

The Romanian Germans and the Securitate Heritage. An Outline of the Problem and Research Potential

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Abstract

This article deals with the efforts to assess the Securitate files, while focusing on Romanian German writers. I address, on the one hand, the explanatory power of this type of source and, on the other hand, the effects which the opening of secret service archives has had on a specific group, in this case the Romanian Germans. On the basis of an analysis of the media discourse regarding the unofficial involvement of Romanian-German actors in the Securitate that is centered around concepts of “guilt”, “justice” and “legality”, I will outline the most important problems in the process of coming to terms with the Securitate heritage: the uncertain explanatory power and the hardly manageable amount of sources, the (delayed) need to come to terms with both the national-socialist and communist past as well as the deep involvement of affected persons in the process itself. As a potential way out of these dilemmas, I will apply a professionalized instrument of analysis to this problematic type of source, which involves a stronger focus on comparable cases and issues which overcome the ethnocentric perspective.

Their names were “Moga”, “Stein Otto”, “Cristina” or “Sorin”. Behind these aliases were well-known personalities from the Romanian-German community – authors, intellectuals, teachers and journalists. After the archive of the previous Romanian secret service Securitate was opened, it was possible to learn more about their secret lives hidden behind these aliases. They were unofficial employees (*Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter, IM*), on the one hand, or observed and betrayed persons on the other hand – and frequently enough both in one: simultaneously victims of and collaborators with the regime; blackmailers and blackmail victims, opportunists or men of conviction. Many of them had already been suspected of cooperating with the Romanian secret service before the archives were opened. Nevertheless, friendships and mentor relationships, many of which had lasted for many decades, fell apart after the files were read.

This painful process of coming to terms with the Romanian-German history only just began a few years ago, approximately two decades after the collapse of the Eastern Block: The strong emigration of Romanian citizens of German ethnicity to the Federal Republic of Germany, which lasted from the 1970s to the early 1990s, not only brought easily employable

workers to Germany, but all the problems these people were burdened with under the authoritarian system as well. As long as the secret service archives remain closed, the dark spots in many biographies only existed at the level of assumptions and suspicions. When it emerged in 2010 as a result of the opening of archives that the lyricist and Georg-Büchner prize-holder from Transylvania, Oskar Pastior, was active as an informer for the Securitate in the 1960s, this set of problems reached a broader public in the Federal Republic of Germany for the first time. It became clear that it was neither a purely “Romanian” problem, nor was it merely a memory of a dark past: the gloomy Romanian-German history spans to the present and also became a German issue, at the latest when German jurisprudence began to play a role.

THE SECURITATE AND THE ROMANIAN GERMANS

Due to the collapse of the Danube Monarchy and the transition of previously Tsarist Russia into the Soviet Empire after the First World War, several regions with groups of German settlers were separated ¹ and attributed to the

¹ The Bukovina from the Austrian part, the Banat and Transylvania from the Hungarian part of the dual monarchy as well as Bessarabia from Russia.

emerging “Greater Romania”. Only gradually did these denominationally, culturally and spatially entirely disparate groups identify with the concept of “Romanian Germanness” and they only became closer to one another as a result of the racist and nationalist promises of National-Socialism and later due to the repressions of the communist regime.

After the upheavals of the Second World War this was limited almost entirely to the Transylvanian Saxons and Banat Swabians. Around 350,000 of the approx. 750,000 counted Germans (1930) with Romanian citizenship had remained in the country, while the remaining Germans resettled or were evacuated during the war or were deported to the Soviet Union for forced labor after the war. Nevertheless, Romania remained a country with many ethnic minorities, in particular Hungarians, various Slavic groups, Germans and Jews.

The Romanian secret service Securitate was founded in 1948 under Soviet leadership. According to the official foundation decree, it was supposed to guarantee the security of the Romanian People’s Republic and defend it against all domestic and foreign enemies.² From the perspective of the newly established communist regime, the Germans living in Romania after the Second World War were, so to speak, both at the same time: as Romanian citizens they were potential *domestic* enemies. In contrast to other countries with German minorities, in which expulsions and murders occurred after 1945, the Romanian government generally strived for the (re)integration of “its” Germans. Nevertheless, the Romanian Germans were viewed as a collective group,

² Helmut Müller-Enbergs: Bilder einer Ausstellung. In: Katharina Kilzer, Helmut Müller-Enbergs (eds.): Geist hinter Gittern. Die rumänische Gedenkstätte *Sighet Memorial*. Berlin 2013, p. 76.

which avowed itself to the “mother county” Germany and became deeply mired in the national-socialist ideology and activities, and as national “*externals*”. In the best case, they were seen as a “cohabitating nationality”, in the worst case as “foreigners” despite their Romanian citizenship, whose ethnonational affiliation with “Germanness” always raised doubts about their loyalty to the state.

During the Stalinist period, this generalized skepticism was reflected in the construction of conspiracy theories among the ethnic minorities, in particular the Hungarian minority. Against this background, several group trials occurred against relatively randomly constructed groups within the German minority. However, these intimidation and disciplinary measures were not only restricted to minority groups, as Romanian “class enemies” were also antagonized. Two widely known cases affecting the German minority that have been partially openly dealt with are the so-called “Black Church Trial” (1958), which targeted a group of Transylvanian Saxons suspected of ideological deviation, and the Braşov authors trial (*Kronstädter Schriftstellerprozess*) (1959), in which five Romanian-German authors were indicted.

At the latest after Nicolae Ceauşescu came to power in 1965, the Securitate changed its strategy and transformed itself from a more or less openly applied terror instrument of the Communist Party to a subtly acting organization, which infiltrated the society through concealed, targeted actions against individual persons and groups. A well-developed system of informers not only provided for information, but also for a permanent feeling of mistrust and insecurity. This fed the desire of many Romanian citizens

to emigrate, not only those of Romanian-German origin. Those who did not practice self-censorship and anticipatory obedience were made compliant through blackmail as well as preferential treatment and enticements of a material nature. This was the Romania that the Romanian Germans left in the 1960s and in particular in the 1970s on the basis of bilaterally arranged quotas negotiated by price.³ They had the “poison” of the Securitate in their baggage, because many of them were committed informants, while some even remained in the service of the Securitate after their departure.

COMING TO TERMS WITH THE PAST: THE EXAMPLE OF PASTIOR

After the 1989 revolution, the Securitate archives initially remained closed. The delayed process of dealing with the past is closely related to the fact that the collapse of the communist regime and the quick execution of the married dictator couple, the Ceaușescus, in December 1989 did not lead to a true democratization of the society. Instead officials loyal to the system (even if hostile to the Ceaușescus) from the second and third tiers came to power. This pertains above all to the party official Ion Iliescu, who had been disgraced and “hibernated” as a publishing house director in Bucharest from 1984 to the transformation phase, before soaring back in late 1989 as a “revolution winner” to become the President of Romania. He held this office, which left him considerable leeway to influence political developments, from 1989 to 1996 and from 2000 to 2004. During his final term in office, he prevented the effective opening of the Securitate archives, even though a corresponding law had

³ See Hannelore Baier: *Kauf von Freiheit*. Sibiu 2013.

already been adopted in 1999. A year later the CNSAS (*Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității*, Eng. National Council for Studying the Archives of the Securitate) was created. Similarly to the Office of the Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Records of the former German Democratic Republic (BStU), this state institution has the task of organizing archives and scientifically accompanying the process of coming to terms with the Securitate heritage. Personally affected persons were accordingly only allowed to view their own file after 2005, if it could be found. Approbated researchers can read all files, if they have been released. As a rule, mentions of persons are blackened out by employees of the CNSAS before the files are released. (However, it is still not hard for insiders to align these black spots with concrete persons based on the context.)

The *Südostdeutsches Kulturwerk* (SOKW-Southeast German Cultural Society), an institution based in Munich and founded in 1951 to research and communicate the history and culture of the Germans originating from the Danube-Carpathian region, seized the initiative in the early 1990s and published the first analysis of the persecution of Romanian Germans by the communist regime entitled “*Worte als Gefahr und Gefährdung: Fünf Schriftsteller vor Gericht. Kronstadt 1959*” (Words as a danger and endangerment: five writers in court. Brașov 1959).⁴ “Self-testimonies” – reports from contemporary witnesses as well as literary analyses of the events in 1959 and their consequences were juxtaposed with analyses of the trial records, if they were available. The authors deliberately demonstrated how difficult it is to build on

⁴ Peter Motzan, Stefan Sienerth (eds.): *Worte als Gefahr und Gefährdung. Fünf deutsche Schriftsteller vor Gericht*. München 1993.

reports from contemporary witnesses and documents, which originated under extreme ideological and institutional pressure:

The author of the article on the author's trial was able to draw on the trial records when clarifying several issues. However, is it not imperative to be doubly cautious with this matter? Based on the Communist-Stalinist practices of legal terror, events that belong to the past are twisted, custom-tailored and simplified; a course of events suitable to the prosecutor is dictated a posteriori on "reality", from which the "guilt" of the defendant is determined a priori. Testimonies can be extorted, elicited, misappropriated and turned into the opposite. The giving of evidence is a mockery of any legal foundations. And they do not shy away from any efforts to embed the image of certain persons or groups in the records, which is desired by the rulers and passed onto their "world thereafter" as such. The contradictions, falsifications and distortions are truly eye-catching when comparing the accessible trial records. They speak a gloomily eloquent language of a repressive-aggressive 'line of argument' and provide insights into the mechanisms of the inhuman, totalitarian exercise of power.⁵

Despite these and subsequent initiatives, the Romanian-German side only began to address the fate of the Romanian Germans in communist Romania – which according to the author of the volume from 1993 the "West German media remained scandalously silent about"⁶ at a later point in time. In 2009, the Romanian-German lyricist and director of the Hessian Literature Forum based in Frankfurt/Main, Werner Söllner, publically admitted that he was an unofficial employee of the Securitate

"against his will"⁷ in 2009 at a conference of the IKGS, the SOKW's successor institution, in Munich⁸.

However, if we look back at the first decades of dealing with the past, it is apparent that the warning given already in 1993 to trust neither the transmitted records, nor the newspapers did not entirely reach the actors involved in the process. The precept of caution remained a commitment, even though it was not overly evidently reflected in the research design – if one existed. This is particularly evident with the example of Oskar Pastior, whose activity as an unofficial employee became public in 2010: In the 3/2009 edition of the cultural and scientific journal "*Spiegelungen*" an article about Pastior's Securitate file written by then director of the IKGS, the literary scholar Stefan Sienerth, was published. Essentially he gives a commented account of the content of Pastior's personal file with the Securitate.

Pastior, who died in 2006, was posthumously awarded the Georg-Büchner Prize several weeks after his death. This shifted even greater attention to Romanian-German literary works, which were already known due to him and author colleagues such as Richard Wagner or Herta Müller, but were not yet widely acknowledged. Even though most of the literature was already written in Germany, this nearly comet-like ascent of a "German in exile" by origin was affirmed by the awarding of the Nobel Prize for Literature to Herta Müller from Banat in 2008, to whose book *The Hunger Angel* ("*Atemschaukel*") Pastior had strongly contributed until his

7 <http://www.zeit.de/kultur/literatur/2009-12/werner-soellner-securitate>, 10 October 2015.

8 See Gerhardt Csejka, Stefan Sienerth: *Vierspiegel Securitate. Rumäniendeutsche Autoren im Visier des kommunistischen Geheimdienstes*. Regensburg 2014.

5 Motzan: *Gefahr*, p. 14.

6 *Ibidem*, p. 9.

death. The discovered records of Pastior's written declaration of collaboration with the Securitate was thus a small sensation: at this moment, the fatherly mentor of the resistant Herta Müller apparently turned out to be a collaborator of the communist regime.

The carefully interpreted passages of this study, which can be regarded as a key document in the relevant discourse, show how difficult it is to provide information on the intentions, extent and effect of informer activities on the basis of the Securitate files. Along these lines, Sieners warns, on the one hand, about too quickly condemning the lyricist, who operated in the files as "Stein Otto":

The information that 'Otto Stein' may have delivered to the Romanian communist secret service between June 1961 and April 1968, when he made the decision not to return to Romania after a visit to Austria and settled permanently in the Federal Republic of Germany, cannot be determined now. There is extremely little information in his file.⁹

On the other hand, he discusses what *cannot* be found in the file: "During all these years no single effort by Pastior to reject collaboration with the Romanian secret service or to do anything to free himself from this mental burden can be observed."¹⁰

Nearly simultaneously while already reacting to Sieners's study, Ernest Wichner – an author, translator, director of Berlin Literature House (*Literaturhaus Berlin*), and Pastior's "long-time friend and excellent connoisseur of his work"¹¹ – published an article in the

Frankfurter Allgemeinen Zeitung, which was also dedicated to Pastior's file. All in all, Wichner comes to the same conclusion as Sieners: there is only one single report in Pastior's file with "denunciatory" content.¹² On the same day, 18 September 2010, the first reactions of the Literature Noble Prize Laureate Herta Müller were published. After initially being "startled and angry as well"¹³, she came to the defense of her friend: "I do not have to distance myself from Oskar. I am just as fond of him as I was beforehand."¹⁴ The writer Dieter Schlesak, who saw himself as the "last witness of the Bucharest era (1961 to 1968) when Herta Müller and Ernest Wichner were still children", did the same a few days later. In view of the "exceptional circumstances" at that time, he showed understanding for the fact that Pastior succumbed to the invasive Securitate: "a terrible state of fear on a daily basis, sleeplessness, trembling during telephone calls, waiting for the 'commanding officer', looking around in the 'pub'." Schlesak was certain: "This late reemergence of the devil Securitate cannot damage my friendly feelings towards Oskar Pastior after his death now!"¹⁵

"Cases" such as the one outlined here certainly did not come out of the blue from the academic, literary and media sphere, but rather were anticipated on the basis of indications, assumptions and insider knowledge originating from Romania. An article about the lyricist Georg Hoprich already

9 Stefan Sieners: Ich habe Angst vor unerfundenen Geschichten. In: *Spiegelungen* 5 (2010), Vol. 3, p. 253.

10 Ibidem, p. 255.

11 <<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/autoren/oskar-pastior-und-die-securitate-die-spaete-entdeckung-des-im-otto-stein-11043791.html>>, 5 October 2015.

12 Ibidem, 5 October 2015.

13 <<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/autoren/nobelpreistraegerin-herta-mueller-im-interview-die-akte-zeigt-oskar-pastior-umzingelt-11043761.html>>, 6 October 2015.

14 <<http://www.zeit.de/politik/2010-09/pastior-securitate-mueller>>, 5 October 2015.

15 <<http://www.zeit.de/2010/39/Oskar-Pastior>>, 18 October 2015.

was published in 1990 in the *Südostdeutsche Vierteljahresblätter*, the journal of the SOKW: "He was set free after his conviction and incarceration for many years, but was never freed from the constraints of the communist state security service of Romania." He took his own life in 1969. Just like the author of the article, the person who wrote the final words at the end of the short article, which rendered one of Hoprich's poems and his "notice of assessment" along with introduction, also remained anonymous: "The poem 'Schweigen' (Remaining silent) was leaked to the Securitate by a 'friend'. Georg Hoprich died because he spoke the truth."¹⁶

Schlesak was also referring to this short summary that is restricted to allusions, which insiders indeed were able to interpret, when he published a text on 16 November 2010 after the first wave of media attention to the Pastior case, in which he now de facto posthumously terminated the friendship he swore to him in the first text. This article was already a reflection on his study of his own Securitate files and those of "Oskar Pastior and other perpetrators or victims and perpetrator-victims"¹⁷, in which Schlesak explicitly faults the previously unnamed Securitate informer – Oskar Pastior – for Hoprich's suicide:

A single poem had first cost [Hoprich] his freedom and then his life. This characterized the dangerous, and indeed deadly situation of literature at that time. Those who read

16 "Die wirre Nacht ist nicht verraucht...". In: *Südostdeutsche Vierteljahresblätter* 39 (1990), Vol. 1, p. 14 (anon.). In Dieter Schlesak's blog entry from October 27th, 2010 Hans Bergel revealed his authorship of this article: <<http://schlesak.blogspot.com.au/2010/11/aus-hans-bergel-existenzgeiel.html>>, 5 October 2015.

17 <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/themen/oskar-pastiors-spitzelberichte-die-schule-der-schizophrenie-1582944.html>, 5 October 2015.

the allegedly harmless 'note informative' from 'Stein Otto' regarding 'Schlesak Dieter' nowadays, must recognize that 'modern poetry' was the 'ideology' of a purportedly subversive anti-state group in the eyes of the Securitate. Pastior only did not know that, rather told the Securitate what it wanted to hear and provided 'evidence' by means of betrayal of his friends. [...]. Is that possible? Can Oskar Pastior spit on and betray himself this way? He could – out of cowardliness.¹⁸

There were vocal reactions to this emotional tone: Stefan Sienerth urged "prudence and caution in dealing with these strange records"¹⁹. By contrast, the Banat author (and Herta Müller's ex-husband) Richard Wagner described Pastior as a "master of duplicity" in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*:²⁰ "In such a situation fear it is not only understandable, it is also entirely legitimate, but does not legitimate anything, not even denunciation. Fear is not a blank cheque and homosexuality is not either, even if it is regarded as a crime."²¹ – The issue of morality became a theme.

The "revelations" and the resulting discourse regarding Oskar Pastior's biography raised a series of questions, which had already been answered for German domestic history two decades beforehand when considering the relatively extensive efforts to come to terms with the Eastern German past. Nevertheless, these questions should be asked again for the sake of dealing with the Romanian-German case: First the question should be clarified what exactly an informant did, how much

18 Ibidem.

19 <<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/autoren/interview-mit-dem-historiker-stefan-sienerth-der-mensch-pastior-muss-neu-bewertet-werden-11064732.html>>, 7 October 2015.

20 <<http://www.nzz.ch/vom-nachlass-zur-hinterlassenschaft-1.8414825>>, 5 October 2015.

21 Ibidem.

information he revealed and whether the denunciation exceeded the necessary extent (in order to not endanger oneself). Was it only fear that made him a perpetrator or personal interests as well? As for Pastior, the range of answers to these questions spans from the motivation of the already mentioned accusation of having caused a suicide (a suggested competitive relationship with the lyrically equally highly talented Hoprich comes to play here) to Wichner's determination that "Otto Stein" did not have any "fervor to denounce" anyone: "There is no evil and good Oskar Pastior, the betrayer and the great poet; he remains the single person who maintained a minimum degree of decency even under coercion."²²

The question of the "extent" of guilt is closely related to the reflexive urge to draw comparisons with other perpetrators: In an article published in the *Tagesspiegel* entitled "Dichtung und Verrat: Das Gleiche ist nicht Dasselbe" (Literature and Betrayal: What is equal is not the same), Ernest Wichner reached deeply into the "poison cabinet" himself in order to exonerate Pastior. He mentions the real names of the unofficial employees "Ludwig Leopold", "Ehrlich", "Filip", "Gert Grundich" and "Moga/Marin" and calls on them to incriminate themselves: "Perhaps the unofficial employee 'Walter' will eventually gain the courage to tell us his legend in the lee of the unequally more famous informant."²³

When the widely acclaimed Herta Müller says during an interview about a university lecturer who reported the most about the Pastior "He was homosexual, like Pastior. One wonders whether he is taking revenge for personal

reasons"²⁴, her word has more weight than that of a usual witness of the *time*, but seldom a witness of the *crime*. An "outsider" may ask him or herself whether the "insider" has more information than the undiscerning reader of the files, or whether this is some kind of apologetics in the form of an unconfirmed assumption.

Furthermore, the question has been raised in the concrete Pastior discourse whether his works now need to be re-read. This is a discussion in the field of literature, which by no means can be regarded as secondary with respect to a Büchner prize laureate. The not so subtle question to be asked was: Did Pastior already offer indications of the guilt which he burdened on himself in his lyrical works? For Siennerth, it was only the person, and not the author Pastior, who should be reassessed.²⁵ Wagner had a similar opinion, even though he believed that Pastior's link between the world and literature, which formed a basis for ethics, had been severed: "His poems endure formally, but they do not have a moral echo; one can continue to read them but they do not say anything – not because they refuse to do so, rather because they are not allowed to reveal anything."²⁶ Wichner, by contrast, viewed Pastior as a person who put literature above everything and whose "hasty liberation" from his identity as the unofficial employee "Stein Otto" to the poet Oskar Pastior "can only be comprehended in his books of poetry".²⁷

²² <<http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/dichtung-und-verrat-das-gleiche-ist-nicht-dasselbe/3917738.html>>, 4 October 2015.

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ <<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/autoren/nobelpreistraegerin-herta-mueller-im-interview-die-akte-zeigt-oskar-pastior-umzingelt-11043761.html>>, 5 October 2015.

²⁵ <<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/autoren/interview-mit-dem-historiker-stefan-siennerth-der-mensch-pastior-muss-neu-bewertet-werden-11064732.html>>, 5 October 2015.

²⁶ <<http://www.nzz.ch/vom-nachlass-zur-hinterlassenschaft-1.8414825>>, 7 October 2015.

²⁷ <<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/>>

An additional dimension of this discourse which oscillated between the concepts of *justice* and *justification* led to a further well-known case by means of a verdict of the Higher Regional Court of Munich. In the final instance, it was decided that the defendants, the literary scholar Stefan Sienerth, the *Siebenbürgische Zeitung*, the official media outlet of the Association of Transylvanian Saxons, and the author Richard Wagner no longer may make and spread the claim that the writer and ethnologist Claus Stephani operated as an unofficial employee for the Securitate under the aliases “Moga” and “Marin”.²⁸ As the publicist Sabina Kienlechner reports in her essay “*Der arme Spitzel. Die rumäniendeutschen Schriftsteller und das juristische Debakel der Securitate-Aufarbeitung*” (The Poor Informant. The Romanian-German writers and the legal debacle of dealing with the Securitate past) in *Sinn und Form* 2014, the justification for this is that the definitive proof of a match between the alias and perpetrator – in this case the defendant – could not be produced²⁹. Thus there were not only issues of *justice* and *justification*, but now also concrete *legal* issues as well.

The problem of the (lacking) reliability of sources is once again apparent here: during some phases of the Securitate regime and in

[buecher/autoren/oskar-pastior-und-die-securitate-die-spaete-entdeckung-des-im-otto-stein-11043791.html?printPagedArticle=true#aufmacherBildJum pTarget](http://www.buecher/autoren/oskar-pastior-und-die-securitate-die-spaete-entdeckung-des-im-otto-stein-11043791.html?printPagedArticle=true#aufmacherBildJum pTarget), 15 October 2015; see also <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/autoren/nobel-preistraegerin-herta-mueller-im-interview-die-akte-zeigt-oskar-pastior-umzingelt-11043761-p2.html?printPagedArticle=true#pageIndex_2>, 15 October 2015.

28 Sabina Kienlechner: *Der arme Spitzel. Die rumäniendeutschen Schriftsteller und das juristische Debakel der Securitate-Aufarbeitung*. In: *Sinn und Form* 66 (2014) Vol. 3, p. 310.

29 Ibidem, p. 311.

certain constellations of power, the reports did not have to be signed. In addition, they were often put in writing by the superiors on the basis of a conversation. In these cases – oral statements given under very problematic circumstances are left somewhere in-between observation and written form. The fact that the German court had access to written reports from the Romanian CNSAS, which confirm the identity of the aliases and real names, but ultimately could not prevent the injunction, points to an additional migration-related dimension of the complex issue of the Securitate and Romanian Germans: from a legal standpoint, German society has little to do with the misconduct of the temporally and geographically distant communist Romania and thus does not see any connection with regard to further legal succession measures. The categories *law* and *justice* did not even marginally touch each other in this case.

CONCLUSION

At the latest in autumn 2010, the discourse regarding the entanglement of Romanian Germans in the machinations of the Securitate was no longer an exclusively endogenous Romanian-German matter, even though most of those involved in the discourse are still of Romanian-German origin. The publishing and academic world began to deal more intensively with the “lessons to be learned” from the Romanian Germans. On the one hand, this group is small and can be conveniently studied. On the other hand, the “sample” has proven to be large enough to draw generalizing conclusions for scientific purposes. In addition, it is affected by issues, which are of general societal importance for the 20th and 21st century: group affiliation, the effects of two dictatorships, migration and integration.

Thus, a relatively large share of the public is observing how the Romanian Germans are undergoing a painful process of coping with the past, which opens up new wounds time and time again, instead of bringing about the reconciliation initially hoped for. Several factors outlined on the basis of the examples above contribute to this very problematic situation of addressing the past from a scientific perspective:

1. The quality of the sources: the study of the communist period as the history of authoritarian regimes, in particular the perpetrator and victim perspectives, is based, as already hinted, on written records that are very difficult to deal with. Secret service files are written for superiors, and not for researchers, and memories fade away. What remains is an extremely problematic set of records with unsigned reports, files that are incomplete or cannot be found, or files that are claimed to be incomplete. Therefore, a historical interpretation based to the greatest possible extent on a methodologically sound mixture of sources must be carried out.

2. The large quantity of material: The “poison cabinets” are largely still unopened and still contain enough explosive material, in order to prevent a “reconciliation” of any kind that puts an end to the process. The resources for a systematic approach are lacking, which means that the pieces of the mosaic are only put together randomly and on the basis of subjective criteria.

3. Dealing with two authoritarian regimes simultaneously: The Romanian Germans also have only begun to intensively analyze the National-Socialist era. The efforts to simultaneously come to terms with “non-simultaneous” authoritarian experiences and the necessity to deal with both regimes to a similar extent complicate a concentrated

debate, but also open up possibilities for a holistic approach.

4. The hardly moderated involvement of both indirectly and directly affected persons: their insider knowledge and in some cases personal animosities “imported” from Romania, which are abetted in a small community such as that of the Romanian Germans, bring a cognitive bias into the discourse, which is very comprehensible from a personal standpoint, but transcends by far the normal degree of emotional identification of a researcher with his or her object of research.

It is an entirely legitimate thought for those affected to demand *justice* for past misdeeds, in particular when they lead to fractured or even failed biographies. It also must be assured that the “perpetrators” can explain themselves, if one does not want to fall for the same methods as the past regimes, which essentially eliminated the freedom of opinion. What is more difficult to implement and not the goal of research is the approximate congruence of *justice* and *law*.

The written word thus remains a “danger and endangerment”, while the process of dealing with the past on the basis of the Securitate files will remain painful. However, a professional instrument for analyzing this problematic type of sources could alleviate the process. An example of this is the discussion held at the conference “From the poison cabinets of communism. Methodological questions on working with surveillance files in South-Eastern and Central Europe”, which was jointly carried out by the IKGS, the Humboldt University of Berlin and the European Network Remembrance and Solidarity.³⁰ It is imperative to conduct a thorough analysis of the repressive apparatus and its actors, who

30 Conference blog: <www.giftschrank.net>, 7 October 2015.

produced these files, before the multifaceted explanatory power of the relevant texts can be determined. Besides the international comparative approach, in particular in view of research on the East German Stasi, it will be important to take an inter-relational historical perspective, as demonstrated above all by Georg Herbstritt in his analysis of the Stasi files regarding Romania and the Romanian Germans. One desideratum is the opening of the archives of the Romanian foreign intelligence service though. This additional angle would facilitate a more comprehensive picture of the processes during that period.³¹ In order to gain a better overall picture, the focus must be directed away from individual persons to institutions and their relationship to the regime – and in particular the question how attempts were made to infiltrate church organizations³² and how great the willingness of religious communities was to cooperate with the regime. Were there some free spheres after all in this system of surveillance and repression – and can they be identified by reading the secret service records? Examples of this can be found in the church community as well as in youth culture or in the literary scene. Furthermore, the value of the records for historiography beyond secret service activities must be assessed: Can secret service reports be fruitful for writing individual and collective biographies? Can the records also tell a story about everyday life? The perspective of and towards minorities, whether they

are religious, linguistic, ethnic or groups marginalized beyond visibility such as punks, homosexuals, or religious sects, enables us to illuminate these issues “from the edge” and promises additional knowledge and insights for research on dictatorships. With regard to the short, exemplary discourse analysis on the “Pastior case”, the history of the impact of the opening of the Securitate archives gradually must be discussed.³³

In order to facilitate this development, the responsibility for the administration of the “poison cabinets” must ultimately become a pan-European matter. Embedding the subject in broader contexts not only leads us away from the ethnocentric victim myth, but also makes comparative and inter-relational historical approaches possible. Both goals – coming to terms with history individually and collectively and distanced scientific research – by no means exclude one another, rather can productively complement one another – so that the focus will not be on what “Moga’s” or “Cristina’s” real names were for all eternity.

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31 Herbstritt published several publications on this topic: <<http://www.bstu.bund.de/DE/Wissen/Forschung/Mitarbeiter/herbstritt.html>>, 15 October 2015.

32 A relevant project is currently being carried out at the IKGS: “Strukturen, Strategien, Methoden und Mechanismen der Unterwanderung und Hörigmachung der Evangelischen Kirche A. B. in Rumänien im kommunistischen Staat (1945–1969)”.

33 For a critical approach regarding the discourse of *Aufarbeitung* see e. g. Michaela Nowotnick: “95 Jahre Haft”. Kronstädter Schriftstellerprozess 1959: Darstellungsformen und Deutungsmuster der *Aufarbeitung*. In: *Halbjahresschrift für südosteuropäische Geschichte, Literatur und Politik* (2012) Vol. 1/2, pp. 173–181.

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