

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52 Kenneth Jowitt defined Eastern Europe as a “brittle region” where “suspicion, division, and fragmentation predominate, not coalition and interrogation” because of lasting emotional, ethnic, territorial, demographic, political fragmentation form the (pre-)communist period. See “The Legacy of Leninism” in New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). For a discussion of this thesis, see also Vladimir Tismaneanu, Marc Howard, and Rudra Sil (eds.), World Order After Leninism (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006).

53 Bogdan C. Iacob, in the first article of his series in Idei in Dialog, argued that the nature and profile of the condemnation of Romanian communist regime comes close to what Jan-Werner Müller coined as the Modell Deutschland. See Jan-Werner Müller, Another Country: German Intellectuals, Unification, and National Identity (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2000), 258.
public deliberation about the past.\textsuperscript{54} Following upon Ken Jowitt’s footsteps, I consider that the fundamental Leninist legacy in Eastern Europe was total fragmentation of society, the break of the civic bonds and consensus necessary for a healthy, democratic life. The tumultuous post-1989 years in Romania are the perfect proof for this thesis: sectarian interests, widespread authoritarian tendencies within the public and political spheres, anomie, and so on, were all rooted in forgetting. The Commission did not find new truth, but it lifted the veil of denial over those truths that were widely known but stubbornly unacknowledged. In a country where the legal measures against the abuses perpetrated during the communist years are close to nonexistent and where the judicial system is rather weak and corrupted, it can be said that the Commission created the future prospects for justice.

The Report, besides its detailed accounts on the functioning of the various mechanisms of power and repression, also named names; it listed the most important people who were guilty for the evils of the regime. It did not stigmatize any group, its purpose was not inquisitorial; but it engaged in a truth-telling process essential for understanding the nature of responsibility for crimes and suffering under communism. In Priscilla Hayner words: “where justice is unlikely in the courts, a commission plays an important role in at least publicly shaming those who orchestrated atrocities.” It revitalized the principle of accountability, fundamental for democracy’s survival.\textsuperscript{55} Considering the present political environment in Romania, I can only reiterate Chilean President Patricio Aylwin dictum upon the creation of the Retting Commission: justice as far as possible (\textit{justicia en la medida de lo posible}). The moral-symbolic action is after all one of the four types of retributive justice (the others being the criminal, the noncriminal,\textsuperscript{54} Jan-Werner Müller, “Introduction: the Power of Memory, the Memory of Power and the Power over Memory” in Jan-Werner Müller (ed.), \textit{Memory and Power}, 33–34.

\textsuperscript{55} Priscilla Hayner makes a very convincing argument about the ways in which the activity of truth commissions can supplant for the fallacies and impotence of the judicial process, about the means by which a commission’s activity and results can become the foundation for future legal action against abuses of the past. See Hayner, \textit{Unspeakable Truths}, 82–87.
and the rectifying aspects).\textsuperscript{56} Naturally, in the following years there has been an immense background of expectation which, given the political situation in Romania, has only partly been satisfied. Legislative incapacity and lack of any will to take responsibility for the past on the part of the majority of the political class have produced regrettable confusion as to the purpose, functions, goals and mandate of the Commission. For example, even an insightful analyst such as Lavinia Stan argued that “the Commission led to no reforms meant to strengthen the legal system, although the evidence it amassed did not represent ‘inconsequential truth.’”\textsuperscript{57} Considering the mandate and the reactions to the Commission from important parties and political actors in Romanian Parliament, it would be unrealistic to expect the body to have such a transformative immediate impact on the local legal system. In his book Pieces of the Puzzle, Charles Villa-Vicencio enumerates bluntly the possibilities and impossibilities of a Commission for Truth. On the one hand, such a commission can

\begin{itemize}
  \item break the silence on past gross violations of human rights;
  \item counter the denial of such violations and thus provide official acknowledgment of the nature and extent of human suffering;
  \item provide a basis for the emergence of a common memory that takes into account a multitude of diverse experiences;
  \item help create a culture of accountability;
  \item provide a safe space within which victims can engage their feelings and emotions through the telling of personal stories without the evidentiary and procedural restraints of the courtroom;
  \item bring communities, institutions and systems under moral scrutiny;
  \item contribute to uncovering the causes, motives, and perspectives of past atrocities;
  \item provide important symbolic forms of memorialisation and reparation;
  \item initiate and support a process of reconciliation, recognizing that it will take time and political will to realize;
  \item provide a public space within which to address the issues that thrust the country into conflict, while promoting restorative justice and social reconstruction.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{56} McAdams, \textit{Judging the Past}.
\textsuperscript{57} Stan, \textit{Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Romania}, 131.
However, a Commission for Truth does not have the capability to
imposing punishment(s) commensurate to the crime(s) com-
mitted; ensuring remorse from perpetrators and their rehabili-
tation; ensuring that victims will be reconciled with or forgive
their perpetrators; addressing comprehensively all aspects of past
oppression; uncovering of the whole truth about an atrocity or
answering all outstanding questions in an investigation; allowing
all victims to tell their stories; ensuring that all victims experi-
ence closure as a result of the process; providing adequate forms
of reconstruction and comprehensive reparations; correcting the
imbalances between benefactors and those exploited by the for-
er regime; ensuring that those dissatisfied with amnesties or the
nature or extent of the amount of the truth revealed will make no
further demand for punishment or revenge.”

Authors such as James Mark and Lavinia Stan consider that the PCACDR
was a history and not a truth commission. Indeed, the Romanian case
is not a textbook truth commission. However, the body did fulfill most
of the above functions of a truth commission listed by Villa-Vicencio.
PCACDR did not have the time and the institutional bedrock upon
which to rely in order to grant the victims the possibility to testify of
their suffering and trauma. But, as mentioned earlier, it did include the
point of view of the Association of Former Political Prisoners, which
triggered criticisms related to the employment of the AFPP’s formula
“the communist genocide in Romania.” In this sense, the Commission
did provide an extent for the victims to “own” the truths that it told
about the crimes and abuses of the ancien régime. Only the inability of
the local state institutions prevented the development of outreach pro-
grams that would further alleviate the victims’ suffering. In fact, it could
be argued that under the umbrella of the Institute for the Investiga-
tion of Communist Crimes and the Memory of Romanian Exile, which
I chaired as president of the Scientific Council from March 2010 until
May 2012, such assistance was and still provided by offering expertise

59 See Stan, *Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Romania*, 112–115 and
on individual cases concerning imprisonment, executions, homicide, and repression brought forward by victims and/or their families. I would contend that PCADCR was a truth commission in the specific political, institutional, and public context of post-communist Romania.

Another issue that I wish to discuss is whether the project of the condemnation of the communist dictatorship falls in the category of what Adam Michnik called the “mantra of anti-communism.” In some of his writings, Michnik noted quite a few similarities between some forms of anti-communism, especially in Poland, with the former anti-fascism of the Comintern and post-1945 periods. He saw both as mere forms within which a deeper structure, focused upon political bickering and neoauthoritarian tendencies, is hidden. According to him, “Anticommunism, like antifascism, does not itself attest to anyone’s righteousness. The old lie—the lie of communists settling scores with fascism—has been replaced by a new lie: the lie of anti-communists settling scores with communism. . . . Communism froze collective memory; the fall of communism, therefore, brought with it, along with a return to democracy, paratotalitarian formations, ghosts from another era. . . . The debate about communism has thus become, through blackmail and discrimination against political enemies, a tool in the struggle for political power.”

In Romania, the condemnation of the communist regime has taken place with a consistent view to reconciliation, consensus, reform, and working through the past. It did not serve either as a weapon of President Băsescu against his enemies or as a means of rehabilitating any xenophobic and/or antidemocratic, procommunist movements (as in the case of Poland with Roman Dmowski’s ultranationalist Endecja). Starting in late April 2006, some sections of the Romanian mass media indulged in an abuse of Michnik’s ideas. Many individuals with hardly liberal-democratic pedigrees, such as former president Ion Iliescu, former prime minister Adrian Năstase, and Social Democratic Party ideologue Adrian Severin, used the principles professed by former Polish dissident Michnik to justify their lack of penance,

their amnesia, and their opportunism. They missed (or conveniently ignored) the fact that Michnik’s positions originated in his weariness toward neo-Jacobin radicalism and vindictive rigorism, especially when they are advocated by those who never uttered not even a word against communism before the collapse of the system (or, even worse, they enthusiastically collaborated and compromised with it). Michnik is profoundly concerned about les enragés, whom he suspects of double moral standards, Phariseism, and even of irresponsible adventurism. Michnik however does not oppose, in my reading of his writings, the idea of moral justice. And, he is, without a doubt, an irreconcilable adversary of amnesia. The Romanian philosopher, Horia-Roman Patapievici, offered a superb interpretation of Michnik’s thought:

The unpopular ethical choices made by Michnik reveal the imprisoned comrade who never betrayed his friends. Those who experienced the penitentiary colony of communism know that only one thing can save you from treason: love. A love greater than any idea. In the name of this love did Michnik take the liberty of provoking those who transformed into occupation the act of confusing la revanche (maybe entitled) with justice (maybe justified). He chose the most difficult path because, and one fells it in his every line, because he loved too much.

I consider that Michnik endorses an anti-utopian, anti-absolutist, anti-monopolist position toward the past; a humanist perspective, rational, and empathic toward the victims. He has no illusion that, at the end of the day, we do have to distinguish between truth and lie, good and evil, freedom and barbarism. He once wrote in 2009 that “we believe that communism was a falsehood from the beginning. We try, though,

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61 Adam Michnik was shocked upon being informed that his ideas on “Bolshevik-style anticommunism” (which cannot be understood without the context of the Polish debates and without taking into account the post-1989 tribulations of Solidarity) were invoked by various former nomenklatura members in Romania, with the purpose of blocking the clarification of the past (personal conversation with Adam Michnik, București, Romania, June 9, 2007).

to understand the people who were engaged in communism, their heterogeneous motivations and their biographies, sometimes heroic and tragic, always naive and brought to naught. We do this, driven perhaps by a conviction hidden somewhere in our subconscious that it’s necessary to distinguish the sin from the sinner: the sin we condemn—the sinner we try to listen to, to understand.”

The reverberations of the past are part of contemporary polemics and define competing visions of the future. It is quite often in relation to the past, especially a traumatic one, that political actors identify themselves and engage in competitions with their opponents. Reviewing Jan T. Gross’s book Fear, David Engel wrote,

Unless Polishness, whatever its constituent characteristics, is transmitted from generation to generation through mother’s milk, as it were, nothing that Gross or anyone else might say about any part of the Polish community in 1946, 1941, or any other year more than six decades in the past necessarily reflects upon any part of the community today. It can do so only to the extent that the present community continues to affirm the values implicated in past events. Thus Fear or any other work of history can legitimately be neither offered nor read as a vehicle for contemporary self-examination except insofar as it prompts contemporaries to question strongly whether they remain committed to those values.

The post-communist debates on the past should be seen as indicators of contemporary ideological cleavages and tensions, confirming Jürgen Habermas’s analysis of the public use of history as an antidote to oblivion, denial, and partisan distortions: “It is especially these dead who have a claim to the weak anamnestic power of a solidarity that later generations can continue to practice only in the medium of a remem-

brance that is repeatedly renewed, often desperate, and continually on one’s mind.”

The Report’s approach to the category of perpetrator is focused on three types that have been consistently ignored by those who blame the document for a so-called blanket condemnation. According to Cosmina Tănăsoiu, one can identify those “guilty for the thousands of dead and deported” (i.e., top Party officials, cabinet ministers, police commanders, high-level magistrates), those “guilty for the annihilation of diaspora dissent” (i.e., the heads of the external services of the secret police and counter-intelligence), and those “guilty for the indoctrination of the population” (the largest category, ranging from Party members and cabinet ministers to writers and poets).

Additionally, the Report signals out those who were responsible, after 1989, for the manipulating and forging the truth in order to preserve their power and continue, by means of an “original democracy,” the fateful structures and the interest groups dominant during the last decade of the party-state rule. I think that this last section of the third part of the Report, is fully justified by the specific post-1989 history of Romania, one marred with moments of critical, managed anarchy (the miners’ trips to Bucharest and the pyramidal financial schemes), by the quasi-bankruptcy of the market economy, and by infrastructural retardation. The part of the Report that analyzes the events, the meaning, and the aftermath of the 1989 Romanian revolution concludes:

During the first years in power, Ceaușescu’s successors defended their hegemonic positions through manipulation, corruption, and coercion. But, we should not confuse this with an attempt to reinstate communist rule. […] The Revolution from below was accompanied by a re-grouping of the nomenklatura, which succeeded in taking power by means of backroom negotiations led by people and groups from the secondary ranks of the old regime (the party, the Union of the Communist Youth, the secret police, the army, and the attorney’s office) Based on these observations we can conclude that the phenomenon of “continuity” was a seri-

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ous obstacle on the path to establishing a genuine democratic political community. The old Leninist habits continued to inspire the new rulers to an intolerant, paternalistic, and authoritarian behavior.\textsuperscript{67}

Consequently, it can be argued that the individual and his inalienable rights were the main reconstitutive focus of the Report. The members of the Commission refused the principle of collective guilt and/or punishment. The question that none of the political actors in Romania wished to bother themselves with can be phrased as follows: How can Romania go through a phase of reconciliation as long as the authors of the crimes perpetrated under communism are still enjoying privileges and are brazenly and unrepentantly defying their victims? And I am thinking particularly to individuals who have been signaled out by the Report as perpetrators of crimes against humanity, the members of the last Executive Political Committee under Ceaușescu who were directly involved in the murderous repression of the protesters in Bucharest or Timișoara.

Along these lines, historian Marius Oprea, then president of the Institute for the Investigation of Communism’s Crimes in Romania (after November 2009, IICCMER), proposed a law according to which “the pensions of the secret police employees, who were found by court to have been involved in repression, would be reduced to the level of the pensions of unskilled labors [I want to note here that the pensions of former secret police members, generals, party leaders are some of the most generous in the country—VT] […] We would opt for the latter because the people affected by this law are perpetrators, their sole occupation was not, neither under communism nor now, in the list of jobs recognized by the state. The funds obtained through this pension cut will be allocated to the victims and the survivors of the communist regime.”\textsuperscript{68} The draft advanced by Dr. Oprea was one of the recommendations of the Report in section III entitled “Legislation and Justice” (p. 637). After several years of negotiations this project was buried in the Parliament’s archive because of an utter lack of political

\textsuperscript{67} Raport Final, 620–622.
\textsuperscript{68} Mirela Corlățan, “Pensiile securiștilor, greu de tăiat,” Cotidianul, August 16, 2007.
will to promote it. In 2011, during my tenure as IICCMER’s President of the Scientific Council, the institution’s leadership attempted to promote a modified version of this legislative project, but again met with the opposition of the Ministry of Justice to sanction it.  

Another initiative that was blocked was the process of bringing to court around 210 individuals who had held leadership positions in various prisons during the dictatorship. They were accused that “they used the correctional program as a means of socially exterminating whole categories of people,” their actions “falling into various category of criminal acts, such as first degree murder.” Between 2006 and 2012, IICCR and then IICCMER provided expertise to Romanian prosecutors for possible indictments for crimes perpetrated during the communist period, but the latter simply ignored this information. Only in 2013, Romanian prosecutors began investigating the possibility of legal action against communist perpetrators. Surprisingly, they used the legal category of genocide to build their cases, which is hardly tenable or inviting for positive results considering that, in Romania, the penal code’s definition refers to genocide as “the destruction in its entirety or only partially of a collectivity or of national, ethnic, racial, and religious groups.” Building a legal case on the ambiguous formulation “collectivity” potentially undermines the initiative itself.  

But maybe one of the most important breakthroughs of the post-Report years, however, was the nomination as Director of the Romanian National Archives of Dr. Dorin Dobrincu (member of the Commission, one of the authors and co-editor of the Report). Soon after

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69 The social-liberal government did pass a law in 2013 that forces perpetrators to pay reparations to their victims. But this can happened only after they are sentenced. Suffice to say that no communist perpetrator has been sentenced in Romania, so implicitly this law is simply a Potemkin legislative act. For more details, see Vladimir Tismaneanu, “Palme pentru victime: pensiile securistilor și activiștilor,” September 19, 2013, (http://www.contributors.ro/reactie-rapida/palme-pentru-victime-pensiile-securistilor-si-activistilor/).


his confirmation, he decided to grant free access to all researchers and individuals to the entire archive of the RCP’s Central Committee—another recommendation of the Commission’s Report. In retaliation for his bold move, several years later, in 2012, the newly instated social-liberal government dismissed him from his position. However, the opening of the Romanian archives remains in place as a lasting legacy of the Commission. Another important recommendation of the Report was implemented in November 2011. As a result of IICCMER’s efforts, the Parliament passed law no. 198 on “Declaring 23 August as the Day for Commemorating the Victims of Fascism and Communism and the 21 December as the Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Communism in Romania.” Unsurprisingly, the social-liberal government formed in May 2012 and its subsequent incarnations simply ignored these days of commemoration.

President Băsescu created, on April 11, 2007, the Consultative Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship (CCACDR), which was composed of twelve experts (I served as chair). The main function of this body was to provide the specialized knowledge for the legal initiatives promoted by the executive branch in relation to the overall effort of dealing with the communist past (e.g., lustration law; commemorations; textbooks; laws regarding the victims, survivors, and perpetrators). At the same time, the CCACDR was meant to be the academic backbone of two other important projects: the Encyclopedia of Romanian Communism and the high school textbook for the study of the communist historical experience in Romania. CCACDR struggled to implement its mandate because of lack of funding and consistent absence of governmental support. But it did successfully publish a collection of the archival documents used by the PCACDR’s members in writing the Report (already two volumes have appeared with two others forthcoming).


For details on this law and other legislative initiatives by IICCMER see http://www.iiccr.ro/ro/proiecte_legislative_iiccmer/proiecte_legislative/.
The most important result of the collaboration between the CCACDR and the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes (a governmental institution with a significant budget, which in November 2009 merged with the Institute for National Memory of the Romanian Exile to become IICCMER) was the first high-school textbook on the history of communism. In September 2008, the textbook was presented to the Romanian public. After almost one year of collecting feedback from teachers, historians, and from public opinion, the authors made the necessary revisions to the textbook and published a new edition in April 2009. On the basis of it, the subject is currently taught on an optional basis in the last two years of high-school. Another crucial development which took place under IICCMER’s umbrella, at a time when former experts and members of its Commission were part of its leadership, was article 125 of the penal code and law 27/2012. They modified the penal code and law 286/2009 concerning the penal code in relation to the statute of limitations concerning genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. These can now be prosecuted regardless of the time of their commission. Furthermore, the same decision lifted the statute of limitations for homicide. Such changes to the penal code create the legal grounding for the prosecution of crimes committed during the communist era. This legal breakthrough was achieved by Monica Macovei, a former Minister of Justice and current member of the European Parliament, but IICCMER assisted her through all the steps of drafting and promoting the legislative proposal.

As it should be apparent by now, after 2006, IICCR and then IICCMER to a large extent attempted to implement some of the Report’s


recommendations and continue the work of the Commission on multiple levels (scholarly, investigations, commemoration, and education). In the absence of a museum of communism in Romania, the institution succeeded in creating a series of websites that represent specific policies of the regime and some of its post-1989 consequences: an impressive collection of photos from those times (http://fototeca.iiccr.ro/); a website about Nicolae Ceaușescu’s politics of reproduction (http://politicalpro-natalista.iiccr.ro/); one about the “Mineriade” June 1990 (http://miner-iade.iicmer.ro/); about the biographies of the nomenklatura (http://www.iiccr.ro/ro/biografiile_nomenklaturii/); on the geography of the Romanian exile (http://www.arhivaexilului.ro/); about the reeducation in Pitești penitentiary (http://www.fenomenulpitesti.ro/); and, last but not least, an education platform on the history of communism in Romania (see footnote 74). There is also a database with the detention information of many political prisoners from the communist period: http://www.iiccr.ro/ro/fise_detinuti_politici/. It functions as a valuable instrument for providing expert assistance for those (victims and their descendants) who wish to clarify or document individual contexts of repression. IICCMER has also published important monographs or edited volumes on the communist historical period, while also promoting an extensive program, at least until summer 2012, of translations of some of the most important scholarship in the comparative study of totalitarianism. In 2010, the institute launched the first Romanian international peer-review journal in communism entitled *History of Communism in Europe*. It also publishes its own Romanian language yearbook.

The main problem of IICCMER is its increased politicization, hardly an issue specific to Romania, as Timothy Snyder rightly remarks in his chapter in this volume. As the institution’s executive president and the president of the Scientific Council are nominated by the prime minister, it only depends on those who hold these leadership positions to avoid the involvement of politics in the institution’s programs and activity. For example, I resigned from the Scientific Council (along with all of its other thirteen members) because of the decision by the socialist prime minister, Victor Ponta, to abusively dismiss political scientist Ioan Stanomir (chair of the doctoral school of the Political Science Department at the University of Bucharest) from the position of executive president and myself from the presidentship of the Scientific Council. Within a year, IICCMER’s entire leadership, structure, and
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activity were reshuffled for the worse. By 2013, the research activity of the institution almost came to a halt as did its publications program that promoted until 2012 a synchronization of local historiography with international debates in the field. Some of its best researchers (almost half) resigned in protest for the arbitrariness of the new management. As mentioned earlier, the Institute did manage to collaborate with prosecutors in preparing the ground for legal action against communist perpetrators. But the fact that they used the accusation of genocide greatly subverts the potential of success of such initiative.

All in all, the years that have passed since the condemnation of the communist regime can be defined as a period of informational self-determination. I consider that President Băsescu’s condemnation of the communist regime in Romania was a moment of civic mobilization. Generally speaking, decommunication is, in its essence, a moral, political, and intellectual process. These are the dimensions that raise challenges in contemporary Romanian society. The Commission’s Report answered a fundamental necessity, characteristic of the post-authoritarian world, that of moral clarity. Without it one would multiply the cobweb of lies crushing us, the impenetrable mist that seemed to forever last. This state of moral perplexity inexorably turns into cynicism, anger, resentment and despair. One must greet President Băsescu’s political will, the first post-1989 Romanian head of state that dared to begin such vital procedure of exorcizing the communist-Securitate demons. The shock of the past unveiled is inevitable. Moral-symbolic action is, according to McAdams, one of the four types of retributive justice (the others being the criminal, the noncriminal, and the rectifying aspects). I would even argue that it is the most important, especially if one is to take the model of Jan Kubik’s book on the influence of civic countersymbols in opposition to the hermeneutic routine inherent to a political establishment.


The Report identified many features of guilt, in relation to the communist experience, that have never before been under scrutiny. It offers a framework for shedding light upon what Karl Jaspers called “moral and metaphysical guilt”—the individual’s failure to live up to his or her moral duties and the destruction of solidarity of social fabric.\footnote{Karl Jaspers, \textit{The Question of German Guilt} (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001). On communism as vengefulness and resentment see Gabriel Liiceanu, \textit{Despre ura} (Bucuresti: Ed. Humanitas, 2007).} This, in my opinion, is the angle from which one can see to the connection between the condemnation initiative and politics. In the words of Charles King, “The commission’s chief tasks had to do with both morality and power: to push Romanian politicians and Romanian society into drawing a line between past and present, putting an end to nostalgia for an alleged period of greatness and independence, and embracing the country’s de facto cultural pluralism and European future.”\footnote{Charles King, “Review: Remembering Romanian Communism,” 722, \textit{Slavic Review}, vol. 66, no. 4 (Winter 2007), 718–723.} Such matters considered, the PCACDR was indeed a political project through which both the acknowledgment and conceptualization of the 1945 to 1989 national traumatic experience were accomplished, whilst those responsible for the existence of communism as a regime in Romania were identified.

I believe that, in Eastern Europe, we still experience a mnemonic interregnum, what Tony Judt defined as “a moment between myths.” The Romanian exercise of “public use of history” was an endeavor to clarify the role of memory in history in order to specify its impact upon contemporary societal life. It was the only path left for truth-seeking under circumstances of a two-decade judicial stalemate in reference to the past. The Commission created a document where responsibility for the past was claimed and individualized. There are hardly other ways of reconstructing Gemeinsamkeit, that is, the social cohesion and communion destroyed by the atomization brought about in the communist regime. As I have already stated, the Report was written with analytical rigor, with compassion for the victims, and in full awareness of the trauma both incumbent in the past and in the act of remembrance itself. The Commission had to listen to what Frankfurt School philosopher Theodor W. Adorno referred to as “the voice of those who
cannot talk anymore.” The PCACDR and the condemnation act can be premises for reconciliation, but they could not facilitate it in the absence of repentance. The condemnation of the communist regime therefore fully maintains its cathartic value because “unless the trauma is understood, there is no possibility of escaping it.”

The Report fixed the memory of the totalitarian experience in place and in time, it overcame the burden of the denial of memory, of institutionalized amnesia. It set the groundwork for the revolutionizing of the normative foundations of the communal history, imposing the necessary moral criteria of a democracy that wishes to militantly defend its values. The Commission’s work and the intense debates surrounding it highlight one of the most vexing, yet vitally important tensions of the post-communist world: the understanding of the traumatic totalitarian past and the political, moral, and intellectual difficulties, frustrations, hopes, and anxieties involved in trying to come to grips with it.

If we attempt to situate the above discussion within a regional context, we need to go back to the legacy of the revolutions of 1989. The most important new idea brought about by these memorable events was the rethinking and the rehabilitation of citizenship. Many of the ideological struggles of post-communism have revolved around the notion of what is civic and how to define membership in the new communities. Both formal and informal amnesia and hypermnesia, after 1989, estranged the lessons of the totalitarian experience from the present, despite the fact that the former ought to be essential features of the latter’s identity. The discomfiture with democratic challenges and the prevailing constitutional pluralist model is not only linked to the transition from Leninism, but to the larger problem of legitimation and the existence of competing visions of common good, of rival symbols of collective identity. Nevertheless, Eastern Europe has the example and the model of the West, where the process of democratization, of building sustainable postwar societies and transnational bonds, was fundamentally based upon coming to terms with the traumatic and guilty past. Therefore, the memory of both Auschwitz and the Gulag,

if remembered and taught, can go a long way to the entrenchment of the societal values and the political culture destroyed in the region by twentieth-century totalitarianisms.

In this sense, the Prague Declaration (signed by people such as the late Václav Havel, Joachim Gauck, and Vytautas Landsbergis) and the OSCE’s “Resolution on Divided Europe Reunited: Promoting Human Rights and Civil Liberties in the OSCE Region in the Twenty-First Century” can be seen as the fulfillment of the second post-1989 stage of development in the region. If in the 1990s, one could argue that the former communist countries sought the main road back to democracy, in the 2000s, they have been trying to overcome self-centeredness in a united Europe. The two documents finally recognize that the new Europe is “bound together by the signs and symbols of its terrible past.”

For example, the OSCE’s resolution states that

Noting that in the twentieth century European countries experienced two major totalitarian regimes, Nazi and Stalinist, which brought about genocide, violations of human rights and freedoms, war crimes and crimes against humanity, acknowledging the uniqueness of the Holocaust […] The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly reconfirms its united stand against all totalitarian rule from whatever ideological background […] Urges the participating States: a. to continue research into and raise public awareness of the totalitarian legacy; b. to develop and improve educational tools, programs and activities, most notably for younger generations, on totalitarian history, human dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms, pluralism, democracy and tolerance; […] Expresses deep concern at the glorification of the totalitarian regimes.

84 “Vilnius declaration of the OSCE parliamentary assembly and resolutions adopted at the eighteenth annual session,” (Vilnius, 29 June to 3 July 2009), http://www.oscepa.org/images/stories/documents/activities/1.Annual%20Session/2009_Vilnius/Final_Vilnius_Declaration_ENG.pdf. The Prague Declaration and the OSCE Resolution are hardly singular. Other official, pan-European or trans-Atlantic have been made to condemn the criminality of communism/Stalinism following the example of the criminalization of fas-
The unmastered past of the twentieth century in Central and Eastern Europe prevents these countries from institutionalizing the logical connection between democracy, memory, and militancy. But, the flight from democracy will always be checked by conscientiousness about the consequences of radical evil in history. I consider that one can refashion both individual and collective identity on the basis of the negative lessons and exempla that national history can provide. Besides the trauma of the early Stalinist days, all the countries in the region (Romania included) had and still have to deal with “the grey veil of moral ambiguity” (Tony Judt) that was the defining feature of existing socialism. These societies and most of their members have a bad conscience in relation with the past. If we agree that annus mirabilis 1989 was fundamentally about the rebirth of citizenship and the reempowering of the truth, the gradual clarification of recent history will close the vicious circle of transition in East-Central Europe. Just like the West has come to terms with its trauma and guilt, the East can ultimately find the long lost consensus in similar ways. In this sense, I believe that the upheaval of 1989 would potentially accomplish its ideals along the road of Europeanization.

cism/Nazism. For example, the EU Parliament’s resolution on European conscience and totalitarianism or the building of the Victims of Communism Memorial in Washington DC. The monument was dedicated by President George W. Bush on Tuesday, June 12, 2007. June 12 was chosen because it was the twentieth anniversary of President Ronald Reagan’s famous Brandenburg Gate speech. See http://www.globalmuseumoncommunism.org/voc.