

A black and white portrait of Corneliu Coposu, an elderly man with short, light-colored hair, resting his chin on his hand. The background is dark and out of focus.

Dorin IVAN

**Corneliu COPOSU,
a SENIOR
of the Romanian
GULAG**

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Ruga

sift, dear God, the peace of oblivion
over the endless pain
sow fields of faith
and enhance the dew of ruth

plant, dear God, love and lilies
on the field flooded by hatred
and lay over the mountains of dross
peace, forgiveness and serenity

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*Motto: "There is neither mercy, nor sympathy
for the enemies of the people"*

From the Number-Detainee, to the Institution-Leader

Whoever had the honour of personally meeting Corneliu Coposu, surnamed the Senior, can consider himself or herself a happy person. Whoever knew him closely, listened to him, drank from the springs of his knowledge and understood the voice within him, can consider himself or herself a lucky person. Such people are born every few hundred years!

People are born in Romania too! Romania itself can be considered lucky with such a personality. Corneliu Coposu died as he lived, righteous, unflinching, like a soldier on duty. Only that his duty was prolonged over more than six decades, out of which 17 years spent in maximum-security prisons, charged with crime of intense activity against the Romanian people. He patiently expiated his punishments, with faith in God and in the divine justice. He was and remained an incurable optimist, a providential man, but he despised fortune, honors and any kinds of functions. The number-detainee, "the bandit" without an identity, deprived of the elementary rights of any human being

in the Ramnicu Sarat penitentiary of the 50's, bore stoically other three decades of oppression, becoming the leader of the democratic opposition of Moral Romania, one of the models of modern Europe.

"Many experiences that I have had are so incredible, that it seems impossible to make someone else understand them. A common person, unused to the treatment that the communists used to apply to us, might not believe you. I would think at times that not even I would not have believed my own story if somebody else had told it to me." (interview, Romania Libera, 1994).

This paper is a simple "attempt", for personal usage, to figure out the springs of the thought and deeds of this singular personality, their internal combustion, their value for the future generations. A small country like Romania cannot resist the challenges of History otherwise than by means of exemplary people. Corneliu Coposu, we want to demonstrate, as if it were still necessary, was one of them. Because he said in his speech at Alba Iulia on the 1st of December 1990, "only worthy nations are eternal"

STALIN'S CODE

From the Pitesti Phenomenon

Out of the properties of the most used methods of oppression used by the Security, violence was on the first place. The crowbar beating was for a long time the most frequent method of moral humiliation of the political prisoner. Besides the inquiry when the detainees would be naked, the crowbar represented the extreme phase of violence. Petre Tutea remembers shiveringly: "The hands and ankles are tied together, a crowbar is placed under the knee joints and is sustained at its ends so that the victim hangs with the head downwards and is beaten with a stick or a metal rod at the bottom or at the soles." (Intre Dumnezeu si neamul meu, Bucharest, Anastasia Publishing House, 1990, p. 346). The system of the Pitesti penitentiary was by far the most draconic, primitive and punitive. Starting with 1949, at Pitesti was carried out the most inhuman process of re-education and extermination, an unprecedented experiment in the oppression annals. Just like at the gates of hell, the detainees were encouraged to leave behind all hopes. "There is neither mercy, nor sympathy for the enemies of the people" had been written on the fron-

tispiece of the prison. The raw material of the hallucinatory experiment were the students, the most refractory and non-conformist social class who, if at large, could have started a riot or popular protests at any time.

The Pitesti experiment is a genuine Romanian creation, having the reeducation as a leitmotif. The scenario, (see Costin Merisca, *Tragedia Pitesti*, The European Institute, 1997) was minutely elaborated even since the summer of 1948 when it was decided that Pitesti should become a prison of penalty execution for students. Eugen Turcanu together with other colleagues, members of the Organisation of the students with communist convictions applied a devilish plan of reeducation by means of torture. An organized violence that did not miss complete isolation, beatings of the detainees that they would strip naked, but what was more inhumane, the compulsion to cooperate against your own friends and colleagues. At least in the first part "... torture is the key of success. Along all these phases, confessions were almost regularly interrupted by torture", but torture was not just a simple beating. "... During the reeducation you would share the cell with the investigator who would not give you a moment of

rest. You could sleep at night, that is correct, but only on your back, completely naked, with your hands stretched over the blanked. And if you moved while sleeping or tried to turn on one side, you would be hit in the head with a club by the reeducator on duty." (Virgil Ierunca, *Fenomenul Pitesti*, Humanitas Publishing House, 1990, p. 36). Therefore, a permanent terror, by day and night, to determine "the breaking of the past".

The Pitesti phenomenon would have several stages. The external exposure, the internal exposure and the public moral exposure. (V. Ierunca, *Fenomenul Pitesti*, Humanitas Publishing House, 1990, p. 33-34). Self-exposure was the preliminary stage of the proper reeducation, a sort of brainwashing before receiving the Marxist-Leninist teaching. Like in the entire communist mythology, a complete and profound reeducation was hoped for, going to the most intimate springs, but using the most barbaric and primitive methods. The first stage was the external exposure, divulging the deeds undeclared at the Security, so that the internal exposure would be made in smaller collectives. "After the external exposure, that is divulging the deeds undeclared at the Security, a new stage would follow, the internal expo-

sure in smaller collectives. While remembering, they would write with a pin on the soap, chronologically, all the inimical activities that they had attended, starting with their arrest, but also all the hostile thoughts for the regime that they had had in that period of almost two years, a so-called moral exposure. When somebody considered that the person is relatively ready, they would announce the room collective that would prepare the person for the verbal confession, for everybody to hear." (Costin Merisca, *Taramul Gheenei*, p. 123, Porto Franco Publishing House, 1993).

There was another type, the public moral exposure. "The detainee has to trample everything that is sacred for him, and, first of all, his family, God – if he is a religious person, his wife or girlfriend, his friends, himself. Each person's past is analysed step by step, on his ground the most monstrous version has to be invented. His father, for example, has to look like a crook, a bandit, a bribe taker. Since among the detainees there were many boys from the country – and therefore some of them were sons of priests – , the latter are obliged to describe in detail the erotic scenes to which their fathers had taken part right in the altar while preparing the

Eucharist bread. And the mother was presented like a prostitute, the detainee was obliged to invent, as detailed as possible, the scenes which he himself was supposed to have attended. About himself, the detainee finally had to imagine the most refined perversities. Nobody gets away without covering with mud, in public, the living springs of his life, until the last bit of his past, that he could hang on afterwards to remake his personality, hasn't disappeared." (Virgil Ierunca, *op. cit.*, pag. 33-34).

The most ferocious stage of this kind of reeducation, torturing indeed, was invented, as well as the entire proceeding, by Eugen Turcanu and his group. In the properties of this proceeding, beating was in the foreground. The detainees would go through a purgatory of terror and humiliation. The violent beating, in group, considered the most ferocious method, with a bewildering impact, followed by a psychic torture, 24 hours out of 24. In any second, day or night, the nightmare would start again after a hallucinatory scenario of the unleashed horde who would innovate every time as far as terror was concerned. The torturers would follow an exact scenario of beating, regulated in detail, but with

freedom of creation as far as terror was concerned. The detainee was brought to the last stage, the stage of extreme uncertainty with the final solution – the complete abandon in the torturers' hands.

Sighet – the Penitentiary of the Romanian Elite

"Sighet" exceeds any other communist penitentiary through the rapidity and efficiency of extermination. If "Pitesti" appeared in 1949, a year after the complete dissolving of the democratic institutions, Sighet marks a peak in the communist oppression. Between 1950-1955 this was the place where the great figures of the interwar period found their end, starting from Iuliu Maniu to ministers, generals, academicians, bishops. Hunger, isolation and beating were the constancies of a detention system whose purpose, either hidden or expressed, was the physical elimination of the cultural, economic and political Romanian elite. "The prison in Sighetul Marmatiei was chosen for the great dignitaries of the country taking into account several strategic rea-

sons. They would try to take the elite people as far as possible from Bucharest, as far as possible from the great centers of the country, to a place as isolated as possible. Sighetul Marmatiei corresponded these criteria as it is plunged into the Maramures Depression and at the border of the country. But not just any border, but right near the border with the former Soviet Union. The prison here corresponded the best the extermination plan that the communist regime had for the great Romanian dignitaries, because, should anything happen against this regime, they could have been crossed the border in the Soviet Union easily and fast. The Soviet railway line with broad rail gauge passed through Sighet, thus ensuring the embarkation and deportation directly in the Siberian wilderness." (Nutu Rosca, Regimul de izolare, in Memoria inchisorii Sighet, The Civic Academy Foundation, 1999, p. 144).

Among the constancies of the detention system at Sighet, the very strict interdiction to communicate with the exterior is included. "During this entire period, the more than two hundred prisoners were not allowed or able to send any letters from here. For five years and six months, the detainees couldn't and didn't send a word

outside the walls of the prison." (*Ibidem*, p. 145). It is written about one of the most select detainees, the former minister of external affairs and economist, Mihail Manoilescu: "Keeping him in detention in the Sighetul Marmatiei prison, as well as the other dignitaries, was so secret that not even the tribunal, that was going to sentence him, did not know where he was." (*Ibidem*, p. 146). The only possible communication with the exterior would be made only through the General Direction of Penitentiaries in Bucharest and only concerning the death of the detainees, by means of a simple code. "Lightbulb number 2 was put out" was transmitted to Bucharest when Iuliu Maniu died.

In the first group, on the 5th of May 1950, 84 former ministers, subsecretaries of state, governors of the National Bank of Romania and former governors of Basarabia and Bucovina were arrested and imprisoned.

What was the objective in the Sighet prison? According to Decree no. 6 on the 14th of January 1950, on the basis of which the labour colonies (camps) were founded, in the foreground there was "the reeducation of the inimical elements in the Romanian People's Republic also in order to prepare and place them in the so-

cial life, in the conditions of the popular democracy and of the development of socialism." But reeducation was only a pretext, part of the detention programme, the hidden objective being the extermination itself. Unlike Ramnicu Sarat, at Sighet they would read and comment upon newspaper articles, in groups of course, under the strict monitoring of the supervisors who would periodically make reports concerning the political prisoners' mood. (*Ibidem*, p. 212)

The life of the 70 priests and high Catholic prelates imprisoned at Sighet was identical with the slaves' life, as cardinal Iuliu Hossu confesses, but it would allow certain loosenesses, unimaginable for the Ramnicu Sarat penitentiary. (*Ibidem*, p. 138). "After we met each other 150 – we were in a select society – , we made a daily programme. We woke up at 5 o'clock in the morning and went to bed at 10 o'clock in the evening. We organized our day time so that we could pray, meditate and performed the Holy Mass (only the recited prayers) together. At times, a bishop would hold a conference. The conferences held by His Excellency Marton Aron about his predecessor, Bishop Mailat, were very interesting. His Excellency Pacha would tell us his "vices",

that is funny stories which he would tell with exquisite art and fine sense of humour." This was a day at Sighet, totally different despite the humiliations of the kind presented by priest Alexandru Ratiu (*Ibidem*, pag. 129-131): "... we, the priests, were the porters of the prison. When they would receive provisions, maize, pearl barley, beans, we were obliged to carry the sacks up, at section number 3, where there was a warehouse. They would oblige me, the youngest, and Father Danila Berinde to carry on our backs 90-kilo sacks. We had 51 stairs to climb. When we reached the top, the heart would beat angrily in the chest." The same testimony appreciates in conclusion: "... the conditions at Sighet were terrible, for most of the elders, and affected the health of all the detainees". And when we got out of prison, we found our lives destroyed" (*Ibidem*, pag. 132)

In the Detention System at Ramnicu Sarat

The political detention system in the Romania of the 50's has a few constancies: beating, hunger and isolation. Although the three punitive measures were used in all penitentiaries indiscriminately, the methods of putting them into practice varied from one prison to another.

"At Aiud I saw people that had gone crazy because of hunger", said Constantin Cesianu in a confession appeared in *Arhivele totalitarismului* (The 5th year, 1993, no. 1, pg. 116). The case of Dr. Dumitrescu from Buzau who died begging "I want milk, I want milk!" is given as an example. In the Aiud penitentiary the political prisoners had only one wish – "In our sleep, we would all dream that we were eating". Despite that, there was a penalty much more difficult to bear. Here is an indeed terrible confession. "I thought and asserted that hunger is man's greatest enemy. Today, I say, though, that loneliness lies above hunger" (*Ibidem*, pg. 112, Nae Tudorica testimony).

This hierarchy of the punitive measures is also con-

firmed by the testimony of the Greek-Catholic cardinal Alexandru Todea, sentenced to life imprisonment by a Military Tribunal in Bucharest in 1950. On the 2nd of March 1952, Alexandru Todea was transferred to the Sighet prison together with other 12 bishops and Greek-Catholic and Roman-Catholic priests. "After a few months, in 1952, a political officer came and informed us that we had been proposed to work in prison, I had been appointed the chief of this work group, because I was younger and more vigorous than the others (...) We have always worked energetically because we knew that our work was useful to all the detainees and, especially to the lonely ones, isolated in their cells, where existence was mistaken for suffering, isolation for all the misery of the communist prison". Isolation was therefore the harshest way of punishment at Sighet too, only that the Catholic and Greek-Catholic prelates managed to break the wall of silence and give them the blessing of communication and Eucharist. As in the communist prison any way of communication, be it in the plainest shape, automatically meant Eucharist, a blessing of the Divine even when it was not invoked. "This is how I found out, Alexandru Todea continued his

confession, where George Bratianu was, as well as Iuliu Maniu and other generals. Among them, general Ilcus, who had lost the sense of reality, in other words, he had gone mad. I found out later that he had been a very decent soldier, but the isolation for more years, as well as the suffering had brought him in the state that he was. Yet, he benefited of a great favour because the Greek-Catholic bishop Ioan Ploscariu, incarcerated too, was placed in his cell to help him. He would calm him down in the moments when he was clamouring and managed to convince him to end his manifestations because the Militia officers were mocking him." (Memoria , 1993, no. 27, pg. 121).

The Isolation

Isolation was the watchword of all the political prisons in Romania, but the extent of success was different. The only way of succeeding was „the black one“, where, besides quasi-total isolation, the detainee was punished with the reduction of the food portion.

At Ramnicu Sarat, along with the isolation from the

exterior, suitable for all the Romanian political penitentiaries, the Isolation from human beings, with capital I, was of daily usage. Here are some comparative excerpts, Aiud – Ramnicu Sarat, at a distance of a few months, belonging to Ion Diaconescu (cf. *Temnita, Destinul generatiei noastre*, Nemira Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999). "I was, therefore, isolated, but this didn't impress me in any way. I knew from my own experience that the isolation from Aiud, by means of objective compelling, couldn't be as strict as the one from the Security". And the foresights of the young political detainee became true. "Barely placed in the new cell, I made contact with those around me, either by means of knocking in the wall, or yelling at the window and from them further on, just like heat through conductivity, I colligated with most of the lodgers in the cell (. . .) and from these friends started to arrive the second day, through the reliable officers on duty or the imprisoned doctor, who had the freedom to move, all sorts of messages written on cloths with ink made from soot or by means of other systems which reminded me of the first period, in the years of 1949-1950, also spent in detention" (Ion Diaconescu, op. cit., pg. 218) Messages

would circulate pretty vividly, conversations, even if only at a shutter, would lead to the establishment or the re-establishment of new friendships, of fragile yet hope and strength of resistance giving inter-human relations. Moreover, this freedom of communication had an immediate and convincing impact on the morale. "... My relations in this period (of isolation – n.a.) with the colleagues in the prison were limited only to written or oral messages, sent via the officers on duty or the doctor, as well as knocks in the wall. Yet, I befriended by these means with some people that I have never actually seen in my life" (Ibidem, pg. 222).

Let us see how the same Ion Diaconescu perceives the same phenomenon of isolation one year later, this time in the Ramnicu Sarat penitentiary. Which are his relations with his fellows, with the colleagues of suffering?

"The methods of isolation, unseen not even at the Security, exceeded all imagination. According to the measures taken, the detainee didn't have to see any human being, besides the guard on duty who would do his morning tour without saying a word". (Ibidem, p. 234). Each detainee had to obey the daily programme and the Interior Regulation: "after waking up at 5 a.m. –

n.a.), the detainees had to make their beds following a precisely indicated technology and from that moment on, until 10 o'clock in the evening, you were strictly forbidden to touch it! Meanwhile you were allowed to walk quietly in the cell or to sit on the little chair, with your face towards the visor, so that the guards could see you at any moment. While sitting on the chair, you couldn't sleep, and if you were caught with this major guilt on you, you would be punished. Also, you were not allowed to make noise in the cell, which could have been heard by the neighbours, you were not allowed to climb on the window and you were not allowed to knock or even touch the walls in order to try to make a connection with the other detainees." Moreover, after each meal "the mess kettle and the spoon were taken out of the cell so that we could not keep any metallic objects, and generally, no objects at all, except those with which the cell was equipped." (Ibidem, pg. 234). In order to make safety measures more strict, "nobody entered our cells alone, but always accompanied at least by the guard on duty, so as not to create the possibility of any discussions between people." Ramnicu Sarat seemed a non-violent alternative, but it was not below the Pitesti

phenomenon in any way. Instead of the hunger and the beatings, at Ramnicu Sarat the extreme, total isolation was introduced, a method of brainwashing which would have allowed at any moment the conversion to other values. The most capable political prisoners managed to break the wall of isolation, the classic language was replaced by Morse signs, coughed Morse or even the language of the doors. Luck only helps the audacious. "Only this way did we manage to break the wall of this fantastic isolation and thus manifest ourselves like human beings. Because how could you call human beings those who would stay locked in some cages for five years and a half, without being able to know anything of what is going on around them, without seeing anybody or talking to somebody" (pg. 251).

Stalin's Code

After the revolution in Hungary, at the Ramnicu Sarat penitentiary the rules of the cage, of the total and permanent isolation, were experienced for the first time. Another penitentiary code of conduct, based on illogi-

cal, absurd and inhumane rules. The norms of a code equally absurd and inhumane were created on this basis. It is probably one of the harshest codes of penitentiary conduct invented by the human mind. A French moralist, Girard, wrote that two principles, ethics and mercy or charitableness must stay at the basis of any Regulation, of any code of human cohabitation. Any deviation from these principles turns even the most honorable through its intentions regulation into an obsolescent one. Besides, the notion of rule comes from the Latin word *regula*, which literally represents the tool with which one draws a straight line. In *The Spirit of the Laws* Montesquieu considers that "the law is, in general, the human reason as long as it governs all the peoples of the world". On their turn, other philosophers concluded that rules must be based exclusively on reason, as long as the laws of hazard are based on whims and errors. The penitentiary universe at Ramnicu Sarat stands on another Code of conduct which proclaims the inhumane, breaks and forces the elementary rules of the logic, even logic in general. Absurd and illogical rules, imposed by means of force, starting from the first day of detention until the last one.

Non-Violent Terror

Theoretically, at the Ramnicu Sarat penitentiary beating was only rarely used. This method was probably part of the same devilish system of thinking, any act of correction being the equivalent of a human gesture, of an indirect recognition of the detainee's existence as a physical person. Or, it was normal, according to this bizarre logic, for the detainee to want to be beaten just to feel that he exists and that he is not completely ignored as a human being! The simple penalties were reduced to isolation, actually to the removal of the bed from the cell so that the detainee does not have a place to sleep, or of the straw mattress, as well as the reduction of the daily portion of food. The regime of extermination, the total and permanent isolation, guards wearing felt shoes who would watch the detainee through the visor and would punish him for the slightest breaking of the regulation. A regulation, with capital R, equally absurd and inhumane. The first contact of the political prisoner with the prison consisted of learning this internal Regulation. The rules were simple and easy to remember. The monocell conditions, with one

political prisoner in each cell, made the application of the internal rules simpler. The daily programme was well delimited. Getting up at 5 o'clock in the morning and going to bed at 10 o'clock in the evening. Here is how Ion Diaconescu describes the rules at Ramnicu Sarat: "After waking up, the detainees had to make their beds following a precisely indicated technology and from that moment on, until 10 o'clock in the evening, it was strictly prohibited for you to touch it". Other confessions and declarations demonstrated the drama abode by the political prisoners who would break this interdiction.

At the age of 64, counter Admiral Horia Macellariu addressed in a memorial to the management of the General Direction of Penitentiaries. "In this health and age condition, I am obliged to comply with hardened execution conditions because of which I am not allowed, if needed, to lie down daily for 17 hours and the diet – which I had at the Aiud penitentiary because of my disease – is suppressed." Most of them ill, old, in pain and, moreover, hungry, the political prisoners were forced to sit on the little chair for 17 hours facing the visor. Any breaking of these rules would cause further penalty

days, most of the times of isolation again. Another rule stated the interdiction of falling asleep on the small chair. Other days of penalty for simply dozing off.

The obligation to sit fixedly on the chair, otherwise the only activity allowed in the cell, was followed by numerous interdictions: "You were not allowed to make noise in the cell, which could have been heard by the neighbours, you were not allowed to climb on the window and you were not allowed to knock or even touch the walls in order to try to make a connection with the other detainees" (Ion Diaconescu). Other restrictions concerned the plates and dishes: "...after eating, the mess kettle and the spoon were taken out of the cell so that we could not keep any metallic objects, and generally, no objects at all, except those with which the cell was equipped." The measure was taken so that the detainees would not try to commit suicide or use the tools to communicate with the others.

A Quasi-Perfect Gulag

Alexandru Draghici, the minister of internal affairs and his countryman, Alexandru Visinescu, perfected a system of an unusual harshness in which beating was used more rarely, but more drastically and more punitively, the so-called group beating. Just like at Pitesti, group beating would increase the intensity of correction and the strikes could not be counted or individualized. The same Alexandru Draghici had forbidden beating in 1953 by means of a written directive!

The few survivors gave their opinions about the Ramnicu Sarat penitentiary but an exact characterization will probably be made by a neutral but very well informed character, far from being suspected of any partisanship, Ion Mihai Pacepa. The former chief of the Security, speaking about Vasile Luca, whose file he had worked on (*Cartea neagra a securitatii*, pg. 193-194), concludes harshly: "At the end of the trial, Vasile Luca was sentenced to death. Gheorghiu-Dej, "large-hearted", commuted his sentence into hard labour for life but took care that Luca was sent to the extermination prison in Ramnicu Sarat where he was kept in total

isolation until his death". Therefore, in the 50's, the destructive character of the Ramnicu Sarat penitentiary was notorious. Let us add that at least in certain periods, the former communist minister of Finance, Vasile Luca, benefited of numerous privileges!

About Isolation and Loneliness one can speak on close terms, the two experiences having similar points here and there. Fosco Maraini describes in the volume *The Hidden Tibet* the phenomenon "of death in solitude". "Solitude is such a powerful experience that leaves inerasable traces on the person who lived it; the chosen ones complete the flame of their spirit, but for common people the same flame diminishes or is put out. Like the poisons which, in certain quantities and on some bodies, have a miraculous effect, and in other cases they are deadly. Who hasn't heard of the death in solitude?" Corneliu Coposu will also speak about death in solitude.

At Ramnicu Sarat, brainwashing was made indirectly. There was not a third way between reeducation and suicide. Constantin Titel Petrescu, the leader of the Romanian Social-Democratic Party, philosopher Ion Petrovici abjured in order to get out from the hell at Ramnicu Sarat. The powerful ones, like Ion Mihalache,

refused any collaboration, did not deny their convictions. Neither Nicolski, nor patriarch Justinian Marina managed to determine Ion Mihalache to betray his ideal. The miracle of survival was bound to strong characters, to the chance of Morse communication but also to hazard. The others died or ended their lives. At least three detainees committed suicide in the prison at Ramnicu Sarat – Dinu Neagu, Jenica Arnautu and Nicu Adamescu. Teacher Dinu Neagu from Macrina village near Ramncu Sarat was arrested, beaten and imprisoned several times between 1947 and 1959. In September 1959, while incarcerated at Ramnicu Sarat, he is said to have hung himself from the cell bars with the bed-sheet. This is the official version. The Neagu case was widely discussed in the post-December media, but an eye-witness, guard Panturu, admitted in 1990 that the former teacher from Macrina died consequently to the beatings received in prison with the help of the Security.

Jenica Arnautu was sentenced to hard labour for life, being incarcerated at Ramnicu Sarat. He died on the 2nd of November 1959, after a prolonged hunger strike. It is said that his gesture wanted to be a general protest

against the conditions of detention in the unusual prison.

The Ramnicu Sarat experiment, as it was such a thing, appeared after the failure of the Pitesti phenomenon, whose negative echo crossed the borders of the country. Ramnicu Sarat is also a Romanian creation from another period, of a relative calm and social peace, of a relative thaw on the international relations. The adhesion of Romania to the United Nations Organization and the Geneva Convention in 1955 imposed a new conduct, on the other hand the revolution in Hungary drew attention on the fact that on an internal plan numerous factors of risk had survived., Beating was going to be, at least theoretically, removed, from the arsenal of punitive methods, but at the same time, the class enemy had to be eliminated. This is how the Ramnicu Sarat appeared, a version which was not below the Pitesti Phenomenon in any way.

The coordinates of this historical epoch are the number-individual, the penitentiary of total isolation and the totalitarian communist regime. Three complementary systems, having Terror as a common point. Historian Denis Deletant draws the attention that

minimizing or underestimating such moments and historical characters do not comply with the historical truth." Initially, Romania, like all the communist regimes in East-Europe, was based exclusively on the use of terror as a tool of the political power. This terror unfolded in two phases, in the first phase the adversaries of power consolidation were eliminated, and in the second phase there were applied methods to ensure obedience, since the revolutionary change had been accomplished". (*Teroarea comunista in Romania; Gheorghiu Dej si statul politienesc*, 1948-1965, Polirom Publishing House, 2001, pg. 10)

A key-event in imposing terror as a method and tool of political domination took place immediately after the Soviet troupes entered the country. On the 24th of March, a few days after the installation, the new Petru Groza cabinet moved the Special Information Service from the Ministry of War in the direct subordination of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, the first step towards the political police (see *Cu unanimitate de voturi. Sentinte publice adunate si comentate* by Marius Lupu, Cornel Nicoara and Gheorghe Onisoru, the Sighet Library, 1997, pg. 9 and the following). Between 1947

and 1948 several waves of arrests took place, the "reactionary-fascist" currents being, on the one hand, "the iron guards" and "the Hitlerists", and on the other hand the historical parties, the NPP, the NLP and the SDP – Titel Petrescu. Setting up the General Direction of State Security, in August 1948, marked a new stage of the class enemy elimination. Tens of thousands of people will be investigated by the Security and will go to political prisons. Stalin's death did not change the data of the problem in Romania, on the contrary. Nicolae Steinhardt appreciated the Romanian phenomenon at its real dimension: "The political arrests during 1947-1950 may have had a character of political terror. The ones between 1958 and 1959 were only demented. The regime was strengthened, all political justification is gone."

In March 1957, the Security personnel were increased. 2.059 officers and 429 soldiers were added to the 13.155 militaries and 5.649 civilians. The wave of terror set up after the retreat of the Soviet armies from Romania led to new waves of arrests, more than 6.362 detainees in 1958 alone. Among the victims there were two groups of writers and scholars foremost of whom

philosopher Constantin Noica, Nicolae Steinhardt, Alexandru Paleologu, Alexandru "Pastorel" Teodoreanu or Constantin Pillat. The new period of terror will climax with the interment in the labour camps of more than 40.000 people. The most feared adversaries of the regime will be sent to the prison of extermination at Ramnicu Sarat.

**Corneliu COPOSU,
a SENIOR
of the Romanian
GULAG**

The Son of the Protopriest of Bobota

Corneliu Coposu had a complex and marked by the unpredictable existence starting with his adolescence. Born under the sign of Taurus, the son of the protopriest of Bobota learned the first lessons of patriotism in his family. From his father, from his grandfathers.

With his typical modesty, Corneliu Coposu considered that "my biography lacks importance and interest". The research of the archive brings numerous disclosures. His father, the Greek-Catholic protopriest Valentin Coposu, was in his youth a great fighter for the Romanians' national unity. His political activity brought him imprisonment, during the Austria-Hungarian regime, for "high treason", in the prisons in Vat, Seghedin, Budapest and Nirekhazo, from where he was released by the Romanian army when Budapest was occupied. His paternal grandfather, Grigore Coposu, was the right hand of president Gheorghe Pop of Basesti and took part in all the national fights in

the epoch before World War I. He was seriously ill-treated on the occasion of the elections in 1906 when he also died. Corneliu Coposu characterized him as "a remarkable Romanian public man on the political scene of Ardeal, of Transylvania under foreign occupation, although he died young." His maternal great-grandfather, the Greek-Catholic protopriest Iulian Ancean of Ciolt, was one of the toprankers of the old National Romanian Party in Hungary, a personal friend of Ilie Macelariu and of the front rankers of the party of that time. He militated for political activism at a time when the orientation of the party was the pacifist conception.

Therefore, a lode of the inborn activism appears on both a maternal but especially on a paternal line. An authentic militant, from generation to generation, with roots of almost one century. Besides that, a co-regionalist exclaimed thrilled after he had personally met Corneliu Coposu in the 90's: "I had the thrill of the presence of Simion Barnutiu's spirit every time I was around him. There was, in Corneliu Coposu, the same soul of the love for people, for the Romanians persecuted by the nation, that strong belief that any op-

pression would end at a point, that things can be different."

At the age of five, little Corneliu is enrolled at the school in the locality, a Romanian confessional school kept up by the church. There are years marked by important national and European events, but also by the effective, cultural, political and economical completion of Great Romania. In 1923, Corneliu Coposu is already a student at the St Basil the Great High school in the Blaj of high expectations. A high school which enrolled 1400 students and from which he graduated successfully. At 16 he was already a student at the Faculty of Public Law and State Sciences of Cluj and after graduation, in 1934, he applied for candidacy for doctoral degree which he was awarded three years later. At 23, with solid studies in Law he chose his own path. "I was a politics passionate, Corneliu Coposu remembers, and I chose my judicial career despite my father's approval who wanted me to be a technician at all costs." The mirage of politics was greater than any university career. "I became a lawyer stuck at the middle of the career. I also had a university career – at the Faculty of Law, at the Penal Law department"

(Corneliu Coposu, *In Fata Istoriei*, Metropol Publishing House, 1997, p. 238)

Meeting Iuliu Maniu was decisive. Maniu as a person, despite all his political descents out of which he knew how to replicate elegantly, irreversibly entranced young Coposu. Unconditionally, he became his disciple and remained so until his death. "Maniu's nephew" was the nickname that he proudly carried from prison to prison.

The manuscript of a book, *A Tribune's History*, prepared for printing, but confiscated and destroyed immediately after his arrest in 1974 was re-written of fragments. "An upright, mystic and moral man", "He is one of those who never yield; whom only death can defeat" are only some of the features of his portrait from 1947. "Maniu was the brightest expression of the authentic Romanian spirit in the interwar years", he says in an interview in 1991.

Corneliu Coposu entered right footed in the big politics. At the University of Cluj, where he was also awarded the doctorate in Law, he was chosen president of the Democratic youth, so that in 1937, at the end of his studies, he joined irreversibly and irrevoca-

bly the president of the NPP. Between 1937 and 1940, in a period of great historical convulsions, the former boxing and weight lifting champion from the time when he was a student, was taking care of the personal security of the NPP president. In 1945, when he was 31, Corneliu Coposu was elected deputy secretary of the party and, in 1946, secretary of the permanent Delegation of the NPP, and Iuliu Maniu's right hand as long as the entire world conflagration lasted.

The Predecessors' Elogio

Stoicism is a frame of mind, a philosophy that can be depicted from the life examples of the predecessors, considered thoroughly by the means of assiduous study and strengthened by means of exemplifying deeds. The chosen drank almost entirely from the springs of wisdom, without even pronouncing their names, and lived exemplarily in their turn. Corneliu Coposu, the son of the Greek-Catholic proto-priest of Bobota, knew the writings of the ancient philosophers Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius and Seneca.

But he probably did not even need to. The Ardeal of his times gave to the country a Marcus Aurelius, that is Avram Iancu, a Socrates, that is Iuliu Maniu, the sphinx of Badacin, and an Epictetus, that is Simion Barnutiu, the revolutionist on the Plain of Freedom. But what more substantial models than his grandfather, Grigore, or his father, the clergyman Valentin Coposu, both imprisoned for high treason of the Hungarian government.

In his youth writings, Corneliu Coposu foreshadows happily and convincingly his future behaviour. It contains, in nuce, the entire route of his life. Chance and genius co-existed and "the ideological faith", a wonderful expression, kept him awake even in the darkest moments of his life.

During his teenage years, Ardeal was a region which was sacred and sanctified by exemplary historical deeds. His father was the first example. The proto-priest of Bobota dedicated his life to the emancipation of the nation, he suffered in the Hungarian prisons so that his descendants could be free, and he wanted his son to embrace a technical career, not a political one.

The Salaj County, where Corneliu was born was full

of advising deeds. The exhibition of Transylvanian personalities opens right in native Salaj. Three neighboring localities, and a total of four, Bobota included, the name of all of them starting with "B" offered this country great names. Bocsa, Simion Barnutiu's village, Badacin, Iuliu Maniu's village, Basesti, related to George Pop of Basesti, and finally, the village where Coposu Senior was born: Bobota. "There are four villages, whose names start with the same letter, four villages blessed by God", remembers Grigore Lapusanu – Transilvan, an inhabitant of Salaj, a few days after the demise. (ibidem, p. 397)

The portrait of the patriot politician is rendered with a lot of plasticity in one of the Transylvanian Busts, Victor Deleu, the president of the Transylvanian volunteers. Young Corneliu Coposu believes that the great Transylvanian established "the schedule of his life" following solid principles. "A man descending from a stone hard race, he was the grandson of a fine commander of Iancu's revolution: Iacobescu, the fighter from Salaj in 1848". His face has the features of a true patriarch: "Kind and calm, wise in everything, Uncle Victor lived calmly and temperately, with a life

discipline that promised hoary old age".

"Good thought and deed were the same for him". Therefore, an austere but active figure, characterized by honesty and integrity, "he was, above all, an example of honesty and integrity", a good leader, "he proved good skills in organizing and received public gratitude as a result of the functions of secretary of resort interests and mayor of Cluj." Courage, kindness and, most of all, modesty are added to these qualities. "After the Union, he honored with his fruitful work many reliable high positions, but he never took off his coat of modesty, he never wanted more than he was given." He remained related to his native region, the Salaj County, which he represented in "the house of the Country".

In his public life he was guided by "the olden law of decency" (Transylvanian Busts, Victor Deleu, article published in *Ardealul* in 1940, *ibidem*, p. 18). Briefly, Victor Deleu meant "a strong character", in his first youth "he swore to serve a conviction and an ideal" a way from which "nobody could turn him around" and his end was like his life: "He lived and died on duty, a living, unforgettable example for all his followers."

Another bust, written in 1940, when black clouds were threatening the Romanian people is that of "the good shepherd", Bishop Nicolae Ivan.

Corneliu Coposu uses various stylistic devices to underline the loss of "one of the best Romanians". "He has, behind him, a life of martyrdom and fight (. . .) A representative of the generation that carried in its soul the voice of law, with its promises and expectations, the Bishop of Cluj was honored by the joy of righteous Simion, of seeing himself the ascension of his church and the salvation of his people".

Bishop Nicolae Ivan lived "with Margineanu's unshakeable perseverance and intelligence, with true love for his nation, endowed with unsurpassed knowledge of people and things, with the most distinguished passion: the passion for labour – the great founder revived, in the heart of Ardeal, from the ashes of historical memories, a Romanian Bishopric."

Vladica Nicolae Ivan, "the unsurpassed master who wrested an accomplishment from each second", "fought, with uncurbed boldness, with rough wrath but with Evangelic kindness against all Romanian sins and low ebbs". Nature itself deplores the shepherd

who blessed "his Nation and Law". "On the snow-bound city of Cluj, the sad bell hymn crosses the sky, blending its dark message, in concord of grief, with the voice of the mourning Troparions...", this is the feeling that the young politician experiences at the death of a great Romanian.

In 1936, when he was writing the second portrait, Corneliu Coposu was 22 years old. Now he establishes two of the landmarks of his political creed, respect for NATION and respect for LAW.

Corneliu Coposu created numerous busts of "the worthy men of the nation", but that of the "tribune" Iuliu Maniu is, by far, perfect. The life of the son of the protopriest of Bobota borrows the qualities and the moral traits of all his characters, but as far as Iuliu Maniu is concerned, "a man that is born only every five hundred years", as he confessed in a post-December interview, he resembles to him so much that they seem to merge.

The sphinx of Badacin was a role model for young Cornel, the Transylvanian politician's shortcomings and blunders do not seem to have influenced him in any way. On the contrary, being around him when he

made the most difficult decisions, some of them historical indeed, Corneliu Coposu understood his springs and tried to imitate him, even in small cakes and ale. The heavy smoker comments: "He doesn't smoke or drink. He doesn't have any brutal or self-intoxicating passions. Neither his moods, nor his senses control him. Wealth doesn't tempt him. His life standard remained unchanged. He lived, soberly, modestly, naturally, for the past 45 years, the hard-working student from Vienna, the deputy of Vint, the famous lawyer of Blaj, the prime-minister of united Romania and the recluse from Badacin (...). The brightness and the honours, desired by many, came up against an immunized Maniu. A portrait sketched when he was young which will decisively mark the one who was surnamed the Senior of the Romanian politics.

And the descriptions will continue the same way, as Maniu was part of "the few great people who were not overwhelmed by passions". This "incorruptible, mystic and moral man" "is immune to threats. And not even the obvious danger can shake him, can turn him away from his duty. Courage is the decisive denominator of all his calculations", "a cool, calculated"

courage, based on "the merit of victories and popularity", "the supreme argument in the important political moments".

His weapons, like his predecessors', are the love for the Romanian people and the democracy based on harsh law. "He is probably the only political ruler – destined with the features of a chief – who understood to carry out the role of tribune of the nation, restricting his hearty genius of emperor in the crust of an exponent of democracy."

"Other leaders can symbolize happiness, copiousness, humanness, optimism, wisdom. Maniu is the law! He stands, by excellence and above all, for harsh legality. Alone. Brilliantly and perfectly...", this is the sketch of the portrait of the tribune Iuliu Maniu for whom Coposu infers the triumphant end. "He is one of those who never yield; that can only be defeated by death".

Chapter II/ Portrait Sketches

Youthfulness Portrait

Gabriel Tepelea met young Corneliu in 1933 at Cluj, when he was a student, an editor at the Romania Noua publication in whose pages he presented polemics "with the right wing fueled by the international context", and an active participant to the Study Debating Society of the National Peasants' Party. "I can see again the Corneliu Coposu of that time: tall, well-built, with wise eyes, very communicative, favouring friendship out of an inner impulse" the famous man of culture remembers him.

In a book published in New York, N. Carandino makes one of the most concise and eloquent presentations of young Corneliu Coposu. "He had humour, he was lively, generous, talented and had character without feeling the need of showing it every second. He always ignored his personal interest and despised current vanities. His modesty was strong, his word was pledging. For such qualities he had obtained

Maniu's appreciation and complete trust."

In an article about prince's Serban Ghica, "dissidence by means of sport", the writer Corneliu Stefan, a very good friend of the rugby-prince, wrote in 1992: "One day, on the stadium in the Child's Park in Bucharest, he introduced me a tall, pale gentleman, who had movements of internalized civility, like a quality of blood, with a frozen, sad, barely smiling mimicry. I kept in mind the remark of the rugby player. You see, he exceeded us all, he stayed in jail the longest, both the previous regime and the current one." The event took place in the 70's when prince Ghica, the Senior's best friend, as we shall see, was leading a rugby team in Buzau where he also worked on a construction site. Besides, as a fate irony, – destiny decides that great men help each other – Constantin Ticu Dumitrescu enters this equation. Prince Ghica, the chief of a construction site in Buzau at that time, helped the latter to get a job at a branch of the firm in Dumitresti village, Vrancea County!

Rodica Coposu, the senior's sister, considered Bani Ghica her brother's best friend. "In his group he was, first of all, his best friend, a life friend next to whom

he endured both the good and the bad, Serban Ghica or Bani, as we called him, who honours us with his friendship due to his exquisite friendship with Cornel. He was his closest and most devoted friend and this is how he remained." Rodica Coposu continues her idea with the miscellaneous chapter, the political friends. "There were, of course, his political friends that he used to meet." The Diaconescu family were omitted, of course, who, according to the Senior's testimonies in the security files, "used to visit us 3-4 times a year."

Who was the mysterious Bani Ghica? A direct descendant of 10 rulers who outlined the destiny of pre-modern Romania, king Mihai's future classmate had a tumultuous and full of adventures life.

"Friendship, fair play, zest, loyalty and courage", this is how his long live friend, Corneliu Coposu, characterized him. In a spontaneous sketch, destined to a Bany Ghica's portrait, he blends humour with tragedy: "The diminutive Bany comes from Serban, the name to which his baptism godfather, marshal Averescu, added his own name, Alexandru, but there are few people who know him otherwise than Bany. Bany is

in our society in Bucharest, in the entire country, unique, he is almost a notion which means "friendship, fairplay, zest, loyalty and courage".

Bany was in his youth a fan of the oval ball sport. At 18 he became the youngest permanent player in the national rugby team and at 27 he was appointed, also as a record, the youngest president of the national rugby federation. This is the period when he recorded a financial success for this sport, leaving behind the famous "Rugby" stamp. In 1940 he went to England, to Birmingham, to complete his studies and after the war he became one of Juliu Maniu's private secretaries. From this moment on, the ways of the two friends cross. Despite his royal origin, Serban Ghica spent in prison seven years out of which two at the Channel together with Corneliu Coposu. This is how he describes the imprisonment at the Channel (see Prince Ghica's Gulag, in Dorin Ivan, *Amintiri dintr-o alta eternitate*, Alpha Publishing House, Buzau, 1999). "I shared with Corneliu Coposu the most difficult moments in prison. We shared the same cell, a lock-up as big as a...stove. We were more connected than two twin brothers." His memories from the Channel,

where he worked on the same truck with Corneliu Coposu, are the most diverse. "The Channel was by far the roughest, prince Ghica remembers, general extermination was the objective, the food was not enough. (...) The more than 1000 wire workers from the Midia Cape endured superhuman labours without getting enough food. An apocalyptic famine ruled the colony. Demises were frequently recorded. All detainees tried to improve their food ration by eating all kinds of animals, dogs, toads or turtles, snakes. We would hunt snakes on the way from the train to the work place. Many snakes were run over by trucks and the most courageous of us would get out of the row and hide them under the furcoat. At the work place they would squeeze the snake and take out the grease which they would spread on bread. Then, they would enjoy the raw meat for a long time." Corneliu Coposu, a lot more athletic, helped him many times to avoid staying in the lock-up, by helping him carry out his quota. The two escaped sure death after they were forced to work under a cliff – thousands of cubic meters underground – which was on the verge of crumbling. They miraculously escaped thanks to Good Lord

and Corneliu Coposu, whose objective was that of "sabotaging the production". Proving workers' discipline, under the cliff entered, in their stead, a team of informants that would watch them non stop in exchange for the illegal receipt of money and food. "Destiny wanted us, programmed to be pliant to some nuisances - that is days spent in the lock-up - in exchange for money receipt, to pull out under the debris, with the spades, pieces of the butchers' bodies, heads and limbs. . . It was awful."

What saved the two enemies of the people during all these years of political imprisonment? "Fear", confesses Bany Ghica. "In jail I was prepared to face anything because I knew that I was going to. . . die. I defied death every time, because I was sure there was no escape. . ." (ibidem, p. 48-49)

Corneliu Coposu, whose incarceration was harsher, out of which eight years in complete isolation at the Ramnicu Sarat penitentiary, is much more nuance. "The most useful was, undoubtedly, the hope. I say hope, not confidence, because I am a Latinist. Hope for the days to come, hope for the future of Romania, hope for the fall of Communism. Besides, I have al-

ways been an optimist. I had a permanent hope, almost a certainty, that I would get out of jail - although I had become a ghost, I was barely standing - and that Communism would fall", an interview published in *Viata Buzaului*, on the 21st of November, 1994. On the second place, from the point of view of the importance, was faith. "I have never had any kinds of flaws in my faith. A strong, powerful faith in God and in His justice." Rodica Coposu suggests in the same publication that something more profound was in the middle. "He had a creed that he followed and gave his life for that creed because, even if ill, he did not spare himself at all (. . .). A lot of politicians entered politics for material thriving and for appointment to positions. He was never interested in that, he was completely detached of such things. (ibidem)

Serban Ghica, creates, on his turn, a portrait sketch at his death (in Corneliu Coposu, *In fata istoriei*, p. 352). "Physically, he was a handsome man, of an impressive height and a very pleasant appearance. His kindness and decency were exemplary. You could never find a flaw in his friendship. I fully felt this in our 53 years of friendship. He was a man with a

unique moral integrity which he made proof of until the end of his life. As far as politics is concerned, he also proved a strong sense of realism, following Iuliu Maniu's trend. (...) I would like to emphasize that in 53 years of friendship, we did not have the slightest contradictory discussion."

An Epistle of Love and Friendship

A universal history of friendship will probably be recorded in the epistle with SEWN LETTERS, a message on a cloth patch, written not with a pencil, but a sewn one, letter by letter, sent from jail, through a nurse, by Corneliu Coposu to his fellow-suffering, Ion Lupu.

Besides, Ion Lupu considers the Senior "my most faithful friend" in "sixty years of friendship and 53 of intense activity" (*In fata istoriei*, op. cit., p. 360)

"Ionel, we decide here, in the Vacaresti prison, to keep our friendship for the rest of our lives, to advise each other in everything, no matter how personal it may be, so that it can be useful for both ourselves and

the Romanian people". "This decision, made on a bed in jail, remained a sacred vow until God took his life. It was a strong friendship and as doctor Baican, who gave him medical treatment in Germany, declared: "I spoke a lot with Corneliu about his friendship with you and he told me that you were the only person with whom he could argue but the two of you would still remain friends."

"In our private life, the friendship feelings were affectionate, but they were not deprived of either irony, which appeared in our moments of rest, or of stories, when we would conjure up the years of our youth, of the incarceration that we did not regret", Ion Lupu remembers, who, just like his friend, does not regret the years of imprisonment that he considered "a purification, a punishment for the nation's mistakes, for its lack of political intuition".

Corneliu Coposu, in His Old Age

Florica Raica, a member of Corneliu Coposu's party, describes the Senior in some situations in the crypto-

communist period. (In fata . . . , p. 383) Here is a scene that took place on the 29th of January 1990. "I could see Corneliu Coposu on the entrance stairs, impassive, under the commotion of booing and objects thrown over the closed gates, with a BBC reporter who was standing next to him and who was shooting lively; he was watching the aggressors with the serenity that only the extreme experience of the years of imprisonment could have given to him, it is difficult to be impressed with something after you have experienced the worst."

His portrait is captured by the voice of the street. "He would speak briefly and directly, clearly for everybody, and the answers to the reporters' questions were often short syntheses which, in a few words, would catch the essential. On the political scene of those times, Corneliu Coposu was, undoubtedly, "a unique presence".

"He was tall, handsome, with wonderful hair and eloquent hands. He was a great man, a perfect politician, of a European level, an example of morality" concludes the Christian – Democratic follower.

At his death, Gabriel Tepelea made him a bronze

sketch. "Corneliu Coposu brought on the political scene in the post-revolutionary period a note of firmness and consistency. A man with the roots in the period of the interwar democracy, Corneliu Coposu would impress with the equilibrium of his conception, with the art of the negotiations. Loved by friends, respected by opponents, his disappearance will be dealt with heavily in the Romanian public life."

A Portrait for Posterity – the Notes and the Reports of the Security

The most valuable gift for Posterity are the notes and reports made by the Security agents starting in April 1963 until December 1989.

On the 30th of April 1963, when Corneliu Coposu was a HD and was on house arrest at the Calmatui Valley, in the Baragan Plain, the Security opened an investigation into him. At 26 he would be followed at every step and the information would be systematized and processed.

Corneliu Coposu succeeded in prolonging an ideal

for a century and a half, which is probably a unique performance in the history. The ideal of the Revolution that took place in 1848 was entirely transplanted into the Revolution in 1989. It is a challenge on behalf of the destiny and of a truly heavenly chance.

The ideas and ideals of a revolution were preserved and transferred through Corneliu Coposu to another generation, but as Ana Blandiana said, concerning the Coposu legacy, *In fata*, p. 389, "...the influence of great personalities does not act upon the first generation of descendants, but on the second one". (*In fata*, op. cit., p. 389)

But during the almost two years of house arrest spent in Baragan, Corneliu Coposu was watched non-stop by the secret services, thus resulting a truthful and eloquent image offered, nolens volens, to the Posterity.

Here is the Senior's Portrait, code name Cornel, Calinescu or Calin, as it appears in the Security informants' conspirational notes. Agent Preda Viorel characterizes Coposu Cornel, in a note on the 9th of June 1963, shortly after he left the Ramnicu Sarat prison like "a real ghost", *Viata*, p. 91, as "an intelligent

fellow, a communicative nature, a little too lazy and stubborn at times". Describing the discussions with other people on house arrest, the informant considers that "All these discussions are listened to with interest because of the fact that COPOSU CORNEL makes in his narrations some jokes, ironies, which draw the others' attention". Agent Eugen Stanescu mentions in the same place that "COPOSU CORNEL enjoys high appreciation in the village, as he is a serious man, he is haughty enough, he has suffered a lot, he has had prestige even since he was in the penitentiary" (...) and as far as his political attitude is concerned "one could estimate that he follows the developing events with interest and tries to inspire the others with a lot of optimism."

"His aspect is surprisingly good", p. 93, shows a synthesis on the 15th of May 1964, based on the information provided by an informant from his entourage. He shows off to "best advantage". He used to look like an obese young man. Nowadays he looks like a tall and thin young man, almost refined. He kept his hair and teeth. He is neatly dressed with his old clothes. He spent 15 years in various prisons and "got out on

a stretcher", he spent two years in Baragan and during the first year his mother accompanied him giving him all her care. One of his sisters, who is a chemist, was also able to help him regain his health". Alt portet, ultimul , pp. 100-101.

Chapter III/ The Life Philosophy

About Faith, Hope and Suicide

His vision on life and death bears the mark of Christian thinking. He admits with nonchalance that "I have never had any flaws in my faith. A strong, powerful faith in God and His justice". But moreover, he seems to have despised the other values – atheism, duplicity, the lack of any nationalism. He was the son of a Greek – Catholic protopriest, fully kept his faith even when a question mark was put on the type of Christian – Democratic doctrine. "Whoever messes with the Greek – Catholic church will never win", he said in a private conversation.

"Man without faith is not a complete man", he motivates the option for a Christian – Democratic party in December '89.

His role models were Saint Pavel, the apostle of Christian love, and especially Saint John the Baptist. In the interview published in the daily newspaper Viata Buzaului he confessed: "As far as love is con-

cerned, which is our religion... the Christian religion is the religion based on love. This is how Pavel the Apostle defines it: Religion is love. Unfortunately, it is the less applied virtue." Coposu considers that his butchers lacked precisely the feeling of Christian love, meaning the love for people. "The authority that governed us during those 50 years, not to mention the penitentiary authorities, was so faraway from the feeling of love for people, that they were almost alienated from the quality of being a human". (ibidem)

"A saint that defeated the world through his death. John the Baptist, the symbol of character" is an article that he published in *Romania Noua* when he was 22. Young Coposu develops a touching, vindictive thinking, with many eulogies with references to contemporary characters, denoting an acute craving for social justice. "A providential man", "the reforming genius of his contemporary society", "born from the contrast of the sinful states as a protest of the divinity harmed by the flood of human turpitudes" (*In fata istoriei*, p. 425)

Despite an Asianic, and, here and there, Messianic oratory style, the article reaches prosaic conclusions,

with direct references to the immediate present days, "he was, above all, an incorruptible, firm, unhesitating man, a man of character". The savage prophet "preached the changing of the sick mentality which ruled the world by the means of the baptism of repentance. He fought against hypocrisy, urging his disciples to return from their sinful paths. Many have listened to him. Some of them followed him, others banished him. But St John went on, promptly, on the path of conscience, helped by the unbridled strength of his faith."

The initiator reproved the despot himself, Herod the Emperor, and "not even when in chains did he deny his ethical convictions, but he happily paid with his life for the temerity with which he carried on his duty. Not even the butcher's sword could turn away John the Baptist from the way of good and justice..." Priest's Zaharia immortal son was a living example for the son of protopriest Valentin Coposu from the Salaj County. "The saint beheaded by Herodiade's machinations remains the perfect embodiment of the man of character", concludes young Coposu.

Faith proved its sacred and soul healing character in the communist prisons. "I witnessed many touching scenes that proved man's love for man. For example, in conditions of extermination, I saw people who would give up half of their portion of food to save their extremely weakened fellows. It is something extraordinary in jail because the famine obsession turns people into animals. But I saw beautiful gestures, attempts to morally save the people. I saw gestures when priests, not all of them, but certain graced priests were trying to recover, by means of faith, some people that were sliding on the slope of desperation". (interview, Viata Buzaului)

Hope – Faith – Salvation, a triad of the complete man who survives in inhuman conditions. But is the relation between faith and love biunivocal? "For the man who believes, the feeling of love is fundamental in the relations between people. The paradox is that suffering straightens him, it does not alienate him." Therefore, suffering can be treated more like a proof of faith, following the Christian example, as the proof

of proofs.

Even in the darkest periods he remained an optimist, he had the hope of the ultimate justice. In 1952, deported at the Channel, where he worked on a truck with Prince Serban Ghica, an informant wrote. "He sees the international situation very optimistically; that's impossible, something must happen very soon." (apud Tudor Calin Zarojanu, *Viata lui Corneliu Coposu, Cu documente din arhiva fostei Securitati*, second edition, Masina de Scris Publishing House, Bucharest, 2005, p. 67).

The suicidal thought as a final form of protest avoided him permanently, even if he witnessed many extreme gestures or suicidal attempts.

"<The cons> from the Pitesti penitentiary arrived at the Channel in 1950 with the intention of putting into practice the sordid experiment of brainwashing through continuous terror and self-exposure. Coposu was an indirect witness of a detainee's suicide who refused to submit the tortures in the famous Hut 13. Doctor Simionescu's case, a surgery professor and a famous surgeon, stirred Europe and ended the demented project. Tortured day and night by his re-ed-

ucators, exhausted, doctor Simionescu decided to commit suicide in an exposing way. He deliberately entered the camp security area, wanted to force the barbed fence passage and was deadly shot. A suicidal gesture which will stand for the beginning of the end of the torturers from Pitesti.

Corneliu Coposu witnessed some extreme gestures in the prison Ramnicu Sarat too. After director's Visinescu saddistic examinations, a teacher from Macrina village, Ramnicu Sarat county, committed suicide by hanging himself in the cell with the bed-sheet. Another case happened in the Ramnicu Sarat prison as well. In the autumn of 1959, Jenica Arnautu, a lieutenant discharged in 1946, an anticommunist partisan, sentenced to 25 years of hard labour, declared war to his torturers from the Ramnicu Sarat prison by refusing to eat. He was forcefully fed but died on hunger strike on the 2nd of November 1959 in cell number 4 nearby the cell where Corneliu Coposu was imprisoned.

Corneliu Coposu was the subject of all the correction methods, sole beating, crowbar beating, hanging with his head downwards, beatings with wet bed-

sheets and with sand bags, the manege, where the detainee would run unclothed in a circle and would be whipped. "There is one torture system that I did not experience, he remembers, the one that I have heard of from the other detainees: the attempt of electrocution."

Here is a confession, shocking indeed for a man who spent 17 years and a half in prison and was subject of these unimaginable ordeals. "I have never thought of committing suicide. I eliminated this idea from the beginning, at least as a thought. There were some who would think of committing suicide in difficult moments. Then... from the conversations with other people who were in the same situation... after useless expectations, some of them, I characterize them as insufficiently strengthened in their faith, would start to lose faith and wonder: there probably is not a God, if God is capable of allowing the horrors that we are going through to happen, it means that He does not exist". (interview Viata Buzaului)

About Suffering, Patience and Hope

Saint Apostle Paul, in Romans 5:3, concentrated the essence of Christian thinking in a memorable phrase: "We praise our sufferings too, well-knowing that suffering brings patience, and patience brings endeavour, and endeavour brings hope".

On his turn, Corneliu Coposu confesses that he learned many things from Iuliu Maniu, "especially the patience" which helped him to abide the 17 years and a half of imprisonment. "In prison, patience overpasses any imagination. I can tell you this because I tried it myself." An idea expressed again in an interview given in Memoria magazine. "Prison is an exercise to train your patience. There, patience overpasses any imagination, I tried it myself."

He learned many things from the example of the great ancestors, especially from Iuliu Maniu, the sphinx of Badaciu, from whom he understood "patience above all". The years of imprisonment passed "with patience and faith in God" and "for all of us, the survival in the communist holocaust required a lot of faith and ideals", he confesses in an interview ap-

peared in Romania Libera in March 1994.

Corneliu Coposu made many bets with history. "Be careful because many of my forecasts became true. Even if I had to wait for a generation to pass. In prison, patience overpasses any imagination. I can tell you this because I tried it myself. I was right when I said that communism would fall. I am also right when I tell you that we shall get rid of its last flaws. The past and present scandalmongers will also disappear. Don't worry."

Corneliu Coposu clearly said that for him everything was reduced to hope. "Undoubtedly, hope was the most useful for me. You said confidence, I say hope because I am a Latinist. Hope in the days to come, hope in the future of Romania, hope in the fall of communism. This essay can be ended with Saint Paul's words too. "Look carefully how they ended their lives and follow their faith" (Hebrews 13:7)

"I had hope that I would get out of jail and that communism would fall", says the Senior tersely in an interview given in 1994 to Radio Campus from Buzau.

"Hope has never left me in my whole life" he confesses in the same interview which he gave shortly

after he had received the Legion of Honour.

Not even in the darkest years did he fall on "the slope of despair". The Hope and the Intuition of the Romanian people, "accompanied by God's finger who intervenes from time to time in the history of a miserable people justify me to think that we shall get rid of the misery, the catastrophe that the country faces and that we are heading towards the good."

About Torturers, Forgiveness And the Expiation of the Sins

"There is neither sympathy, nor mercy for the people's enemies" was the message on the frontispiece of the Pitesti prison.

"To be forgiven, like the robber on the cross!" Corneliu Coposu confesses a year before his death. (interview for Viata Buzaului)

"I have seen before people who slapped me, hung me on an iron bar and insulted me in all ways. I want you to know that I would take the insult on me. I didn't feel humiliated by the curses. I don't spite or

hate those who lowered themselves to the horrible crimes that the 50 years of communism recorded. I believe that the people who got to degrade themselves up to the point of torturing their fellows, without any kind of justification, lost the quality of humans and that it would be an honour for them to have feelings of enmity against them. To be forgiven, like the robber on the cross!". The doctor in Law of the faculty of Law and State Sciences of Cluj knew very well the relations in the primary communities, coordinated by the principle an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But he abhorred not only the feeling of hatred, but also the feeling of enmity. Was he carrying the Christian feeling of love for his fellows or maybe something deeper?

About Fortune, Poverty and Public Functions

The wise carries his fortune, says a Greek philosopher. For Corneliu Coposu there was no other virtue more profound than an austere life. A modest life,

based on principles and on a permanent and total reconciliation with a conscience which was just as clean. This was the Coposian ideal. The phantasmagorias appeared after the Revolution but also at his arrest in 1947 did not affect him. In an interview which I had the honour to take him in 1991 I asked him about the truth dear to the anti-Coposu propaganda. I brought him a reportage from a newspaper, very serious on the other hand, which described his "adventures" in a village in Ardeal. The Senior was said to have been chased by the peasants while he was trying to get back his estates confiscated by the communist state. I asked him directly about the fortune that he had before the war and how he administrated it. My question, naïve through its simplicity, made him burst in laughter. "My ideological faith was my only fortune", the Senior answered.

The documents from the archive of the former Security describe its torturers' disorientation, their conscience issues when the problem of the goods owned by Iuliu Maniu's nephew arose. There are repeated addresses, really desperate requests on behalf of some people educated in the Marxist spirit of class fight be-

tween the rich, the exploiters' class and the poor, the exploited who had only the strength of their arms at their disposal.

His public accusers fell in the same trap, forced to convict him before judging him. They were disoriented, standing in front of a harmless class enemy, a truly poor one. In August 1955, the date of his proper trial, - until then he stayed in prison without a trial - , the president of the Military Tribunal requested "the proof for the fortune owned by the defendant Corneliu Coposu". On the 7th of August 1955, his mother, Aurelia Coposu, sent a statutory declaration. "My son does not own any kind of movable or immovable property. The jewels, such as a watch and a ring, were sold by his wife to earn her living." The register from the Jilava penitentiary is as conclusive as the declaration. At the PROPERTY section it was recorded, for both the past and the present, "W. Property". Despite that, the judges gave him the harshest penalty, 15 years of hard labour and . . . the total confiscation of his fortune, the executors being supposed to apply the sentence.

Yet, the Security tried to fake a document concern-

ing a small alcohol factory in a rural locality in the Alba County, but it was proven that his father Valentin Coposu had leased it for a very short period of time. His torturers gave the verdict with an unrelenting conscience; they were fighting an enemy who made part of the social class of the poor. They refused to accept the pure truth registered by <the enemy of the working class> "I don't own movable or immovable properties and I have never owned any either. (our emphasis) I was evicted from my last dwelling, Bucharest, Jianu Street, no. 72, which I had rented, in August 1947, after my arrest" and they requested for years the repetition of the addresses.

Only in 1957, after repeated summons, was the court forced to accept and register the obvious, admitting that "there is nothing that can be confiscated from Corneliu Coposu". Meanwhile, the class enemy had already done 10 years of hard time!

„After all that has been said about my "fortune" it is natural for me to wait questions concerning my

wealth or my departures abroad. All these aberrations couldn't have come from the Security, because they knew what they had taken away from me and that I hadn't left the country since 1938. But let them talk! Who is listening to them? I have always been and I am still very poor. We live as if we were under communism: we always ask only how much money there is in the house. But poverty never bothered us. (our emphasis) It's the same thing if there is or there isn't any money. I am my sisters' fancyman. I know of nothing but my cigarettes. I have never bought anything for the house. (an excerpt from an interview given in March 1994, in Corneliu Coposu, *In fata istoriei*, p. 191)

A really painful truth about his welfare, on the terms that Coposu's door was always open to all kinds of friends and an invitation to dinner was compulsory for Transylvanian hospitality.

The notes and reports of the Security partly register these truths. (see Tudor Calin Zarojanu, *Viata lui Corneliu Coposu*, p. 139). In 1988 the source Petraru registers after a visit at Baia Mare "...Coposu is a harmless element as he is old. His only passion is smoking, he always has quality cigarettes with him."

His despise for fortune was closely related to his refusal for functions and glory, for a social status which would have exempted him from worries, a thing which was possible exactly under communism. Under the regime, there are known bourgeois intellectuals who had a privileged status and an exceptional university career by making a simple compromise with the communist power. The brilliant professor of international law, Grigore Geamanu, the general secretary of the State Council in a confused period of the autochthonous communism is only one of the examples. Grigore Geamanu, Corneliu Coposu's former subordinate in the party hierarchy before the war, made him such a proposal. The Security reports, but also the Senior's memories, are eloquent.

In *Fata*, p. 85, "I was convoked the following day after the arrival – from Baragan, a.n. – at Gheorghe Gheorghiu – Dej who made me an apparently generous proposal of dissociation from the party and Maniu. He was offering me a very promising appointment as a State Contentious employer. I refused this proposal, of course, and consequently I looked for a job by myself through the Jobcenter. I finally got hired

as a worker in the construction industry where I was promoted technical office worker on a minor position which I occupied until I turned the retirement age." (In *fata istoriei*, op. cit., p. 85) Therefore, he refused a good, well-paid job which offered him a high social status in favour of the position of ... an unskilled worker. At the same time, a university career was perfectly credible and probable, he had been awarded a doctor's degree in juridical sciences and had taught at the Penal Law Department of the University of Cluj. All the great professors of the Law Faculties of Bucharest and Cluj in the 70's had a political past which was even more colourful than the Senior's. With awful qualms, the communist leader Gheorghiu – Dej released when on their death beds 10 personalities imprisoned in the Ramnicu Sarat penitentiary, and the communist leader Ion Gheorghe Maurer was known for the effort of recovering some interwar personalities.

Corneliu Coposu could have taken this step, we are in the possession of the confession that Grigore Geamanu made him these proposals, when he was a secretary of the State Council, a function of great respect

at that time. He preferred work to shovel and to live in misery than to accept the compromise of treason.

"At the Channel I re-qualified. I am a bricklayer and a house painter" (...) "When in need, I am ready to do one of these jobs. Anyway, I don't want to be a lawyer or an industrial unit jurist anymore, I don't want to be an office worker either...", appears in a Security note in 1964. (Viata, p. 94). A year later, in 1965, when he returned to Bucharest, professor Grigore Geamanu calls Gheorghe Gheorghiu – Dej, (*ibidem*, p. 96) who thus excuses himself for the political prisons: There was nothing we could do because the Russians commanded us all the time. In order to compensate, he proposes him to become a solicitor for the State Council with a salary of 4.800 lei a month (an engineer would earn approximately 800 lei a month), provided that he signs a declaration. Dej also suggested him to rehabilitate him and Iuliu Maniu, to which he answered: Maniu would be more indicated to rehabilitate the communists. (Zarojanu, p. 96)

"My dear is dignified", it is a declaration of his mother, Aurelia Coposu, Mommy, registered by an informer of the Security in 1965 a little time before Dej's

informant death. A simple employer of a construction site in the Capital, with his wife working for a registration service of the sick people in a hospital, Corneliu Coposu refused, despite his family's precarious wealth, any offer of collaboration. "It is difficult, but my dear son won't accept certain offers which were made to him in exchange for certain services, as he suffered too much in the past. My dear is dignified", confesses the old lady who had accompanied her son on house arrest in Baragan.

The Institution – Leader

Corneliu Coposu proved to be more than a political man, he was an institution. In order to see how he became that, we shall have to start with... the beginning. In the phase of gregarious community, virtues or, as appropriate, inabilities acquire macroscopic valences. The simple life, of a primary community, can rapidly devote or, as appropriate, destroy any myth.

In 1962, in the Baragan Plain, at Rubla and the Calmatui Valley, were deported the most known "enemies of the people". Ad hoc communities, far from the tumult of the socialist slogans, of the anticapitalist propaganda, the hundreds of H.D.-s were born for the second time, but this will also be the place of a baptism, that of Corneliu Coposu, a group leader, active and authoritative, the future moral leader of the anticomunist opposition. At the age of 50, the one who had started his journey on Golgotha at the age of 33, the age of Jesus Christ, will acquire in Baragan

the role of a catalyst of the confused energies, an unquestionable moral landmark.

Corneliu Coposu was bearing the experience of the 15 years and a half of hard prison and the halo of the fighter who had never accepted to make compromises. The house arrest at the Calmatui Valley was a unique experience, following a detention which was as unique, 15 years and a half of hard prison. "For me and other detainees it was a blessing, because, if we had passed from the hard conditions in prison directly to a normal life, it would have been a shock tolerated with difficulty." Remembers a few decades later Corneliu Coposu. (*Viata lui Corneliu Coposu*, p. 88)

Besides learning again the simple existence, the austere but invigorating life, close to the life of the world's first colonists, the deported had the occasion to learn again the advantages of the family life. Corneliu Coposu had the chance of seeing again his mother, Aurelia, who stood by him in the isolated locality in the Baragan Plain for six months, as long as the Security allowed her. His mother's presence would heal many of the imprisonment wounds and pull him out of the apathy and the political convalescence.

Baragan was also the place where he found again the big family, the last survivors of the camps, the past and future adversaries of the communist regime, Ion Diaconescu, Ioan Huiu.

A few months after settling down in a small house in Baragan, it is signaled that he rallied behind him both elements that activated in the NPP and elements with an inimical activity of another kind, as it results from a Security informative note on the 30th of March 1964.

House arrest turns Corneliu Coposu into an unquestionable leader. Mainly, because of his qualities of a good organizer, "he is an intelligent man, a communicative nature, a little too lazy and stubborn at times", registers agent Preda Viorel in the note written on the 9th of June 1963. Agent Eugen Stanescu informs that "in Coposu Cornel's house people come and go and he is never alone", and he attracts his guests into dialogues on political topics. "All these discussions are listened to with interest because of the fact that Coposu Cornel includes some jokes, ironies in his stories, a fact which attracts the others' attention."

At the end of the period of house arrest people were

already talking about "the Coposu group". In the note on the 16th of March 1964, agent Cistescu Nica registered that "the Coposu group continue to be starry-eyed and still have interest for national peasantry, making proselytism and asking questions about one and other's political affiliation.", the Security employer drawing the alarm signal that "the way their group remains leaves the impression of a party".

The repeated refusal to deny his own past and his former party colleagues reconfirms, year by year, his leader halo.

In an informative note in March 1968, it is mentioned that two Romanians with the residence in France "consider Coposu Cornel a representative and genuine spokesman of the NPP for both the young and the old. This idea is also transmitted by the emigration".

The Security Services are alerted day by day, especially because meanwhile Corneliu Coposu has refused two other offers coming from the communist officials, those of publishing in Glasul Patriei and in Scanteia, motivating that "he does not want his signature to appear in the current publishings". A simple signature

in the semi-official newspaper of the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) would have saved him from many nuisances and would have given his watchers a feeling of restraint if not of panic. He refuses and dedicates himself to humanitarian actions, offering food, money and medicines to some hospitalized needy people. The quasi-unanimous opinion of the Romanian anticommunist resistance in the country and abroad is registered in an informative note in 1969. "Materials have been obtained from whence it results that various people who had functions in the NPP appreciate him as an incorruptible man, considering him the future leader of the NPP". Two other decades will have to pass, which Corneliu Coposu will cross slowly, devoted to the vow that he made to tribune Iuliu Maniu in jail.

Meanwhile, the Security made 27 searches at his house and he had to give hundreds or even thousands of declarations. "I think that between 1968 and 1989, until one day before the Revolution, I was called hundreds of times at the Security headquarters and I gave thousands of declarations relating to my real or apparent anticommunist activity. I was accused of sab-

otage, of organizing plots, of actions aimed against the communist regime. Meanwhile I had 27 searches, occasion with which I think I had a quarter of wagon of manuscripts, correspondence and books confiscated. I still keep the reports and the warrants of presentation at the Security for inquiries." (In Amintiri , p.32)

A permanent headquarters, doubled by a quasi-permanent watching, a non-stop stakeout, including microphone installation in his house. During this entire period of time, the Security sources confirm in 1963, "he has inimical activities", in 1970 "he continued to have inimical manifestations" and afterwards his targets aimed not only the party but the presidential family as well. "He was inimically manifest, several times, against the superior party leadership and the members of the presidential family", according to what a source relates in April 1985. (see Viata lui Corneliu Coposu , p. 122)

About Political Creed, Ideal and Optimism

The political creed is a character trait difficult to measure, but it seems that in the Senior's life it was the dominant note. It was a permanence of his existence and its deep roots can only be found in the history of Ardeal and of his brilliant predecessors. In a conference about native Salaj he says that "The history of Salaj is an endless chain of oppressions, from clew to earing, of pain and revolt the other way round. The Romanians in Salaj lived long and hard centuries only with the strength of the memories, of the power of faith and of the conscience of their eternal right of mastery." (In fata istoriei p. 303) "It must be otherwise too", was Simion Barnutiu's creed.

In January 1952, (in Viata lui Corneliu Coposu , p. 65) informant Busuioc reports about Corneliu Coposu; He congratulated me on New Year's Eve and wished me urgent freedom, claiming that 1952 is the year when the destiny of mankind for the following 1000 years will be decided. The Destiny of mankind for the following 1000 years, probably a joke, but full of

meaning. His overflowing optimism probably inherited from his mother Aurelia, was weakening the torturers but made them more humane. There is a crescendo of the punishing and suffering of the 17 years and a half.

Informative note since 1968, (ibidem, p. 99) informant Sultan, "Coposu made the statement that the events in Czechoslovakia are the beginning of the end of communism in general. He is convinced that the economic and ideological bankruptcy of communism is total (our emphasis) and that the forces that will overthrow it, will be born within it and they will not come from the outside. A prophetic but mostly stimulating statement. Besides the deep meaning of the internal combustion of the crisis of communism, it also stands for an invitation to action. His attitudes are also related to "the ideological faith", a beautiful and comprehensive term, a notion suitable to the Senior and to his life ideal.

About Faith and Ideology

The Senior's vow will guide him his entire life, results from an informative note since October 1971, the source Ghioca, (ibidem, p. 102). "Coposu made in front of the source the statement that in 1974, with the occasion of the Tamadau business, he was in dr. Jovin's house together with Maniu surrounded by the authorities. (...) Maniu told him in private "you are like my own child, maybe one day in my place too, no matter what we shall go through don't you think for a second about leaving the country. I am sure that I'll end up in a communist prison". Coposu states "I made the vow and I shall be loyal to him all my life." These confessions made to an informant-"friend" are more veridical and profound than any further texts, a test of life.

Corneliu Coposu was convinced that he had a mission to accomplish. Such statements would seem venturesome if they were not sustained by other confessions. In 1953, after the expiation of not even half of his penalty, in the Vacaresti Prison, on a bed in a cell, charged with murder, Corneliu Coposu plans

the organization of post-communist Romania. "Destiny, a Ioan Lupu confession, (In fata , p. 358) made that I meet Corneliu Coposu again, in 1953, in the Vacaresti prison where we did our best to share the same cell. (...) Days, weeks and months, standing face to face on the bed that stood for our life space in prison, we would discuss all day long projects that would contain plans for the political future of Romania, blended with commentaries on the historical events that we were living, surprising the people around us that we had the patience to talk to each other for hours every day."

A page of political philosophy in a Security note since May 1979, the Security informer relates that, when simply ran into on the street, Corneliu Coposu said that "Nowadays, in Romania, one cannot really scrape together with anybody an action for fighting or crushing the communist regime (...) Luckily, C. Coposu is certain that this regime will crash by itself, getting old and wearing off maybe faster than we think as all the totalitarian, based on force regimes", p. 114-115, etc. an extremely lucid vision in a moment of political relaxation and economic revival, of eco-

nomic increase of the system.

Besides, the sources confirm what is known from previous confessions, but certify what crossed his life as a red line, his passive resistance, "my passions are limited to reading, bridge and chess issues", a declaration given at the Security in 1982, but with precise goals. The source I. C. Dragan reports that the objective CORNEL "was inimically manifest, several times, against the superior party leadership and the members of the presidential family".

Iron Guards and Communists

We cannot include Senior Corneliu Coposu in the epoch without deciphering, even if roughly, the position towards two ideological systems which marked the epoch in which he lived. At an age close to these ideologies fell victim the future great men of culture, Mircea Eliade, Eugen Ionescu or Emil Cioran.

"I could never have hard feelings for other people because they were Hungarians or Jews", he confesses in a post-December interview. (see *In fata*, p. 190). I

had iron guard friends. But I have always considered their mysticism and fanatic nationalism a little too childish. The great vogue of nationalism appeared somehow logically. After the beautiful union of Romania, the youth woke up without ideals. The generation called "The White Lily" appeared, Eliade, Noica, Cioran, Tutea and others. All of them were rightwinged, not necessarily iron guards. And among the iron guards there were also both paranoid people and honest people, but I found their manifestations silly. There were also many girls in the Movement. All of them, ugly and full of complexes, would reach a place where they were given importance."

In his opinion, the same thing happened with the communists. "It was the same thing with the communists. It was all about the wish of being noticed". (ibidem). A right wing appeared even in the party that he served, the Vaida Voevod line, of which Iuliu Maniu outdistanced. Corneliu Coposu remained loyal to the Maniu line, roughly kept even after December '89.

About Communism as a Historical Epoch

Corneliu Coposu treated communism as a short and inefficient experiment. "I have always had the certainty of the fall of communism and its country, but I expected this to happen much earlier", he confesses five decades later. (see *In fata istoriei*, p. 82)

He had the curiosity of becoming familiar with the communist ideology from the inside, not from imported communists, but from the source.

In an article appeared in the *Dreptatea* newspaper, on the 26th of May 1946, entitled *Talking to a communist*, (ibidem, p. 51), Corneliu Coposu reproduces a dialogue with a genuine communist of the year 1946, in a moment when the Soviet occupation troops were in the country. His dialogue partner "an honest man, with convictions acquired through studies and consolidated through renunciations and suffering", but, as we shall see, cynical and unscrupulous when it comes to Power and, *mutans mutandis*, deprived of patriotism. "I respected his courage of honest opinion, the brutality of confession which most of us avoid and

the sincerity with which he defended an ideology that we thought it was so wrong."

"I admit that we are a meaningless political minority. But we shall accomplish electoral majorities", the left winged advocate confesses, mentioning at the same time the methods through which the Communists will access the power. On the one hand, by creating a maneuver mass made of "traitors, political swindlers, collaborationists, all in all the rottenness of the Romanian public life." On the other hand, by applying the principle that "the crowd must be stirred, even against its will".

What kind of political ethics absolves you to organize the Terror and the political persecutions, the intolerance and violence which have nothing in common with democracy?, would have asked Coposu. "There is no morality in politics, the communist activist mentioned, the class and party interests come first" and consequently, the author of the interview mentions <it is legitimate and there will be applied the entire arsenal of class fighting, beatings, assassinations, organized terror and other condemnable means of taking over the Power!?!>

About Nation, People and Providential Men

"History is not written by the resigned but by the audacious. Nations live through them", the 23 year old young man wrote prophetically in 1937, in a confused historical period. It was a historical moment of vacillation, confusing for the young, wisely characterized by the young man who was at the age of his first lessons of political culture, of initiation as a zoon politicon. We live a moment when "an entire nation starts to shake and weaken. A suspicious, illegal element slides in the simplest relations. Qualities are negotiated in an unhindered way. Virtues borrowed the mark of anachronism. Everything depraves. The liveliest, the most judicious spirit is lost in Byzantine subtleties" (...), and "all the composition is heading to plunging." (*The Corrective of the Paradox, In front of History*, op. cit., p. 476-477).

"The most terrible slapping of the human dignity is the chain" used to say with a painful premonition the son of the protopriest of Bobota, but there comes a time when "common people don't feel its shameful

shackle. Habit wears off sensitiveness." Corneliu Coposu depicted with a lot of plasticity the sad icon of the years before the second great world conflagration.

"There are dark ages in the history of each people, during which the entire aggrieved nation crawled helplessly its chained feet on the road of moral renunciations." It is the moment when the providential men of the nations must enter the scene, "the men of honour and courage", the audacious ones. But "sometimes the decades, even the centuries, are stingy with names of tribunes." *THE TRIBUNES*, because they are the ones that we are talking about "are usually rare and in a small number, the ones who choose a different way from the one that the crowd craves for. For such deviations, a big dose of political sense and an even bigger one of heroism are necessary." The leader, the man who is great indeed, "is like a meteor which shines and consumes itself while lightning", only that "the crowd does not always have the power to declare solidary with him, to fight by his side, to sacrifice at the same time with him". (ibidem, p. 477)

Therefore, there are worthy crowds and less worthy, cowardly crowds. In the first case, the only one that

young Coposu takes into account "there are great epochs, where the majority, if it is worthy, draws nearer to the way of life, to the way of the dignity of the nation, and goes on the bright line of history, next to its CHOSEN MAN; in other epochs, - if they are cowards, - the majority turn away from his way, more difficult, more dangerous than others, he is the nation itself; he speaks in the name of history", says Corneliu Coposu who concludes like a genuine democrat that even in the case of the cowardly crowds, "the leader has only one duty, besides that of following his destiny; the duty to convince the crowd of his justice".

The history of Romanians is full of examples of men of honour and courage. In an essay published four years later, "1848", he sent "humble feelings of submission to the Blaj of the three national gatherings in 1848, to Iancu's cross which guards the height of the hill in the north, to the Plain where the rush of the delivering revolt was leavened and to the Rock of Liberty, pervaded by the historical shivers of our tragic aspirations." "Mentioning them is an act of integration in the pride of the past of whose loftiness our generation proved to be so unworthy, and an act of verifi-

cation of our destiny in order to face the dark future". The heroes of 1848, "the dead from the past remain beyond death the guides and guardians of the Romanian destiny".

"Dominations and reigns are temporary. The worthy nations enjoy immortality the nations go ahead, over obstacles, on the way of their destiny. The predecessors' greatness blends with the life of the present and of the ones that are to come", Corneliu Coposu explains the victories of the past.

Against those who commit crimes on behalf of the people, "the defenceless walls are painted with urges to crimes, with capital sentences dictated by "the people". The real people is another one, "in front of these little people, disguised in the toga of the prophets of the future, stands up our nation, that stays unflinchingly in the position of the great commands of the Romanian destiny; the real people stands up with its entire virtue, with the conscience of its rights, with the determination to protect its peace and home". (ibidem, p. 39)

What is a people? "The people is not a crowd, the people does not lurk on hidden lanes with a loaded

revolver. It does not deal with devastation either", writes Corneliu Coposu who is convinced that "the longing of destruction, the ferocious hatred, the political crime are unknown to the soul of our nation." (op. cit., p. 38-40) Hence the organic need of Freedom. Because "the real freedom is the transposition in the political ground of the biological need of motion. The right to do what you want, within the limits of the law, without any external constraints, or not to do what contradicts your convictions, is called freedom".

His conclusion is natural "The nature of the Romanian people is begotten of sun and freedom. In order to lead its life authentically and honestly, with love and diligence, our People needs freedom. Freedom itself is the spiritual foundation of the Romanian people". (op. cit., p. 46)

The Complex of Dishonesty

Corneliu Coposu lived in the communism period like his ancestors in the enslaved Ardeal. His convictions remained unchanged; they rather fed with the ideals

of the Suplex Vallachorum epoch and of the Revolution in 1848. He remained dismayed to see that after four decades of communism, the Romanian people had another moral profile. Cooperativization and the peasant's separation from the land, the forced industrialization, the systematic indoctrination made the man in the street change his identity. The idols of communism took the place of some moral features that had consecrated the Romanian people. For the common man, duplicity and lying, means of resistance at the beginning, will become a way of living. And since habit is a second nature, in four decades and a half, mentality had changed exceedingly.

"The 45 years of communism inculcated in people's minds the complex of dishonesty. Two generations that were born and brought up under the communist regime, were educated under the aegis of the lie. These people knew that one had to think something and express something else. This complex is still present. (...) unlike this category of people, I had the luck to stay in prison while the population of the country was practicing the complex of dishonesty. I did not assimilate it and I believe that the obligation of a per-

son responsible for a certain political situation is that of being honest and firmly affirming his principles, without making small calculations over the opportunity of an attitude", he says in an interview appeared in June 1994, with the natural conclusion that "principles are not negotiable", opining that "the most suitable democratic shape for the difficult events that our country is facing, is the restoration of the Constitutional Monarchy." (In fata istoriei, p. 198)

White Lilies and Pelargoniums at the Window

Life and politics are two expressions of the same conscience. The righteous man and the clean conscience are part of the totality of virtues of the great men of the nation. "The righteous man does not listen to the voice of conscience", Corneliu Coposu wrote on a fragment of Plato's Dialogues. His conscience cannot be shaken neither through the infamy thrown over him, nor through persecution. He will walk, unflinchingly, until his death, on the paths enlightened by this

conscience. . . " Prophetic words which will be his shield and guide along his entire existence.

"Principles are not negotiable. The conceptions of those who define politics as a chain of compromises, although they can find correspondences, lead to nowhere. The ethical element must prevail in the political life too. Respecting your own principles is a *sine qua non* condition of a person who wants to be a political man, not only a politician. (ibidem, p.10). His entire experience as a political man, but also of the dozens of tribunes who sacrificed their lives for an ideal, is concentrated in a few phrases.

The political man must listen to his own conscience but also obey the Dictatorship of the principles. "As far as principles are concerned, of course it comes many times to compromises on a tactic line and on strategy. But the moment one makes a compromise on the line of principles, this is condemnable."

The providential man must be "incorruptible, mystical and moral", according to the portrait made to Iuliu Maniu whom he considered in an interview for *Tineretul Liber* in 1991 "the brightest expression of the authentic Romanian spirit in the interwar period

and the exponent of the real tendencies of Romanian independence under all circumstances, in all conditions", and as an ideal, democracy based on law, politics – on ethical principles. Corneliu Coposu is convinced that "man without faith is not a complete man". This is only one of the reasons for which he made an option for Christian – Democracy.

"I consider that without pelargoniums at the window, that is, translating in a free language, without consistency and morality, valid politics cannot exist. Of course, there can be, under special circumstances, the pseudo-politics made by some people who are only bound by the pragmatic interests of the moment and who have no other preoccupation but the prolongation of their agony, of their political rule" (from an interview appeared in 1994 in *Viata Buzaului*). Political men do not till pelargoniums at the window, "they favour vanities and tendencies of prolongation of a terrible agony of the country."

His poem written in prison, Ruga , sums up a part of his life philosophy:

sift, dear God, the peace of oblivion
over the endless pain
sow fields of faith
and enhance the dew of ruth

plant, dear God, love and lilies
on the field flooded by hatred
and lay over the mountains of dross
peace, forgiveness and serenity

The Penitentiary of Total Isolation

*Motto: "It was horrifying many times, but I am a serene man... But for the 8 years of isolation..."
Corneliu Coposu about his prisons.*

"People with the appearance of beasts who lower themselves to violent acts do not have the feeling of reality, of the existence of the world. They are capable of anything, even of the destruction of some existences, without thinking, giving freedom to their instincts and the aggressiveness guided by the blind discipline and the daily obedience to which they are subordinates. There is something threatening about the inexpressiveness of their faces." (Ramnicu Sarat) This is one of the few texts kept since the years of detention quoted by the author of the most complete work dedicated to the Senior, Tudosie Calin Zarojanu, Viata lui Corneliu Coposu, with documents from the archive of the former Security, p. 172.

We cannot talk about Corneliu Coposu ignoring "the last period of isolation", the Ramnicu Sarat prison. He obsessively mentioned, in any interview or evocation, the Ramnicu Sarat prison where, in his opinion, the detainees were the political guinea pigs of some Stalinist experiences. "They were not Soviet soldiers, they were professional guards and had an Asian complexion. Many jail officers were Romanians, because the Ramnicu Sarat prison was some sort of pedagogic seminar where they were brought to learn methods of torturing the detainees." (interview appeared in Revista 22, November-December 1994). Corneliu Coposu spoke with detachment about his torturers who used to beat him with iron bars and sacks of sand, and sometimes he tells with humour about the lock-up days. "Sometimes we would challenge them to hit us too", he remembers when a waggish and illiterate gaoler from the Aiud prison treated him like an ordinary "bandit".

The completely dark memories are related to the Ramnicu Sarat prison. When he was telling about "the jail from Ramnic", his face would change and a strange suffering would cover his body. Total isolation,

penalties on absurd grounds, chronic hunger, group beatings. An entire Marxist laboratory of extermination kept up with harshness by the guards with Lom-brosian complexities.

How Corneliu Coposu Went to the Ramnicu Sarat Prison

Corneliu Coposu "paraded", according to his own expression, through almost all the prisons of communist Romania for 17 years and a half. Until 1955, when he was judged by the Military Tribunal, Corneliu Coposu had spent in prison 8 years, without a trial, on the basis of a so-called administrative penalty. On the 7th of August 1957, when he went to the Ramnicu Sarat Penitentiary, Corneliu Coposu had got to know all the great communist prisons: Malmaison, Vacaresti, Pitesti, Jilava, Gherla, Sighet, Aiud. The exact itinerary of the prisons, according to Zarojanu, p. 53, starting with 1947 was the Ministry of Home Affairs, Malmaison, Vacaresti, Snagov, Pitesti, the MHA, Craiova, Uranus, the MHA, Jilava, Malmaison, Midia, Ghencea,

Bragadiru, Popești-Leordeni, the MHA, Uranus, Jilava, Gherla, Sighet, Aiud, Ramnicu Sarat, the MHA, Rubla – house arrest.

Questioned for hours, beaten and tortured, Corneliu Coposu refused any kinds of compromises. In all the penitentiaries, a "mood synthesis" was made monthly for each detainee. The Security did not have as an objective the reeducation of some detainees, but their extermination. Maniu's nephew, as he was known in the communist penitentiaries, had to have the exact fate of the NPP leader, the only party of the masses, literally and figuratively, in the interwar period.

Until his internment in the Ramnicu Sarat prison, Corneliu Coposu permanently turned out to be "an extremely dangerous element". The informative notes from the Security archives are hilarious. The prison directors wanted to get rid of him as of a seed of evil. "A refractory element", Corneliu Coposu avoided the penalties skillfully or bore them stoically, but continued his destructive work, "leading from the shadows the activity of sabotage".

The first dark period was the imprisonment in the Craiova Penitentiary. "I was walled up in the cell for

eight months out of an exaggerated interpretation of the order of severe isolation which had been given by the center", he remembers in a post-December interview, p. 83, *In fata* In September 1948, Corneliu Coposu was transferred to the Craiova Penitentiary as "a SECRET detainee". His torturers thought it was appropriate to isolate him for good and all and walled up his cell! But he dug a tiny tunnel to the neighbouring cell where he discovered professor Hudita, an excellent table companion and an ideal dialogue partner.

At the colony "Midia Cape" where he was transferred in November 1950, his evil genius horrified the torturers. The interned Coposu Corneliu would often carry out his work ratio but had persuaded the others to "sabotage the production"! In an informative note since March 1952 owed to an informant colleague it was mentioned that Coposu is the only one working out of all. I don't care about what he thinks, there are others for that, but I am satisfied with the fact that he works." On the other hand, at the colony from Midia Cape, Corneliu Coposu founded a real network with the exterior. In 1952, the network was working

so well that at the search Corneliu Coposu was caught with cigarettes and prince Serban Ghica was caught while eating sponge cake!

Nonconformist and inventive, always looking for solutions, he would either "mislead" his guards, or humiliate them, getting in return a "portion" of lock-up. Here are some episodes sedulously registered by the informants of the former Security where we meet famous figures such as Radu Campeanu or prince Serban Ghica. (Notes quoted in *Viata lui Corneliu Coposu*, p. 65-71)

"From the material obtained during the month of March, (1952 – a.n) from the informants, who surround informatively the above named interned, it results the following: interned Coposu Corneliu continued to have further inimical manifestations against the actual regime, as well as against some measures which the administration of our colony took concerning the building site work, all the time, although he is pretty well-built and physically strong he does not have any interest in working and at the same time, he is trying to expand his propaganda to sabotage the production.

Besides the people shown by us with report No. 75, interned Coposu Corneliu also surrounded himself by a series of reactionaries and he is the one who conducts the entire reactionary work in our colony. These interned people are: Dumitrescu Gheorghe and Mal-darascu Aurel, people who had functions in the bourgeois state apparatus, all these people signaled both in February and in January, help him with food and cigarettes from their parcels which they receive from home, and referring to the food that the colony gives he says that this is not food and it is simply for people's extermination, which created in his detachment of which he makes part to bring about an agitated mood among the interned and to lower the production.

Concerning the illegal reception of aids until now we could not establish with whose help he received aids from the outside, and legally he does not receive as he makes part from the special lots of iron guards and they do not have the right to letters, parcels and the speaker."

The security agents' conclusion was that "interned Coposu Corneliu is a refractory element, all the actions that he leads, he leads them from the shadows

through his trusty elements, and he is the front ranker of all the actions of machination in our unit, reason for which we requested in the mood synthesis from March that together with the elements of his kind to be transferred in a penitentiary with severe cell conditions of penalty execution."

During the following month "the political criminal interned Coposu Corneliu continued to have further inimical manifestations, leading from the shadows a whole series of interned in order to sabotage the work on construction sites and especially at the work point "Luminita", where the above named worked in the last period of time. Gathering around him a series of interned people who were shown by us in the previous reports he obviously tried to sabotage work by leaving the railway unbordered (the beams) covering them with stones with the purpose of causing the derailment of the train that was going to pass on this newly-built railway with the occasion of the 1st of May."

Corneliu Coposu was enlarging day by day the series of subversive meetings, on the list of collaborators always appearing new names such as Radu Campeanu.

"Permanently having various meetings and discussions with a series of interned front rankers of the NPP and iron guards from this colony, this fact determined us to suggest several times the transfer of these top rankers in a penitentiary with a hard cell regime of penalty execution. Not receiving a positive answer and since the situation was worsening through production decrease on the building sites, which was planned by interned Coposu Corneliu through the interned: Campeanu Radu, Ghica Serban, Surugiu Mihai, Pavlov Iona and others that had been signaled by us."

The colony securists requested even the approval of the Center of Coordination in Constanta to build a series of cells of the Penitentiary type, "at our suggestion made to Comrade Commander of the Colony these interned, foremost of whom Coposu Corneliu, were isolated in the specially built cells, fact which was reported by us in both the mood synthesis in April and in report no. 160 on the 3rd of May (c.y.) thus somehow managing to improve the mood in this colony and especially among the interned in the special groups of iron guards."

The effect of the isolation in the colony was the quassin, the informants' notes keeping their line for the following months. "In order to know in detail all the inimical manifestations and the activity carried out by the political criminal interned Coposu Corneliu in this colony, we add a number of 9 (nine) notes obtained from our informants who surround the above called interned and also from some informants who do not surround him but who notice his inimical activity".

The informants' conclusion is unanimous, "the criminal interned Coposu Corneliu continues to keep his old reactionary position, still leading an inimical activity against our regime, stating that they will bear any treatment, no matter how severe it may be, because there is not much time left until they get rid of this suffering because the U.N.O. armies will liberate them. Considering the fact that a series of interned in the det. of the iron guards say that they would prefer to be isolated in the same cell with the interned Coposu Corneliu and the reactionary front rankers, we suggest however that these interned iron guards and NPP frontrankers that we signaled several times to be

transferred to a Penitentiary with severe cell conditions".

In repeated informative notes, the boards of directors of the penitentiaries anxiously requested to get rid of "the refractory" person that gathered around all the beings in the colony. "I requested (...) that together with the other elements of his kind to be transferred in a penitentiary with severe cell conditions of penalty execution" the director from "Peninsula" informed his superiors.

"My period at the <channel> was interrupted the moment the political management of the camp selected a few people, among who I was included too, who were sent to Ocnele Mari as penalty for work sabotage", remembers, four decades later, Corneliu Coposu.

On the 8th of June 1952, qualified as instigators, Corneliu Coposu, Serban Ghica and others were brought in the sorting camp in Ghencea from where, after approximately three weeks, they were sent to the Bragadiru farm to cull tomatoes. After the summer campaign, the transfer to Military Unit no. 4, Ocnele Mari, is issued for isolation and cell regime.

From one prison to another, there were 15, in 1957, the political criminal interned Corneliu Coposu was transferred to the "prison of absolute isolation", Ramnicu Sarat. In the 34-36 cell-penitentiary his torturers will try to apply the obsessively repeated desideratum, "isolation and cell regime". But "the chosen ones" were destined to triumph at the Ramnicu Sarat prison too! The journey on Golgotha had started again!

The Number-Detainee

The period of detention at Ramnicu Sarat changed the data of the equation. A tiny penitentiary, isolated from the town, placed nearby a cemetery. A neogothic construction, built at the end of the 19th century for relatively light penalties and minor crimes. But the former prison of the country had a rich record, under Carol II, during the night of 29th to 30th of November 1938 14 detainees were hung to death and one year later, in the morning of the 22nd of September 1939, other 14 detainees were shot in the prison yard having their feet chained.

After the revolution in Hungary and the closing of the Sighet prison, the former Antonescian ministers, generals of the Romanian army, high prelates, NPP leaders, will be brought to Ramnicu Sarat. The NPP leader Ion Mihalache, the number 1 enemy of the communist regime, had been at Ramnicu Sarat since the autumn of 1955.

Gradually, the cell will be occupied by high Roman-Catholic prelates foremost of whom the future cardinal Alexandru Todea, Antonescian ministers, philosopher Ion Petrovici, general Constantin Pantazi, a former war minister, the general commander Gheorghe Jienescu, subsecretary of the Ministry of Air, general Gheorghe Dobre, former Finance minister, counter admiral Horia Macellariu, general Ion Eremia but also the survivors of the Maniu group, Corneliu Coposu, Victor Anca, Ion Diaconescu.

The detainee completely loses his identity and becomes a simple figure. The rule was applied in the other detention penitentiaries too, but at Ramnicu Sarat it was guided by the principle of complete isolation. In this prison, the guard or the superintendent addresses, rarely however, a number. Ion Mihalache,

for example, was no longer a name but a number, 51. One of the eye-witnesses confessed that he could make the difference between the political prisoners only after their age and the colour of their hair. But for two or three people, commander, political officer, the names of the people in the penitentiary were unknown. If there had not been the behaviour charts that had to be filled periodically, the secret would have probably been total.

The figure-person had a lot more reduced freedom of motion, similar to an animal in a cage. The cell, 2,5/3 meters, was hermetically closed up. The small window, besides being placed too high, was covered by a shutter. The chance to see other suffering fellows was very small. George Manolescu, a political prisoner from Ramnicu Sarat who bore the hard detention conditions, remembers that he needed a few weeks to understand that he was not alone: "The guards would wear feet shoes and would look discretely through the visor, there were no other signs of life. After three weeks I went out for a walk and I found a stub, a sign that I was not alone". This happened in 1955, two or three years later, when the other "dangerous ele-

ments" appeared, isolation became more perfect.

Even if, theoretically, beating was forbidden, refusals to obey the strict isolation rules were harshly punished. Corrections were exemplary and took place in group. In an interview given to Roxana Bradalex (*Memoria* magazine, no. 25), Corneliu Coposu wonders rhetorically: "I have always been astonished by how some people could be determined to torture their fellows with no reason at all. For them, we were numbers; they had no idea who we were. One of the questions that torture me is almost an obsession, what could they have possibly told those people to make them enter Mihalache's cell – who was 82 and could not move – and beat him. Or in Radulescu-Pogoneanu's cell, who was half paralyzed and whom they used to beat in his bed."

Regulation of Non-Violent Terror

Extermination conditions, total and permanent isolation, guards wearing felt shoes who would watch the detainee through the visor and would punish him

for the smallest rule violation. Everything started from a regulation, with capital R, equally absurd and inhumane. The first contact of the political prisoner with the jail consisted of learning this internal Regulation. The rules were simple, but difficult to comply with. The monocell conditions, with one political prisoner in each cell, made it easier. The daily programme was very clear. Getting up at 5 o'clock in the morning and going to bed at 10 o'clock in the evening. Here is how Ion Diaconescu describes the rules at Ramnicu Sarat: "After waking up, the detainees had to make their beds following a precisely indicated technology and from that moment on, until 10 o'clock in the evening, they were not allowed to touch them". Other confessions and declarations demonstrated the drama abode by the political prisoners who would violate this interdiction. Penalties would bring another period of isolation, five or seven days in "the black" with their feet enchained and food at every three days.

When 64 years old, counter admiral Horia Macellariu addresses in a memorial to the management of the Penitentiary General Direction. "In this health and age condition, I am obliged to comply with a hardened

execution regime because of which I am not allowed, if needed, to lie down daily for 17 hours and the diet – which I had at the Aiud penitentiary because of my disease – is suppressed.” Most of them ill, old, in pain and, moreover, hungry, the political prisoners were forced to sit on the little chair 17 hours facing the visor. Violating these rules would cause further penalty days, as we said, another kind of isolation. Further penalty days were given for simply dozing off.

The obligation to sit on the chair, with the eyes pointed at the visor, was followed by other interdictions: “You were not allowed to make noise in the cell, which could have been heard by the neighbours, you were not allowed to climb on the window and you were not allowed to knock or even touch the walls in order to try to make a connection with the other detainees” (Ion Diaconescu). Other restrictions concerned the plates and dishes: “...after eating, the mess kettle and the spoon were taken out of the cell so that we could not keep any metallic objects, and generally, no objects at all, except those with which the cell was equipped.” The measure was taken so that the detainees would not try to commit suicide or use

the tools to communicate with the others.

In the reports written on the grounds of this regulation, of an endless cruelty, exemplary penalties were requested. Thus, Ion Mihalache is given in February 1959, on a frosty day, the penalty of 7 day isolation and food given at every 3 days for “mounting and closing the window without reporting”. “For trying to get in touch with the detainee in cell 34, I suggest 4 days of isolation”, it was written in a report in January 1960, and during the same year, “for saying his name without being asked” Ion Mihalache was punished with five days of isolation.

Monocell System

Such rules circumscribed the purpose of the devilish system of detention, the political prisoner’s isolation from both any signal from the exterior and the guards and fellow detainees in the penitentiary. “According to the measures taken, registers Ion Diaconescu, the detainee didn’t have to see any human being, besides the guard on duty who would do his morning tour

without saying a word".

One might think that these are simple exaggerations due to the prolonged detention, if these restrictions hadn't been confirmed by the prison personnel. Dumitru Rusu, the medical orderly of the prison, confessed that director Visinescu was caught off guard the moment a detainee was talking alone. He was going to be severely punished when he confessed that he was talking alone "not to lose his mind". The famous torturer is said to have accepted this reality, but he certainly made only an exception. The restriction of some human contacts would continue with the food served by some orderly duties who "would place the food in front of the door, and after they left, the guard would open the door and you would reach your hand and take the mess kettle without getting out of the cell".

The system of total isolation would aim at either the destruction of the personality or it was a preparatory step in the reeducation action. Those who got to know the detention system from Ramnicu Sarat, only with rare exceptions, willingly gave up their own principles and adhered to Marxism. The first ten detainees thus

reeducated left the penitentiary in 1958. Among them, two former ministers of the Antonescu government, Aurel Dobrescu and Ion Petrovici, who abjured and completely switched sides. Other political prisoners, who experienced the isolation system, will get a second chance. It is Ion Mihalache's case. The NPP leader will refuse the liberation proposals in exchange for abjuring NPP, and action for which the red patriarch Justinian Marina had worked so hard too. Moreover, starting with 1959, he will denounce the system for psychic terror, declaring an unequal war to the penitentiary administration. A way of protesting against the penitentiary conditions at Ramnicu Sarat, but also a suicidal gesture.

Regular Searches

The political prisoners were intrigued by the great number of searches that were made at Ramnicu Sarat. Ion Diaconescu even speaks about daily searches, a statement which was not confirmed by other detainees. One thing is for sure: the prison administra-

tion had the obsession of the contacts with other detainees or with people from the exterior. Political prisoners were subjects of body search even in the rectum, the place where one could hide a pencil tip or a small piece of paper. In 1962, Corneliu Coposu received a 5 day isolation penalty because he was caught unwinding thread from the pillow case. During their rare walks in the penitentiary yard, the detainees would find a piece of tin or wire, objects which were violently confiscated by the guards. The searches also had the role of putting down from the beginning any kind of humane track of contact between "the bandits".

The Behaviour Charts

One of the guards' and superintendents' daily pre-occupations, as well as the political officer's, was that of filling in the Behaviour Chart, of the detainee's mood synopsis. Even since April 1947, Gavrila Rusu, the director of penitentiaries, sent a note to Ramnicu Sarat, (The National Archives of Buzau, Ramnicu Sarat

Penitentiary fund, file no. 4/1947) in which he requested, especially in the case of cell conditions, a behaviour chart. "How is the penalty execution regime applied? How many detainees executed cell regime (...) Will you show, at the same time, how the detainees regard the execution of the cell regime? How do they execute this regime (obedient – disobedient)? How do they wait for the expiration of this regime? How do they regard the stroll hours? How do they regard the other detainees? How are they regarded by the other detainees? The behaviour charts will become more important starting with the moment the cells will have new occupants.

The Personal Micro-Universe

The political prisoners made superhuman efforts to save their mind. The chance of most of them was the knowledge of the Morse code, and improving it in other prisons was of great help. Those who did not know it, could not communicate, such as Nicu Adamescu's case, and succumbed. Isolation destroyed

the strength of resistance, the morale and they preferred to die. For the others, the hunger for information was more important than the real hunger. The acoustic signals from the outside were extremely rare. Witnesses remember either Christmas and New Year's Eve carols, which could not be forbidden, or a radio which was turned up by a merry neighbour. Even Ion Mihalache's protests, who had declared war to the management, were included in the communication chapter. A thing unknown by Ion Diaconescu, but confirmed by guard Dumitru Rusu, is the reason for which they would take out of the cell the plates and dishes after each meal. Rusu states that Morse transmissions would be made regularly before 1957, by means of plates, a thing that Ion Diaconescu could not have known...

The Language of the Objects...

The most intellectually endowed political prisoners managed to discover a new language. Just like deaf and speechless people manage to get the real world

closer to them, new signs of communication are discovered in the systems of isolation. Ion Diaconescu remembers (op. cit., p. 239): "We had learned to interpret the slightest noises on the hall, we would feel when the detainee in that cell or the other was taken out for his walk, when food was brought or when someone was inspecting the place". Cardinal Alexandru Todea had similar experiences. "In a penitentiary, the detainee's senses develop by sharpening towards everything that his situation concerns in the sense that he sees, hears and feels better than in normal life" (Memoria, nr. 2)

"Prison, considers Corneliu Coposu in an interview given to Memoria magazine, is an exercise to train your own patience. There, patience exceeds any imagination, I experienced it myself". He exemplifies the Ramnicu Sarat experience. "I did not talk to anybody then, I did not eat bread for years, I did not see sunlight and, of course, I did not have a pencil or a piece of paper or fire to get warm."

Survival Techniques

At the Ramnicu Sarat prison, turned into the fortress of absolute silence, the political prisoners made appeal to all sorts of methods to break isolation. Communication was the key of any success, that is why they accredited the idea that the hunger for information was greater than the hunger itself. Two of the survivors, Corneliu Coposu and Ion Diaconescu, remind various ways of communication which remade the idea of family and were the combustion that allowed them to resist. The destruction of the spiritual springs, the main target of the Ramnicu Sarat experiment, was postponed every day. Each word, each phrase – understood or at least suspected – was the daily food necessary for survival. From the regular Morse code through knocks in the wall to coughed or thread Morse code – are just as many attempts to break through the wall of isolation. "During the rest of the period spent in prison, confesses Corneliu Coposu to Doina Alexandru (op. cit. p. 114), while I was alone, I could check some distinct characters (...) I was in monocell arrest at Ramnicu Sarat. There, of

course that the occupants of the cells were known, after some experience, in the order of the respective numbers. One would know everything that was going on because all the movements were attentively watched, one would know after the creaking of the hinges (s.n.) when the door of cell no. 15 or 2 opened. The detainees would communicate through the Morse code for a long time. Most of them, including the old, Mihalache for example, had learned the Morse code and would make efforts to transmit and receive various indispensable information. At a certain point, the coughed Morse code was used. Usually, the communication between two neighbouring cells could be made through the wall. If you were not a neighbour of the person that you wanted to communicate with, you would cough in the Morse code, which was extremely difficult."

The inventiveness of the communicators was divers, from real emissions by means of coughing, to simple messages, by means of jolting the mud on the boots or transmitting an adhesion of registration in the NPP on general Jienescu's behalf on threads with dots and lines marked with coal from the stove.

Communication through Morse, not deprived of adventures, allowed the miracle of eucharist and the salvation of the mind. Like holy water, a message from the Ramnicu Sarat prison, no matter how unimportant, had the gift of sanctity and increased the chance of survival of the last opponents of the communist regime.

CONFESSION - CORNELIU COPOSU

The 17th of November 1991

● If political prisoners had had a Golgotha Hill, it would have been called Ramnicu Sarat!

On the Romanian map of the martyrdom places, I believe that Ramnicu Sarat comes on the first place. I, who knew all the prisons of the communist regime, can say for sure that the Ramnicu Sarat prison was the harshest. 32 detainees, out of whom only 5 lived, were watched by 60-70 guards and a few hundreds Milia and Security officers who would make experiments on "the political guinea pigs". Ramnicu Sarat surpassed all the famous prisons: Zarea from Gherla, Zarea from Aiud, the Teresian prison in Suceava, through its harshness. Ramnicu Sarat was the most horrible place of imprisonment that the communists had invented. Especially through the applied methods of an absolutely incredible savagery.

● Vasile Luca Was Protesting in the Name of the... Leninist Principles Against Beating

An example would be the use of beating for the maintenance of the so-called discipline. Without any justification, headsman (foreigners, speaking an Asian language) would enter the cell and beat the detainees until they lost consciousness. Beating people who had a certain strength was nothing, but they would also beat Ion Mihalache, who was 85 years old, or Radulescu-Pogoneanu who was semiparalysed. They would beat us all, of course, while Vasile Luca had the ridiculous outburst to protest in the name of the Leninist principles against beating. Of course, his protests were not understood by the headsman who did not speak Romanian, but he thought it was right to protest in the name of the humanitarian communism. A war minister, a few front rankers of the NPP leadership, residents of the former Antonescian government, ministers and Roman-Catholic bishops, but also Lucretiu Patrascanu and Titel Petrescu were imprisoned in the Ramnicu Sarat jail. Although they would apply the monocell system, of total isolation, I knew almost all of them...

● Cough, as the Morse code

In order to correspond with the other detainees, I would use various ways. I kept in touch by means of the Morse code until I was discovered. Then I used cough as... the Morse code, something exceedingly difficult. For example, you wanted to cough a word: each letter cost an outstanding effort, especially in the extremely bad state that we were. And yet we managed to communicate, prolonging the transmission for two or three days, we had learned by hearing to identify which cell opened, each door having its particular creaking. But the most difficult thing for me was to notice, in the silence of the prison, which way the guard was heading... The surveillance on the visor was almost ceaseless. We were not allowed to sit on our beds except between 10 o'clock in the evening and 5 o'clock in the morning. The total lack of activities was obsessing. In order to withstand the numerous hours of isolation, you had to look for activities.

Very many detainees would make arithmetical calculations, would solve problems with three unknown elements. I wrote a few thousand poems and trans-

lated an encyclopedic dictionary in French. In mind, of course, as I did not have pencils or paper. Our clothing was limited to underclothes and that fur coat which did not offer enough heat. We would sometimes receive a cloak and a bonnet, foot wraps and boots. As a funny incident, I wore almost three years two left boots. I drew attention on the matter and asked them to change them for me but they answered that they were not interested!

But we suffered the most from the lack of food. We were given the same food twice a day, with no bread at all. Instead of bread we would receive a cake made from besom seeds, scalded and baked in the oven.

● **Ion Mihalache Thrown Naked in the Pit**

Ion Mihalache died in 1963 in the Ramnicu Sarat prison, where no medical assistance was given. Of course, to his condition contributed both the detention conditions and the diet. Slowly, because of starvation and the inhumane brutalities to which he was exposed, he died. Like the other deceased detainees, he was thrown naked in a marshy cemetery so that their bones can never be recovered. After many years

I met as a free man the former torturers. Unlike them, who were terrified and were trying to disappear, I looked at them with sympathy, thinking that if they got to such humane degradation, they cannot claim the quality of a human being. I am convinced that they are not worth at least an attempt of revenge for the crimes that they did. They would feel honoured if they were given the attention of revenge.

● **When I Got Out of Prison, I Had Forgotten How to Speak!**

If I hadn't been an optimist, I couldn't have survived. In the last eight or nine years of imprisonment, the detainee's diet was especially made to exterminate him. We were given 400-500 calories a day. When I was arrested, in 1947, I weighed 112 kilos (I was a weightlifting university champion, the heavy category) and when I got out I only weighed 51.

Almost all the elder generation died in prison because of these conditions. The lack of food, the lack of some elementary conditions of hygiene, often without a doctor and medicines, the lack of heat (I spent eight winters isolated with no heat at all!) these were also elements of extermination. For eight years I could

not utter a word and when I got out of prison I had forgotten how to speak!

TESTIMONIES About Ramnicu Sarat

● Rodica Coposu – **When he got out of prison, he looked like a ghost.**

"He went in prison weighting 112 kilograms and got out weighting 52, being 1.92 meters tall – I saw him three weeks after he got out of prison. He was wearing a shirt which was fluttering just like the shirts on the scare-crows in the fields of wheat, he was completely shaved on the head. I'm telling you something that has obsessed me for years and which I have told many times, but that I cannot forget – he was shaved on the head and you could see through the scalp the joints between the cranial bones, as we had learned at the anatomy classes in school. You could see them very well in his case, as you could see his teeth through the lips and he had very large edemas on his ribs and knees. He got out with hunger edemas of the IIIrd and IVth degrees; this is how the doctor diag-

nosed him, a prison fellow as well, who was under house arrest there." (Interview with the Senior's sister, appeared in Viata Buzaului, at the 10 year-commemoration of his death)

Here are some terrible testimonies about "the hell" at Ramnicu Sarat between 1947 and 1963 for those who still refuse to believe the truth about the communist prisons:

● Ion Ovidiu Borcea "Ramnicu Sarat was the most tragic prison by means of its conditions, unique because of its harshness and duration. If Pitesti was characterized by collective violence, Ramnicu Sarat excelled through individual death in "the conditions" of the a la longue extermination, another devilish method invented by the K.G.B. tools."

If it does not have the celebrity of Aiud, where I have also been until 1957, it is owed to the fact that the prison is infinitely smaller and had on its conscious a smaller number of detainees sent there to never return. It is not the same thing, dying in a cell with 4 or 5 other people around, and dying alone, after years

of...torture. It was the road with no return, the prison without hope, from where we, the ones who left, were taken out by a miracle unforeseen by the communists. A torture or a pain can be shared and can be coped with more easily in a group than only by yourself, when you start to forget the day count, and you count the years according to the pass of the seasons. And if you add to that grave-like-silence in the 36-cell and 36-detainee prison, where not even the guards had chairs to watch day and night, the hunger, the cold, the isolations, the loneliness, the count of the dead, the lack of information, the unknown of the following day, the sinister silence and the lack of hope, you are left with the only "success" that you did not hook it before your fellow, your best friend did.

● **Nicolae Steinhardt** in "The Happiness Diary" describes a scene that he witnessed: "He comes from Ramnicu Sarat, where he lived six years (five to be more exact), alone in the cell, subject to a starvation diet, he ate the straws in the mattress (torn) on which he slept, eventually all of them, only the sack

cloth was left. Ion Mihalache died in the nearby cell after he had gone blind." "This MAN, who was an example of behaviour, did not die of natural death. He was deliberately assassinated because he would continue to remain a symbol of the Romanian resistance. He protested countless times, making the whole penitentiary sound. The political officer and commander Visanescu would permanently beat him, they created conditions for him to get sick and did not give him medical assistance. They would enter and throw water on him with the bucket in the middle of the winter. I watched his cell through the six holes that I had made in the door with a wire. They would beat Ion MIHALACHE every day until he died. If I hadn't been there, this testimony would not exist. Now that I am a free man, I have the duty to announce this assassinate committed by commander Visanescu. The cries: "Brothers, this is Ion Mihalache. They are killing me!" sounded daily in the penitentiary. This murder cannot be forgotten".

● **Augustin Visa** is telling: "I was taken to the

first floor, in a small cell, with a bed, a three legged table, a small bench, a vessel with water and the tub... The door was of massive iron, with a visor and an opening for the food mess kettle. A small window with the shape of a crenel brought in the tiny room an opaque light. I see that the ceiling is made of thick, corrugated iron over which there was brick covered with asphalt, so was the floor... they took off the cuffs on my feet. They had tried to cut the rivets for two days. The chisel was blunted and the anvil was moving under the hammer blows. They didn't have a jigsaw. I had awful pains... There was silence everywhere as if in a cemetery. The guards had felt shoes so that we couldn't feel them, so that they could supervise the interior of the cells without being heard".

● **Ion Diaconescu:** "The isolation measures, that not even the Security used, overcame any imagination, the detainee was not supposed to see any other human being, but for the guard on duty who was in the morning shift, without saying a single word. Those who served us food were orderly duties

but, in five years and a half, the time I spent there, I did not get a glimpse of any of them, not only once... Nobody would enter our cells alone, they would always be accompanied at least by the guard on duty, so that the possibility of any discussion between people could not appear... They had created a perfect draconic system to destroy all our spiritual springs. That is, the ones who had survived the periods of starvation and torture extermination were going to be psychically destroyed by means of these unseen measures of isolation... But wickedness had no limits, on the contrary, the more important a detainee was considered, the harsher the treatment was, meaning that he was considered a dangerous enemy of the regime and had to be eliminated somehow!..."

● **Victor Anca** summarises the Ramnicu Sarat experiment: "The conditions at Ramnicu Sarat were of a savagery that the mind of a sane person cannot believe that were possible. This was the product of the animal-man, made by the totalitarian regime. Reading nowadays the literature about the extermination

nation camps in the Marxist USSR and Hitlerist Germany, we, who have survived Ramnicu Sarat, see that communist Romania under Gheorghiu-Dej wasn't below in any way and it had its Beria, Dzerjinski, Himmler, Eichman or other horrid criminals – ours were called Alexandru Vişinescu, Alexandru Nicolschi, Pantiuşa Bodnarenco or other names as sinister as these ones. (in Ion Diaconescu, Cicerone Ioniţiu, Prin ungherele iadului comunist-Râmnicu Sărat, Bucharest, 2007)

Moral România

Corneliu Coposu was one of the brightest personalities of moral Romania. Unforgiving at 20, patient at 30, serene at 80.

"You were not a state president, or a minister, or an army commander, or an academician and not even an ambassador. But you did not need these titles to make your name well-established and respected everywhere", the ambassador of France in Romania, Bernard Boyer, said at the awarding of the National

Order of the Legion of Honour of the French Republic. Complex through his simplicity, great through his modesty, majestic through his intransigence and unabdication from his principles. He wanted only one dignity, that of a man of character, that of a Man with capital M. In a nutshell, one of those men of the nation who loved their country and believed in its historical destiny. The foreign analysts noticed his personality more exactly and reproduced it more graphically. Maybe because they understood that "such people are born at every half of a millennium." According to Lech Wallesza and Soljenitin the Era of the political experiments passed and along with it the era of the great heroes of history.

The political guinea pig in the Ramnicu Sarat prison will be a Tribune of contemporary Romania in a country destroyed by vanities and ambitions for Power.

"A giant among people" David Funderburk, a former ambassador of the USA in Romania, said at his death, "a genuine champion in the fight for liberty and democracy". The same person concluded "he was a patriot, in the real sense of the word, Romania lost one of its greatest values and a political character of

maximum integrity."The political guinea pig from the Ramnicu Sarat prison defeated the torturers and followed his destiny like the great Tribunes of the nation.

Corneliu Coposu proved his verticality under all circumstances. Especially as a winner. He spoke about his torturers without hate and wish for vengeance. "I don't hate them, but I don't understand them either!" Corneliu Coposu said harshly. (P. 188, *In fata*) But he kept an endless pain towards the colleagues of suffering, towards the millions of innocent people thrown after bars. "A piece from my soul remained there, near the friends that died, a part from my life is still there... Maybe a piece from the history of this nation..." (p. 187, *In fata*)

He died the same way he lived, on the barricades of the ideals, on duty. He did not spare himself until the last moment. His sister, Mrs. Rodica Coposu, was wondering rhetorically, at the ten-year commemoration of his death, "why he did not protect himself at all,

considering that he was ill". The answer came naturally. "He did not want any kinds of dignities. He had a creed which he followed and gave his life for this creed."

"Everything is about the survival of an attitude. If it triumphs, my disappearance is no longer important", the Senior confessed shortly before the Great passing away.

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Corneliu COPOSU, a SENIOR of the Romanian GULAG

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