Historicizing a Disputed Theme: Anti-Communist Armed Resistance in Romania

The wars waged by small irregular groups against regular military forces or even big armies, of the “classical” type, have been known since Antiquity. But the term “guerrilla war” entered the military vocabulary with the Napoleonic invasion to Spain, at the beginning of the 19th century, when the Spanish irregular forces played an important part in Napoleon’s defeat. The term “guerrilla” means “small war” or “irregular war” waged by unprofessional civil-soldiers, who transform into fighters when their country is invaded by a foreign power. Therefore, if a war is carried on with regular armies, it is considered to be the “great” (classical) war, while guerrilla warfare is the “small war,” the unconventional one, a “harassing war,” which brings together “functions and practices of fight, where the cunning, the cheating, the surprise and the secret intercross and support each other.”

1 The title of the paper delivered on 29 November 2007, in Washington, within the symposium “Stalinism Revisited—The Establishment of Communist Regimes in East-Central Europe and the Dynamics of the Soviet Bloc”, was “The Anti-Communist Armed Resistance in Romania in Comparative Perspective.” Considering the fact that the topic of the anti-communist armed resistance in Romania is very little known in the English language historiography, we though it might be useful to insist more upon the development of the phenomenon, offering in the final section the so necessary comparative perspective.
The “guerrilla war,” the “unconventional war,” the “irregular war,” the “internal war,” the “maquis” (a term for the French Resistance only), the “paramilitary operations,” etc., are all concepts that compelled recognition during World War II and continued during the Cold War. They started to be attentively investigated after World War II\(^4\) giving birth to a rich military and political literature. But in the second half of the 20th century, in certain political and military circles, they substantiate the idea that the guerrilla war, the partisan war, is not just a liberation war, but one against colonialism and capitalism. Actually, this was only about the left wing partisan war, particularly the communist one.\(^5\) There was no place left for the anti-communists’ partisan war, as they were all together and automatically associated with fascists. The anti-communist Resistance in Eastern Europe was not known in the West, except at a quite superficial, even false, level. On the other hand, because of the hostile public environment in countries like France, where the intellectuals had been blinded by communism after World War II, it was not possible to know any better. As a result of these generalized reductionisms, the idea that being an anti-communist corresponds to being a fascist spread.\(^6\) Jean-Paul Sartre’s statement became famous: “All anti-communists are dogs.” For an intellectual of his importance—holding a place in the foreground of the international intellectual stage for so long—being an anti-communist was nothing more and nothing less than a moral crime.\(^7\) After World War II, this kind of intellectual opinion maker played an essential part in the formation of a negative perspective on anti-communists all over the world, especially in Eastern Europe.

In the present paper, we shall dwell on the anti-communist armed resistance in Romania. We have in view the temporal and spatial

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development of the resistance, the characteristics of the phenomenon and, and for a better understanding, we opted, in the final part, for a comparative perspective.

The Discovery of a Historiographical Subject: Anti-Communist Armed Resistance in Romania

The anti-communist armed resistance in Romania, or the “resistance in the mountains,” has represented, for decades, a subject that was dwelt on only ideologically, by the actors on both sides of the barricade. It has been looked upon from two totally opposite perspectives: either as a form of heroic opposition against the Soviets and the regime installed in Romania at the end of World War II, or as an “expression of the last convulsions of the bourgeois-landlord rule.” The members of the anti-communist resistance have always considered themselves anti-communist fighters or partisans organized in a “group.” On the other hand, the Securitate used to give the partisans the name of “bandits” or “terrorists,” respectively “band” and “terrorist band.”

Until 1989, in Romania, the texts on this theme were rare and made only to order. A few historians in the service of the regime of Bucharest, but of quite a low professional qualification, mentioned the subject only briefly, with conclusions in accordance with the ideological orthodoxy of the moment. The official theses of the communist regime regarding the anti-communist armed resistance were expounded in different propaganda works.

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8 For instance, although confronted with death, Ioan Novac, from the Ion Gavrilă group, which operated in the Făgăraș Mountains’ north side, wrote at the end of an inquiry on 19 April 1957: “Instead of the word ‘band’ in the declaration, I think it would have been necessary to use the term ‘group,’ as by ‘band’ we rather understand an association of bandits, of criminals” (Ion Gavrilă-Ogoranu ed., Brazii se frâng, dar nu se indoiesc, Vol. IV (Făgăraș: Editura Mesagerul de Făgăraș, s.a. 2004), p. 328, document from Arhivele Consiliului Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității, fond “Informativ,” dos. 770, Vol. 61, f. 400).

9 See Mihai Fătu and Ion Spălătelu, Garda de Fier: Organizație teroristă de tip fascist, ediția a II-a, revăzută și adăugită (Bucharest : Editura Politică, 1980), chapter 22, “Ultimele zvîrcolîri,” pp. 364–85; general-maior Luigi Martiș, general-maior Constantin Mleșniță, colonel Ion Șerbănescu, and colonel Ilie
In the Romanian exiles’ academic writings, the anti-communist armed resistance was barely mentioned, obviously because of the inaccessibility of the sources. The existence of the phenomenon had already been pointed out in 1964, by Ghiță Ionescu, in his synthesis of the Romanian communist history, who placed the term, here and there, between inverted commas. The Romanian political analyst noticed that, because of the systematic repression, “there was no real possibility for an organized resistance.” Inaccuracies were not completely missing, for instance, the statement that in 1946–47 there was an attempt to unify the “Sumanele Negre” (suman: a kind of long, coarse peasant coat; the Black Coats), partisan groups were mainly composed of isolated and intransigent elements of the Iron Guard. This was probably the moment when in the Western circles (including the historiographic ones) the idea appeared that the anti-communist armed opposition and the Romanian legionary resistance were synonymous. In reality, the latter was only a segment, an important one, indeed, of the former. In 1984, a history of the Romanian Communist Party was published in Denmark, signed by Victor Frunză. The author underlined the fact that “the resistance in the mountains, in the period 1948–1952 (?) [Victor Frunză’s question mark, D.D.] is the chapter that the official historiography absolutely hushed up.” Although he did not have access to


documentary sources, the Romanian dissident exiled in northern Europe grasped the exact reason of the communist regime’s silence: “By hushing up and ignoring them, those resistance groups were suggested to be isolated, not supported by the masses.” Vlad Georgescu too, in his synthesized history of Romania, mentioned the phenomenon of the anti-communist armed resistance. Referring to the years 1944–48, the famous historian only observed that then “were defeated the few attempts of military resistance.”

Immediately after 1989, in Romania, the public interest in the anti-communist armed resistance flourished, a fact underlined in the articles and interviews with the survivors published in cultural journals, in journals about anti-communist memories, in the daily or periodical press, and in radio and television broadcasts. The public interest in this subject has remained high. The editorial flux on subjects of recent history has become stunning over the last years. In this respect, the anti-communist armed resistance probably shares the first position with the history of the Romanian communist gulag and the history of the Securitate. Naturally, as always happens with subjects intensely investigated by different researchers, the results are unequal, the valuable papers neighbouring works that do nothing else but indicate the growing interest for the theme.

16 There is a rich bibliography on the subject of the anti-communist armed resistance in Romania. Hoping that, even if brief, the bibliographic suggestions are useful, we try to provide here an overview.

Stalinism Revisited


Several doctoral theses, some of them finalized, dealt with the anti-communist armed resistance.
Armed Resistance in Romania: Temporal and Spatial Perspectives

The phenomenon under consideration sprang up in Romania at the end of World War II, as a form of fighting the Soviets and it fairly soon acquired an explicit anti-communist character. Different authors have proposed different periodizations of the development of the anti-communist armed resistance in Romania: 1944–58,\(^\text{17}\) 1944–62,\(^\text{18}\) 1945–62\(^\text{19}\) or 1946–58.\(^\text{20}\) As far as we are concerned, we believe that we can speak about this phenomenon as belonging to the period 1944 to the beginning of the 1960s, with the greatest intensity at the beginning of the 1950s. Though we cannot speak of a rigid delimitation, one could identify two phases of the resistance: 1944–47 and 1948—the beginning of the 1960s. In the first phase, the State was not yet completely controlled by the communists—though they had managed to assume a major role in the government after 6 March 1945—and there still were forces that opposed the government’s becoming all “red.” The second phase developed under the conditions of the totalitarian State, which was taking all the necessary steps to control the territory and the population, among other things by perfecting its repressive instruments, rendering the anti-communists’ situation tougher and tougher.

The resistance started in the spring of 1944, with the entrance of the Soviet troops in north-eastern Romania, as a result of the Uman-


\(^\text{19}\) Dennis Deletant, România sub regimul comunist, translated into Romanian by Delia Răzdolescu (Bucharest: Fundaţia Academia Cvică, 1997), p. 78.

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Botoşani operation. Because of the abuses by the Soviet soldiers, as well as of the generalized practice of the requisitions by the Red Army, and because of the evacuation of the local population from the area of the front to the area behind it, numerous inhabitants at the foot of Obcinele Bucovinei took refuge in the woods, between the battle lines. To defend against the attacks of Russian patrols and to benefit from the help of the military regular forces in Bucovina, the locals formed several groups of partisans under the leadership of Vladimir Macoveiciuc, Ion Vatamaniuc, Vladimir Tironae and Constantin Cenuşă. Each group consisted of about 15–20 members—farmers, “premilitaries” (the young people aged between 18–21, supposed to join an organized pre-military service in Romania, before the Second World War), the discharged, or the soldiers on leave. They were well armed and trained by German and Romanian instructors. The missions of the partisans of Bucovina aimed at sending the local population, who had taken refuge between the two fronts, to the area left under Romanian administration; at patrolling the woods; at reconnoitring and collecting information about the Soviet forces in the area, as well as at creating disruptions behind the Red Army. The occurrence of the coup d’état in Bucharest on 23 August 1944 brought about the end of the groups’ activities. Some of the partisans of Bucovina managed to leave the German forces, while others were forced to withdraw towards the West. The Soviets—who were not used to forgive those who had dared to oppose them—submitted the Romanian partisans to repression; these were tried, sentenced and thrown into the immensity of the Gulag. Persistently pursued, some of the partisans continued the fight, being annihilated over the next years, while others (re)entered the resistance after 1948.21

The coup d’état of 23 August 1944 resulted in Romania’s leaving the Axis—a disaster for Germany, who now tried to regain its lost position. The Germans relied, in the attempt to achieve their goals, on the Legionary Movement (which also had its own objectives, that is reconstructing its territorial structures and its return to power in Bucharest),

but also on the German Ethnic Group. The Romanian traditional political circles hoped that they would have the West’s support, that the West would moderate the Soviets and even force them to leave Romania. If, in the context of the last months of war, a German counter-offensive had determined an Anglo-American intervention, this would have only been beneficial to this country. But the Germans’ and the legionaries’ plans, involving diverse forces (including guerrilla groups) and contacts were doomed to failure. Romania was occupied by strong Soviet powers, consisting of both Red Army troops and NKVD units. Some of the commandants of the Romanian Army suspected of disloyalty were neutralized, while the leaders of the anti-Soviet action were captured and found their end in the Gulag. In order to prevent such actions from happening again, but also because this was part of the logic of their own system, the Soviets took measures meant to weaken the internal opposition in Romania. Germany’s attempt to get Romania back under its control proved to be unachievable, and the pro-German resistance lost its reason to be because of the defeat in the trench warfare of the very power that had inspired it.  

The installation of Petru Groza’s government, on 6 March 1945, signaled the country’s return to dictatorship. The manifestation of political opposition became problematic, considering that the police control was every day clearer and prompter. As the positions adverse to the government were repressed, numerous subversive groups arose, having as their main purpose the anti-communist fight. Among them, there were the organizations “Tinerimea liberă” (The Free Youth) and “T.” The former was led by Mircea Ştefanovici; it originated in the left wing, but it soon adopted anti-communist positions, in the context of the repression the Groza government had started. The latter

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was initiated by Remus Țețu and eventually gathered members of the National-Liberal youth, as well as National-Peasant young people and Social Democrats, the platform being an explicitly liberal one. The contacts with the democratic political circles did not fail; even the resort to armed fighting was acceptable if the circumstances were favorable, especially in case of a war between the Anglo-Americans and the Soviets. Discovered by the repressive services of the government, the two organizations were annihilated, and their members arrested, questioned, tried and sentenced. In the trial that took place in September 1945 in Bucharest, the discrediting of the democrat parties was one of the goals, but this attempt was eventually a failure for the authorities, as they did not yet completely control the justice system or the press, and foreign representatives were present in court. However, this was a lesson that the communists, from a dominating position of power in the government, learnt, as one can see in the next period.23

The starting of the “royal strike” in the summer of 1945 clearly underlined the fact that the anti-communists’ position was weak in their confrontation with a regime ready to use all legal or illegal means in order to impose and extend its control over the State institutions. In this context, anti-government organizations appeared, with more radical platforms. The most important ones were the subversive organizations “Haiducii lui Avram Iancu—Divizia Sumanelor Negre” (Avram Iancu’s Outlaws—Sumanele Negre Division), the so-called “Mișcare Națională de Rezistență” (National Resistance Movement), “Graiul Sângelui” (The Blood’s Voice), and the so-called “Grup Înarmat Sinaia” (Sinaia Armed Group). The organization “Haiducii lui Avram Iancu” was set up by a group of former members of the “Iuliu Maniu” Volunteer Battalion, headed by Gavril Olteanu, and proved to be very active from the propaganda perspective, practicing an anti-communist discourse from national, even chauvinistic positions. This harmed the organization’s image, if we take into consideration the reproaches from certain democratic political circles, and the communists, who saw all

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nationalists as fascists, had further pretexts to repress the group. General Aurel Aldea, Admiral Horia Macellariu, and other high officers and political men of different affiliations started the “Mișcarea Națională de Rezistență” (National Resistance Movement, MNR), which tried to bring together the resistance groups in Romania, establishing contacts with the Opposition political groups, with the Royal Palace and the Missions of the United States of America and of Great Britain to Bucharest. MNR did not go beyond the phase of debates, of preliminary relationships, its potential for action being extremely limited. The organization “Graiului Sângelui” was founded by Ion Vulcănescu and confined itself to elaborating a series of documents regarding the present and the future of the State/nation. “Grupul Înarmat Sinaia”—the name was given by the Romanian repressive services—was made of militaries from the mountain corps of the area Sinaia-Predeal-Brașov, who had at their disposal weapons and ammunition deposited in the neighbouring mountains. The four groups we have mentioned had a pretty small number of active members, and the activity of “Haiducii lui Avram Iancu” and of “Graiul Sângelui” was limited to writing and spreading manifestos. The adherents to these groups hoped, together with the political opposition and an important segment of Romania’s population, that the pro-Soviet regime in Bucharest would collapse if a conflict started between the free world and the power of Kremlin. Infiltrated by the information services of the Groza government, these organizations were kept under observation for a long time and then annihilated. After brutal inquiries, there came a trial (the sentence was given on 18 November 1946), mainly aiming, like the previous year, at compromising the political opposition.24

The annihilation of these anti-communist/anti-Soviet organizations, as well as of others, which were active in the period 1945–47, somehow marked the end of the first stage of subversive anti-communist resistance in Romania. The second phase, which started in 1948 and lasted more than a decade, was marked by the toughness of the armed confrontations and the amleness of repression, as well as by the isolation of the partisan groups. The resistance of this period was mainly manifest in the mountain and wooded regions of Romania. Fourteen zones of resistance appeared, with different anti-communist groups: Bucovina, Moldova, Vrancea, North Transilvania, Central Transilvania, Apuseni Mountains, Crişana, Arad, Banat, Oltenia, Făgăraş Mountains—north flank, Făgăraş Mountains—south flank, Iezer Mountains, Muntenia, and Dobrogea. The climax of the armed resistance was reached at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s. The last groups—inactive for several years—were liquidated in 1957–58, and the last isolated armed partisan fugitives were annihilated at the beginning of the 1960s.

The causes for the (re)appearance of the phenomenon of anti-communist armed resistance at the end of the 1940s in Bucovina were diverse, from the persecution of the former anti-Soviet partisans, those who opposed the new political realities in the country, to the radical economic measures of the regime, particularly the collectivisation of agriculture. Among the partisans who stood out at the end of the 1940s and in the 1950s, there were Constantin Cenuşă, Vasile Motrescu, Cozma Pătrăucean, Constantin Gherman, Gavril Vatamaniuc, Grigore Sandu, Gheorghe Vasilache, and others. They acted either as isolated fugitives, or by combining in groups or even organizations (e.g., “Gărzile Decebal”—Decebal’s Guards), who had as a platform the fight against the “democrat-popular” regime. Most of the partisans from Bucovina had been on the fronts of the Second World War, especially in Russia, where they had gained useful combat experience. Like in the rest of the territory, the communist authorities did not tolerate manifestations of opposition, and even less an armed one, so that these opponents were annihilated too, some of them being shot down, others tried and sentenced to prison, together with their supporters. The last isolated partisan fugitive in this area, Gheorghe Munteanu, was caught in 1961.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{25} Adrian Brişcă and Radu Ciuceanu, eds. \textit{op. cit.}, vol. I; Adrian Brişcă ed., \textit{Rezisten\c{t}a armată din Bucovina}, vol. II, 1 octombrie 1950–10 iunie 1952, (Bu-
Even if, for the most part, Moldova did not offer favorable conditions to a partisan movement, many anti-communist organizations and groups appeared here too, both in the rural and in the urban zone; most of them were subversive groups, but there were some armed ones too, involved in guerrilla actions. Important groups proved to be those headed by Vasile Cămăruţă and Vasile Corduneanu, the organization “Frontul Patriei” (National Front) and “Centrul de rezistenţă” (Resistance Center) from Uturea. Most of them were small groups, counting a few members, but there were bigger ones as well. All of them had supporters in the region, without whom their survival would have been problematic, if not impossible. Several organizations had political platforms, more or less articulate, while others were rather confused in their opposition to the communization. Most of them were actually just circumstantial/temporary associations of political fugitives.26

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In the district Curbura Carpaților, more precisely in the county of Vrancea, at the beginning of the communist regime there were two active important partisan groups. The Ion Paragină group arose in 1948, in the Panciu zone, as a result of some legionaries’ initiative, but pretty soon national-peasant party members, national-liberals, or people with no political affiliation enrolled. The members of the group were University students, pupils, teachers, priests, tradesmen or farmers. The partisans wrote manifestos and a battle guide (*The Outlaw’s Manual*), they gathered weapons, took military instruction, and established useful contacts in case a conflict would have started between the West and the Soviets. Infiltrated by the Securitate, the group was annihilated in October 1949.\(^27\) The inhabitants of the historical region of Vrancea, desperate at the end of the 1940s, as their main resources—mountains and woods—had been confiscated (“nationalized”), were subjected to harsh taxes, and they were attacked daily on their still archaic ways of social organization. They were also waiting—like all Romanians and Eastern Europeans—for the situation to change, for help to come from somewhere, even if it came with the price of a new war; in other words, they were waiting for “the Americans to come.” The people of Vrancea were simple people, mountain people with few contacts with the world, but brave to madness, ready to follow anyone who had a project at all coherent to remove the communist regime. In this context the organization “Vlădanții” appeared, started by Victor Lupșa, from the county of Trei Scaune. The organization had nuclei in three counties—Putna, Trei Scaune, and Râmnicu Sărat—including hundreds of persons, especially farmers, but also workers, civil servants, intellectuals, discharged officers, and university students. A series of simultaneous

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actions in the three mentioned counties occurred in the night of 23–24 July 1950. The insurgents only took over the control at Bârsești, drawing out the rapid and brutal intervention of the Securitate in all the villages where they found nuclei of the organization. Encounters with the Securitate were also recorded, several rebels being killed, hundreds of people arrested, and their families ill-treated. The trials (there were 18 batches with over 300 defendants) ended with death sentences or many years in prison. Victor Lupșa surrendered after a few years, and was executed in 1956.\textsuperscript{28}

In North Transilvania several anti-communist groups existed. Brothers Vasile and Ioan Popșa tried in 1949 to unify the resistance in Valea Izei, by initiating the subgroups of Ieud, Rozavlea, and Dragomirești, in which tens of persons were involved; the groups were annihilated during the clashes of 1949–50. Another important group was formed by the unification of the groups headed by the forester Nicolae Pop called Achim (in 1944 he had saved several Jews that were about to be deported by the Hungarian Germans to the extermination camp of Auschwitz; he was subsequently awarded the medal “Righteous Among Nations,” together with Maria Pop and Aristina Pop, Săileanu-to-be—by the Yad Vashem Memorial, in Israel) and the Greek Catholic priest Atanase Oniga. Active in the Țibleșului Mountains, the Lăpușului side, this group proved to be the most important one in North Transylvania. The Securitate did not manage to annihilate it completely until 1953. The last isolated partisans in North Transylvania were killed in 1956–58 (Gheorghe Pașca and Vasile Blidar).\textsuperscript{29}


In Central Transilvania several anti-communist groups operated. “Garda Albă” (White Guard) / “Liga Naţională Contra Comunismului” (National League Against Communism) / “Organizaţia de rezistenţă a partizanilor din Munţii Rodnei” (Partisans’ Resistance Organization in Rodna Mountains) (all three designations appear) was founded by Leonida Bodiu, former officer of the Romanian Army; he had been a Soviet prisoner, he then returned to Romania with the “Tudor Vladimirescu” Division, was taken prisoner by the Germans and came back home after the war. The region in which the organization was active included part of the Năsăud county, with important nuclei in the communes of Parva, Rebra, and Rebrişoara, made up of rural intellectuals, rich, middle, and poor peasants. Two important writers had contacts with this group as well, Teohar Mihadaş and Constant Tonegaru. The group was annihilated in January–February 1949. Several members, (including the leader) were executed without trial, as repeatedly happened in Transilvania and in other regions as well. The other arrested were tried and sentenced to many years in prison. Another organization in this area was called “Partizanii Regelui Mihai—Armata Secretă” (King Mihai’s Partisans—Secret Weapon) / “Partizanii Majestăţii Sale Regele Mihai I” (Partisans of His Majesty, King Mihai I), or “Garda Albă” (White Guard) / “Armata Albă” (White Army); this was started in 1948 in Cluj, at the initiative of Alexandru (or Vasile) Suciu, Gheorghe Mureşan, and Lazăr Bondor. It spread in


the neighbouring localities, from Turda to Gherla, including the villages. Their goal was to fight the communist regime and to bring the king back to power. The group was destroyed in the spring of 1949, after the betrayal by one of the members. But some of the group members managed to flee, taking refuge in the woods and engaged in armed fighting. A group headed by the Greek Catholic Priest Eusebiu Cutcan, annihilated at the end of 1950, was particularly conspicuous.\textsuperscript{31}

The Apuseni Mountains were one of the most important areas of anti-communist armed resistance. On the eastern side, in 1948, the “Frontul Apărării Naționale-Corpul de Haiduci” (National Defense Front-Outlaws’ Corps) was formed under the leadership of major Nicolae Dabija and of the sub-engineer Traian Macovei. The partisans built a blockhouse in Muntele Mare, and support groups appeared in the localities at the foot of the mountains—as was the case of “Liga Apuseană a Moților” (Western League of the Apuseni Mountains Inhabitants). As well as a network offering information about the authorities’ actions, Major Dabija developed a plan aiming at nothing less than starting an insurrection in 1949, when the war between the Soviets and the Americans was expected to begin. Their objectives were the occupation by force of the State institutions, of some weapon and ammunition deposits, as well as of some strategic districts in the country, especially of some mountain passes. Connections with Bucharest were arranged, and steps were made to establish contacts with western diplomatic circles from the capital. The Securitate managed to avert the starting of a significant anti-communist movement in the Apuseni Mountains: Nicolae Dabija’s group was destroyed, many partisans died during the fights, and others were caught then or later. A trial that took place in Sibiu, in October 1949, ended in the sentencing to death of some of the arrested partisans, while others were executed in spite of intial prison sentences. Another group from the same eastern side of the Apuseni Mountains, in the area of the communes of Băișoara and Muntele Băișoarei, was headed by commander Diamandi Ionescu. The partisans were involved

in daring actions against the communist authorities (in August 1949 they occupied the commune of Muntele Băişoarei, removing for a short while the party and State administration), but after a brutal clash they were annihilated. Some of the fighters or their supporters were executed on the spot, others were tried and sentenced to death or to different periods of time in prison. In the south-eastern slope of the Apuseni Mountains a group headed by Leon Șuşman and Simion Roșă operated for almost one decade a group who stood in (armed) expectation, rather than in an active, paramilitary mode.

In Depresiunea Huedinului there were several anti-communist groups. One of them was “Echipa Cruce și Spadă” (Cross and Sword Team), headed by Gheorghe Gheorghiu called Mărășești and Gavrilă Forțu. Founded in 1948 in Bucharest, the organization “migrated” to the area of Huedin, where it had supporters. The Securitate’s quick and determined intervention led to the destruction of the group, most of its members being caught, tried and sentenced (but none of them received a death sentence). The leaders and a few other partisans were executed and their corpses were displayed in public. Teodor Șuşman from the commune of Răchițele, in the south of Depresiunea Huedin, was one of the numerous individuals persecuted by the communist regime on grounds of social origin, his prestige having been built on traditional values and of unconventional convictions. Together with his elder sons, Teodor Jr. and Visalon, he founded an armed group that operated for several years in the area of the Vlădeasa Mountains, on north side of the Apuseni Mountains. The group became, step by step, one of the most important groups of anti-communist armed resistance


in Romania, according to the Securitate’s classifications. After years of confrontations with the Securitate, some of the partisans killed themselves (the leader and the two sons, on different dates), others were killed in combat (Mihai Jurj) or were seized, sentenced to death, and executed (Roman Oneţ) or sentenced to prison (Lucreţia Jurj), together with many of their supporters. In the same region of Huedin, there was a subversive organization known as “Frontul Naţional Creştin Iuliu Maniu” (Iuliu Maniu Christian National Front), “Gruparea de luptă pentru Libertate, Patrie şi Cruce” (Fight Group for Freedom, Nation and Cross), or the Iosif Capotă–Alexandru Dejeu Group. This group confined itself to spreading anti-communist manifestos.34

Crişana was one of the smaller hotbeds of resistance, but here too, there were several subversive organizations and armed groups: the Ştefan Popescu group, “G4” and “Vlad Țepeș II” organizations. These had a heterogeneous political, social, and ethnic composition, some of them being led by former members of different political parties (National Peasant Party), others having no political affiliation. They were supported by both well-to-do and poor people, young (most of them) and old people, by Romanians, in the majority, but also by Hungarians (men and women).35


In the area of Arad, the armed resistance was present especially on the Eastern side. Gligor Cantemir and Ioan Bogdan headed organizations that extended to the mountain area of Arad, in the period 1948–49; the Securitate soon liquidated them. Some of those who escaped arrests regathered into smaller groups, and they proved to be particularly active over the next years; considerable display of force was necessary to destroy them. This was the case of the Zaharia Berâu-Ioan Lulușa–Pavel Dobrei group, and that of Ilie Sasu’s group. The resistance groups in the area of Arad represented a real problem for the Militia and the Securitate at the period, as they were involved in armed clashes, that ended with victims on both sides. Eventually, they were infiltrated and annihilated as well.36

One of the regions where the phenomenon of armed resistance manifested itself intensely and for a long time was the region of Banat. Colonel Ion Uță—who had extensive military, administrative, and political experience (he was a member of the National Peasant Party)—was one of the most important leaders of the resistance there. The people around him were, for the most part, peasants from the mountain villages of the county of Severin, but he also had contacts in the important cities of Banat. Hoping that the much expected East–West war would start, colonel Uță initiated a plan meant to build a “National Bloc” that would include all the resistance groups in Banat and start a general anti-communist riot in the region. Informed in time, the repressive structures of the communist State intervened with force at the beginning of the year 1949; during the fights, several partisans were killed, including colonel Uță. At the end of the 1940s, under the leadership of lawyer Spiru Blănaru, commander Petru Domâșneanu and notary public Gheorghe Ionescu, with different political affiliations (the first two were legionaries, while the last one was a national-liberal), several anti-

communist groups were created in the same mountain area of the county of Severin. For certain periods, they united, but because of different political ideas, and because of the leaders’ vanities, frictions appeared, which led to the disintegration of the groups. The groups headed by Blănaru and Ionescu in particular had major clashes with the numerous forces of the Securitate in the area. The Securitate eventually gained the upper hand over them, the leaders and most of members being seized. Engineer Aurel Vernichescu and lawyer Ioan Târziu, former members of the National Peasant Party, were, in the autumn–winter of 1948–49, the leaders of a resistance group that operated in the villages south and east of the city of Caransebeş. The “Organizaţia Naţională Creştină de Luptă Împotriva Comunismului, Partizanii României Mari” (National Christian Organization of the Fight Against Communism, Great Romania’s Partisans)—also known as “Vulturul Negru” (Black Eagle) or “Bastionul Negru” (Black Bastion)—was founded at Timișoara in the autumn of 1948 on the initiative of Ion Tănase, private servant, and former member of the National Peasant Party. The group spread towards the Banat region, planning to start, on 18–19 March 1949, an anti-communist riot, by simultaneously attacking and occupying the public institutions, the headquarters of the Communist Party, etc., in the main cities and villages of the region. A cooperation contact was established between the two above-mentioned groups in February–March 1949. The Securitate, however, counteracted these anti-communists’ actions, seizing the members and the supporters of the organization. The leaders and the important members of all of the above-mentioned organizations were gathered in as an exemplary batch, and tried at Timișoara, in June 1949, in a show-trial. Several death sentences were given and executed, and subsequently, other partisans were executed as well, even if they had been given prison sentences. Besides these, there were other subversive or armed groups in Banat. Moreover, there were isolated anti-communist fighters. The most famous case was Ion Banda’s, referred to as the last anti-communist fighter in Banat, and in Romania, as he was only liquidated in 1962.  37

The most important anti-communist groups in Oltenia were the “Carlaonţ-Ciuceanu” subversive organization, the “Arnota” group and “Mişcarea Română de Rezistenţă” (Resistance Romanian Movement). Their members had different political affiliations (they were peasant party members, liberal party members, legionaries, social-democrats) or were apolitical; they had different professions (including high officers), teachers, elementary school teachers, university students, pupils, engineers, workers, and peasants). Some of these groups were involved in clashes with the Securitate, but they were violently annihilated, with victims on both sides of the barricade.38
The north side of the Făgăraș Mountains proved to be, from a historical point of view, one of the most important hotbeds of hostilities against the communist regime in Romania. Profiting from the geographical advantage—the Făgăraș Mountains were the most important massif in the Romanian Carpathians—many of the young people from the localities in the former county of Făgăraș, almost all of them members of the “Frăţii de Cruce” (Cross Brotherhood), the youth organization of the Legionary Movement, became involved after 1948–49/50 in open actions against the communist regime. These university students, high school pupils, workers, peasants, and foresters formed a group known as “Grupul carpatin făgărășan” (Făgăraș Carpathian Group), “Grupul 73 Carpatin de eliberare națională” (73 Carpathian Group for the National Liberation), or simply Gavrilă group (the Securitate used the expression “Gavrilă band”). The most famous leader was Ion Gavrilă.

In the mountains, there were few partisans, not more than 11 or 14, but they adapted to the new conditions and proved to be extremely efficient in the guerrilla actions, even if important Securitate and Militia forces were mobilized against them, as well as a large number of informers. In an extremely hostile environment, the fighters from Făgăraș resisted several years, due to the important support of the locals. Securitate’s persistence eventually yielded results, the last partisans being ambushed, captured, tried, sentenced, and executed at Jilava. Numerous supporters were tried as well and sentenced to different periods in prison. Among the partisans, the only one who escaped was the leader himself, Ion Gavrilă, who hid for more than 20 years; by the time of his capture in 1976 there were no criminal consequences any more.39

On the south slope of the Făgăraș Mountains and in the Iezer Mountains other important armed resistance groups were active. Geography played an important part again, as well as the population structure (energetic people, supporters of historical political parties). The initiators of the armed resistance in the area were a few career soldiers, discharged after the purges conducted by the Communist Party. Colonel Gheorghe Arsenescu, a competent officer who had participated in the fights on the Eastern front, and after the war had become an active member of the “Tătărescu” National Liberal Party, started, together with other locals, an anti-communist organization—and subsequently an armed group—installed, in 1948, near the commune of Drăgoslavele; the group was annihilated by Securitate in the spring of 1949. Taking refuge in Bucharest in the winter of 1948–49, colonel Arsenescu established connections with different anti-communists, among whom the former lieutenant Toma Arnuțoiu, coming from the commune of Nucșoara, the county of Muscel; Toma also had battle experience (he had even been hurt on the Western front), and he joined the National Peasant Party when he left the army. Fostering the conviction that the war between the Soviets and the Americans was imminent, the two officers developed an armed resistance organization in the Nucșoara zone. Named “Haiducii Muscelului” (Outlaws of Muscel)—the names of “Gruparea de partizani (haiduci) de pe râul Doamnei” (The Group of Partisans/Outlaws on Doamna River) “Rezistența Națională” (National Resistance), and “Partizanii Libertății” (Partisans of Freedom) were also used—this group had a paramilitary structure, including in particular, inhabitants of the village of Nucșoara. Several confrontations with the Securitate occurred; some of the group followed Gheorghe Arsenescu, others Toma Arnuțoiu. The group headed by Arsenescu was quickly annihilated (autumn of 1949), only the leader managed to escape and hide in the area of Câmpulung for more than a decade. On the other hand, the Arnuțoiu group created real problems for the Securitate for years. These partisans’ survival was due to both their courage (some of them killed or injured Securitate, Miliția officers, or Romanian Workers’ Party members), and the loyalty of their supporters. Even if, at a certain moment, the partisans entered a quasi-total conspiracy, the political police continued the pursuit, and in 1958 managed to find and annihilate them. Numerous persons were grouped in batches, tried and sentenced to death (executed at Jilava,
including Toma Arănățoiu) or to many years in prison. Colonel Arsenescu was also captured in 1960, tried, sentenced to death, and executed, while his supporters were given heavy prison sentences.40

In Muntenia, several anti-communist armed groups stood out. The Dumitru Apostol group was formed in 1948 and its members were legionaries. They were active in the Argeș Mountains, but were destroyed in May 1949; the repression was excessively severe—people were killed in battle or discretely executed. In the area of the locality of Lehlui, in the middle of the field of Bârâgan, Major Constantin Hocic’s group operated, in the period 1950–52. Șerban-Drăgoi’s and Șerban-Voican’s groups operated in the county of Muscel, but they also were annihilated by the Securitate in the years 1951–52, and 1957, respectively.41

In Dobrogea, the anti-communist armed resistance was manifest especially among the Macedo-Romanians; from among them came the leaders (Gogu Puiu, brothers Niculae and Dumitru Fudulea, Nicolae Ciocelcu, etc.) and most of the members. As for their political


affiliation, the most important partisans had been legionaries, although peasant party members, liberals or even nominal members of the Communist Party and Working Youth Union were not lacking. From a social point of view, the major part were peasants, but also elementary school teachers, discharged or active militaries, churchmen, etc. The resistance in Dobrogea was at its peak in 1949–50; in the fights, several partisans were killed, captured, tried, sentenced to death or prison (many of them were executed in the so-called “trains of death”). The resistance in this area was completely annihilated in 1951–52.42

The resistance developed especially in the areas favourable to guerrilla warfare, particularly in the mountains, woods, in the places, therefore, difficult to access, which offered the possibility of camouflage for the anti-communist fighters. But anti-communist groups also existed in the hill areas, sometimes even in the lowlands and in the cities.

From a political point of view, the partisans were former members of the National Peasant Party, of the National Liberal Party, of the Legionary Movement, or even people who had enrolled in the Romanian Communist Party or in satellite parties or mass organizations it controlled, and who, at a certain moment in time started a conflict with the new regime and had to join clandestine groups in order to escape arrest. But on the whole, the members of the resistance groups and their supporters were not politically affiliated.43


43 For instance, the Securitate managed to arrest, in the first months of 1949, 804 members of the partisan groups and resistance supporters, whose distribution on age, social category, and political affiliation criteria were, in our opinion, relevant; we therefore present them below.
The distribution by age was as follows: 1) 347 were 35–50 years old (43%); 2) 250 were 25–35 years old (31%); 3) 125 were 17–25 years old (16%); 4) 82 over 50 years old (10%).

The distribution by class was: 1) 360 were poor peasants (45%); 2) 180 middle peasants (22%); 3) 71 workers (9%); 4) 45 well-to-do peasants (6%); 5) 30 petty bourgeois (4%); 6) 25 university students (3%); 7) 17 civil servants–retired (2%); 8) 15 priests (2%); 9) 15 traders (2%); 10) 12 teachers (1%); 11) 11 craftsmen (1%); 12) 10 discharged military (1%); 13) 4 professionals (under 1%); 14) 3 military sub-officers (under 1%); 15) 3 school students (under 1%); 16) 2 notaries public (under 1%); 17) 1 without profession (under 1%).

According to political affiliation: 1) 448 were not politically enrolled (56%); 2) 88 were members of Maniu National Peasant Party (PNȚ) (11%); 3) 24 PNȚ sympathizers (3%); 4) 73 members of the Legionary Movement (9%); 5) 13 legionary sympathizers (2%); 6) 79 members of the Ploughmen Front (10%); 7) 42 from the Communist Party/Working Party (5%); 8) 12 from the Communist Youth Union / Working Youth Union (1%); 9) 15 from Brătianu National Liberal Party (2%); 10) 6 from the German Ethic Group (1%); 11) 2 Bejan National Liberal Party (under 1%); 12) 2 from PSDI (under 1%). (Arhivele Serviciului Român de Informații, fond “D,” dos. 2168, f. 423. See also Dorin Dobrinçu, “Rezistența armată anticomunistă la începutul ‘republicii populare’,” Analele Sighet, Vol. 6 (1998): 233–235). For a political perspective on the resistance, limited to the central and western Romania, see Liviu Pleșa, “Apartenența politică a grupurilor de rezistență din Ardeal (1948–1958),” in Mișcarea armată de rezistență anticomunistă din România, 1944–1962 (Bucharest: Editura Kullusys, 2003), pp. 141–81.

The presence of the legionaries, in particular, in the anti-communist armed resistance raised a question mark among the researchers with liberal-democratic convictions, including the Western ones. The question that many analysts ask is: Can those who had a totalitarian orientation (the legionaries) and fought in the resistance, be placed next to the other anti-communist fighters? In other words, are the adepts of a totalitarianism that fights another totalitarian system fight for democracy or for the victory of their political creed, essentially anti-democratic? This is a justified question. Undoubtedly, the Romanian society of the 1940s, when the resistance started, was a polarised one. Today, in post-communist Romania, the political representation of the anti-communist armed resistance raises not only problems of historical nature, but also questions in the field of memory. Now at its beginnings in Romania, social history could help us better understand the different phenomena, most often simplistically or passionately dealt with. As we have seen, in a temporally limited segment of the resistance, the first months of the year 1949, the former members of the Communist Party / Working Party (or of the mass organizations the Party controlled) were much more than the legionaries and their sympathizers. Methodologically, we could not make an extrapolation on the resistance as a whole, but the number, for a precise interval, is sufficient to make us prudent in front of mythologizations, of the interested exaggerations, and the attempts to politically confiscate the resistance.
The partisans’ leaders were most often people invested with an important symbolic standing in the regions of their activity, but not in the entire national territory. The armed Resistance in Romania did not have a command centre, although there were attempts to make one; instead the resistance groups tried to survive until a favourable context to remove the communist system appeared. While the Resistance in Bukovina in 1944 and that of the Legionaries in 1944–45 was a pro-Germanic one, the Resistance after 1945 was openly pro-Anglo-Saxon. The hope that some help would come from the West, especially from the United States of America (hence the extremely widespread myth “The Americans are coming!”) played a certain part in fortifying the anti-communist partisans, as well as an important segment of the population.\footnote{For this interesting topic from a historical point of view, see Gheorghe Onişoru, România în anii 1944–1948: Transformări economice şi realităţi sociale (Bucharest: Funndaţia Academia Civică, 1998), pp. 132–45; Cornel Jurju, “Mitiul ‘venirii americanilor’: Studiu de caz: rezistenţa anticommunistă de la Huedin,” AIO: Anuarul Institutului de Istorie Orală, Vol 3, (2002): 173–92; Neagu Djuvara, O scurtă istorie a românilor povestită celor tineri, ediţia a III-a revăzută, (Bucharest: Edit. Humanitas, 2001), pp. 225–7; Bogdan Barbu, Vin americani! Prezenţa simbolică a Statelor Unite în România Războiului Rece: 1945–1971 (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 2006). The irony of history is that the Americans really came to Romania, but after 50 years (see the thematic issue “Vin americanii,” Dilema, No. 105 (13–19 Ianuarie 1995); Daniel Barbu, Şapte teme de politică românească (Bucharest: Editura Antet, 1997), pp. 180–81. Today Romania is a North Atlantic Treaty Organization and European Union member and an American air base is placed near Constanţa, the most important city-harbor of the country at the Black Sea. According to some sources, the Romanians’ expectations from the other countries, from the West in particular, have always been great, in their modern history. For instance, Rene de Weck, the author of the Legation of the Swiss Confederation to Bucharest during the World War II, wrote after the disaster suffered by the Romanian army at Stalingrad: “What shocks today in the Romanians’ propositions [towards the Anglo-Saxon Allies, D.D.], either in the power or in the Opposition forces, is that nobody is capable to elaborate a national liberation policy. They are always waiting to be saved by external powers” (René de Weck, Jurnal: Jurnalul unui diplomat elveţian în România: 1939–1945, ed. transl. from French, Viorel Grecu and Claudia Chinezu [Bucharest: Editura Fundaţiei Culturale Române, 2000], p. XXXVI.} Under Truman, the Americans developed a draft aimed at freeing the Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe from the Kremlin’s
influence, but by measures with gradual effects, provoking no direct military confrontation with the Soviet troops. But as this was not a fact that the Romanians (including the communist partisans) knew or could have known, many of them tried to fasten upon what was desirable, even if it had no real substance.

Not numerous, in groups varying from 2–3 to several tens of persons, the Romanian partisans had limited resources: light weapons, most of them left from World War II, improvised equipment, food and medicines offered by the locals. The partisans were helped by some of the locals in the mountain areas, especially by members of their families, relatives and people with the same political and, in some areas, the same religious convictions. Those who acted against the partisans were the Securitate, the political police, the Militia and the extended networks of informers, recruited from diverse socio-professional circles.

In a Securitate report drawn up in January 1959, in which both the subversive and the paramilitary groups were included, 1,196 “counter-revolutionary/subversive organizations and groups” were annihilated in the period after 23 August 1944–59. According to year, the distribution of these groups was the following: 1944: 1; 1945: 15; 1946: 5; 1947: 16; 1948: 119; 1949: 200; 1950: 89; 1951: 69; 1952: 74; 1953: 60; 1954: 50; 1955: 26; 1956: 42; 1957: 68; 1958: 182. At the end of the 1940s, the clandestine opposition to the communist regime was, indeed, quite significant, but it subsequently decreased. At the same time, as the regime took control of the situation and its self-confidence grew significantly, the criteria for the identification of the “people’s enemies” became more relaxed. The fact that the number of annihilated subversive organizations was again large, in 1957, and especially in 1958, was caused by the oppositional wave that appeared in Romania as an aftershock of the Hungarian revolution (1956), the communist regime resorting to terror in order to control the situation. But these figures were, most likely, exaggerated by the Securitate, who aimed, first of all, at emphasizing its merits in the fight against the “class enemy,” and some of the “organizations” might have been nothing but

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discussion groups that suffered the consequences of the severe laws of the time, while others might have even been invented by the Securitate officers, eager to get promoted at any price. Yet, if only half of these organizations had been part of the real Resistance, it underlines the statement that the phenomenon was widespread enough to keep the Securitate’s attention.

The anti-communist fighters consciously risked their lives and freedom, opposing an extremely powerful enemy, ready to use any means to annihilate them. Many partisans died fighting, others were captured, tried, and sentenced to death (and executed), or sent to the Romanian Gulag; the same happened to their supporters. Moreover, numerous executions were registered, some of them in spite of the sentences given by the communist justice system.47

As we have seen above, in Romania, after the Second World War, there were numerous isolated initiatives to oppose the communization of the country, but a unification of them, under a national leadership, was not possible. The anti-Communist armed resistance in Romania was, on the whole, rather a fight for survival than a visionary one. The phenomenon partially resembled that of the pre-modern outlaw and less the modern guerrilla. The resistance was made of a multitude of small groups, spread all over Romania, which were not interconnected.

A Useful and Necessary Comparison: Anti-Communist Armed Resistance in Romania and Anti-Soviet/Anti-Communist Armed Resistance in Other Eastern European Countries

As we have already mentioned, the anti-communist armed resistance in Romania was rediscovered after the communist regime’s collapse; it was one of the most frequently analyzed subjects for the “memory retrievers” and some of the historians, who, however, limited themselves to publishing documents or dealing with sequences, fragments of the entire phenomenon. That led to the absence of an overview image and

to unavoidable distortions.\textsuperscript{48} The idea that the anti-communist armed resistance in Romania was a unique phenomenon emerged and became widespread, coming from both former partisans and activists.\textsuperscript{49} The Sovietization of the territories occupied by the Red Army was a process that started immediately after the Second World War, and the resistance was manifest in many parts.\textsuperscript{50} A look at the Eastern European region, under the Kremlin’s control after 1944–45 (either directly

\textsuperscript{48} There are numerous partisan approaches of the anti-communist armed resistance in Romania. On the one hand, the theses of the old Securitate and of the Communist Party were perpetuated by former officers of the political police or by party activists. But especially the contrary perspectives were asserted. The exaggeration, after 1989, of the importance and scope of the anti-communist armed resistance seems to have aimed at “washing out” the lost honor of many fellow citizens, particularly, by public intellectuals, journalists, historiography dilettantes. In fact, few Romanians participated in the resistance, while millions of people were PCR members, plus millions were members of other mass controlled organizations (see Comisia Prezidenţială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România, Raport Final, pp. 49–154, 176–98). The exaggerations in the writings of recent history are often related to other agendas than the historiographical one. This is an aspect that even the researchers, sometimes, take no notice of.

\textsuperscript{49} There are many examples in this direction, but we shall only mention a few. An insignificant text, published at the beginning of the 1990s, in a journal for the retrieving of the communist victims’ memory: “Among the countries in the Soviet orbit at the end of the Second World War, Romania was the only one where communism confronted a strong armed resistance, which did not last a while, but a few years, more precisely, from the moment of the Soviet invasion, on 23 August 1944, to the years 1959–1960, when it was defeated.” [underlined in the original, D.D.] “Figuri de luptători din Munții Făgăraș—Versantul nordic,” Memoria, Vol. 12 (1994): 102. Ion Gavrilă Ogoranu, former leader of a group of partisans: “[Anti-communist armed resistance in Romania] is a unique phenomenon in this area of Soviet occupation, this is be our emblem, Romania’s, our page of dignity and glory and sufferance.” Ion Gavrilă Ogoranu testimony, in “O viață de fugă,” recorded by L.Ş., in Monitorul de Cluj, No. 276, 25 noiembrie 2005, p. 8. Monica Lovinescu, a critical voice from the civic positions of the communist regime in Romania: “Nationalism is for us (Romanians) barking, and criticism is replaced with raillery. We are haughty when we have no reason to be, and timorous when we could be proud (like in the case of the mountain resistance, the only one in the Europe occupied by the Red Army). We are most original. That is why the comparison with the satellitic neighbours, like us, is avoided.” Monica Lovinescu, Insula Șerpilor: Unde scurte, Vol. 4 (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 1996), pp. 197–8.

\textsuperscript{50} Liviu C. Țirău, op. cit., passim.
or by interceders) shows us that the anti-communist (and anti-Soviet, according to the situation) resistance was quite extensive—in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, in Poland and Ukraine, but also in Bessarabia—in some places even more than in Romania. Far from attacking the “uniqueness” so often claimed in certain circles in Romania, this statement is made in accordance with the facts that occurred in Eastern Europe some decades ago.

The anti-communist armed resistance had a few common causes for the whole region: the Soviet occupation, the rapid and brutal transformation of the State and of the society, the political and religious persecutions, but also the ethnic one in the territories directly occupied by the Soviets, and so on. A phenomenon with many controversial aspects, the anti-communist resistance must be historicized in order to reveal its true dimensions.

This comparative perspective helps us understand both the specificities of the anti-communist armed resistance in Romania and the resemblance of similar phenomena in Eastern Europe in the first decade after the war. The phenomenon of armed resistance appeared in the second half of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s in other countries in Eastern Europe under Soviet domination, being particularly significant in the Baltic countries, Ukraine, and Poland.\footnote{From the rich literature on the phenomenon of anti-Soviet and anti-communist resistance in different countries of Eastern Europe, we only mention a few works, that we have used for the final segment of our paper.

First of all, we should take into consideration the different conditions in Romania, as well as those in Poland, on the one hand, and those in Western Ukraine and the Baltic states on the other. Romania was a country that the Soviets had occupied after 23 August/12 September 1944, formally independent after 1947 (the Peace Treaty of Paris); Poland was theoretically independent too, while Ukraine, the Socialist Soviet Republic of Moldova (most of it was the formerly the Romanian region of Bessarabia), and the Baltic states were included in the USSR, as union republics. As we mentioned before, the causes of anti-communist resistance were diverse in Eastern Europe. While


the Baltics, the western Ukrainians, some of the Polish, but also the Besserabians (most of them, of Romanian ethnic origin) had been arrested, deported *en masse*, and summarily executed by the Soviets in the period 1939–41, and then after 1944–45;\(^{52}\) the Romanian citizens had no experience with all this until 1944–45.

In Romania only a small number of people, enrolled in the partisan groups just like in Bessarabia. The situation was different in Ukraine and the Baltic states, where tens, even hundreds of thousands of people joined the groups, in a population incomparably smaller, especially in the case of the Baltics. Some of those who fought communism were apolitical or had democratic convictions, but an important number of the partisans had been members of nationalist, authoritarian, and even totalitarian political groups.

In western Ukraine and in the Baltic States, the anti-communist resistance had the characteristics of both a war for national independence, against a foreign occupier, and an ideological battle, with aspects resembling a civil war. In Romania and Poland, the resistance had an explicit anti-Soviet element, but in the field the fight was waged especially against the local communists.

The communists called the anti-communist and anti-Soviet fighters “bandits” and “terrorists” (everywhere), while the population mostly thought of them as “partisans,” “outlaws,” but also “men of the woods” in Romania, and “brothers of the woods” in the Baltic States. It is difficult today to describe the difference between guerrilla and non-guerrilla, considering the fact that many of the anti-communist groups were training for armed resistance, some of them being involved, one way or another, in the actions meant to support the partisans’ military actions.

In Romania, Latvia, and Estonia, there was no unified command center of the resistance,\(^{53}\) while in western Ukraine and in Lithuania

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there was one, at least for a long period of time. Even if in Romania there were some attempts to unify the resistance, they were not successful, each group acting by itself, fighting for its own survival and hoping that the domestic and international context would change and lead to the collapse of the communist regime.

The resistance was repressed pitilessly in all Eastern European countries. The organizations involved in the repression of the resistance movement were the NKVD, GKB and MVD in the Baltic States, Ukraine and Soviet Moldova, and the “national” Securitate in Romania or in Poland, but with support from the Soviets. In this vast operation against the resistance not only the common echelons of the Securitate and Militia were involved, but also a large number of troops from the same organizations, and in some cases troops from the regular army. Moreover, the political organizations that the communist party controlled offered logistic support and forces for the annihilation of the resistance. In order to collect information about the partisans, the repressive organizations attracted, through different methods (co-involvement, manipulation or, most of the time, blackmail) many persons, recruiting especially among those who came in direct contact with the anti-communists.

The communist regimes made constant efforts to isolate the partisans from their supporters, from the population in general. To this end, they also tried to compromise the resistance by making up groups of false partisans, who were wandering in the woods and mountains, sometimes even robbing civilians (particularly in the Baltic States). Besides, in order to deprive the partisans of the possibility to collect food supplies, to get information and so on, the authorities isolated the regions with a significant population of partisans. Moreover, whole countries were inaccessible to Westerners at the beginning of the communist period. For instance, in the Baltic States, foreign tourists were only allowed in the mid-1950s. The communist regimes also made use of deportation measures against the locals—as happened in the Baltic

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States, western Ukraine, south-eastern Poland, Romania—both as a punitive measure against the supporters and to deprive the partisans of the help they needed.

The authorities did not confine their actions to repressive measures in order to isolate the partisans from their supporters, they also tried to attract on their side as large a number of locals as possible: by co-opting them in party and communist youth organizations (Comsomol, Communist Youth/UTC, etc.) and by social measures, including the possibility to be socially promoted.

The partisans responded in some cases with violent measures as well, for instance by threatening or even executing NKVD, Securitate or Militia local collaborators. This was a spiral of violence, like in all cases of guerrilla actions and anti-guerrilla measures. In the Baltic States, the partisans managed, in the first years after the war, to paralyse the functioning of the Soviet administration, but this was not possible any more after 1946 (Latvia and Estonia), 1949 (Lithuania), or 1948 (West Ukraine). In Romania, this never happened.

Nowhere in Eastern Europe, including Romania, were the anti-communist/anti-Soviets fighters captured by the authorities treated as war prisoners, but as criminals, as “bandits,” as “terrorists.” They were tortured, tried by military courts and severely sentenced, often to death or to many years in prison. This undoubtedly happened because guerrilla warfare is a type of war where the rules established by the modern conventions of war fall by the wayside, most of the times, in the field. Unlike what happened in other areas and other historical periods, for instance in the Second World War, when the actions against the partisans failed as a whole, the actions organized by Moscow and its satellites against the eastern European anti-communist resistance were successful. The zones where resistance made itself visible were pacified, even if at the price of a generalized terror.

In the context of the large-scale repression that the communist regimes organized, the evolution of the international situation offered discouraging signals for the resistance; for instance, the fact that the


55 Ibid., p. 266.
war in Korea (1950–53) did not extend to Europe, or the fact that the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was defeated. Even if there were hopes that the West would intervene, the Eastern European anti-communist/anti-Soviet resistance did not rely on external help anywhere, but exclusively on the local population’s support. The Eastern European partisans were disappointed when faced with the West’s attitude; they felt abandoned in front of the occupying forces, considering that a segment of the population was decimated through executions, arrests and deportations, especially in the Baltic States and in western Ukraine. One of the explanations why, *grosso modo*, the anti-communist armed resistance was not successful was the very absence of external help, which was present in just a few places and quite insignificantly. As the last century demonstrated, the efficiency of partisan war under the circumstances of a confrontation with an extremely powerful foreign enemy also depends on the scope and rhythm of foreign help.\(^5^6\)

Anti-communist armed resistance lasted until 1950 (Latvia), 1953 (Estonia), or 1955 (Lithuania), although there were isolated survivors until the beginning of the 1960s. In western Ukraine, resistance was annihilated at the beginning of the 1950s, as in Poland. As far as Romania is concerned, the organized groups were active until the mid-1950s; some of them survived until 1958, and the last fighters/isolated fugitives were annihilated at the beginning of the ‘60s.

A general conclusion arises from our analysis: the difficulty with which armed resistance groups were created and, above all, maintained, during the communist regimes. There are many explanations for that, but the most important ones of them are: the state-party’s quasi-complete control over the territory, people and resources; the harsh measures against their opponents, from arrests and deportations to executions, including arbitrary ones.

The political stake in the annihilation of the Resistance was particularly important. It was, first of all, a political fight, and only secondly a military one. The communists and the Soviets eventually won. Only if seen in the long run and from a symbolic standpoint, could one argue that the partisans got the upper hand.