

THE ‘ENEMY ELEMENTS’ – THE LEGIONARIES THROUGH THE EYES OF THE COMMUNISTS. A CASE-STUDY: *SCÎNTEIA*

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Abstract: The totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century assigned a central role to the written press, transforming it into a decisive instrument for achieving political objectives. In the case of the communist dictatorship in Romania, the dissemination of propaganda, essential for reshaping society and instilling the doctrine, was conducted through publications controlled by the Romanian Communist Party. The party's main press organ, *Scînteia*, operated illegally during the interwar period, only to be suspended under the National Legionary State and the subsequent military dictatorship. The newspaper reemerged in the public sphere after the events of August 23, 1944, and continued to be published without interruption until the fall of communism in 1989. This study focuses on a less explored dimension: the image of the far right as constructed by the communist regime in the pages of *Scînteia*. The Legionary Movement was regarded by the communist regime as one of its principal enemies, while the struggle against fascism served as a key source of the regime's legitimacy. Articles and speeches on this topic abound, particularly during the first two decades of the dictatorship, though references to legionarism became more sporadic toward the regime's end. The study examines three key aspects: the drawn representations of the Legionary enemies, both in terms of the movement's leaders and of ordinary foot soldiers; the accusations leveled against former members; and press coverage of the major trials brought against the Legionaries.

Keywords: Legionary Movement, communist Romania, *Scînteia*, legionary representation, propaganda

Rezumat: Totalitarismele secolului XX au atribuit presei scrise un rol central, devenind un instrument decisiv pentru atingerea obiectivelor politice. În cazul dictaturii comuniste din România, diseminarea propagandei, vitală pentru transformarea societății și inocularea doctrinei, s-a realizat prin intermediul publicațiilor aflate sub egida Partidului Comunist. Organul principal de presă care a servit intereselor partidului, *Scînteia*, a funcționat ilegal în perioada interbelică, fiindu-i suspendată activitatea în perioada Statului Național Legionar și pe durata dictaturii militare. Ziarul a revenit apoi în spațiul public după Actul de la 23 august 1944 și a fost distribuit fără întrerupere

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până la căderea comunismului, în 1989. Studiul de față are la bază analiza unui aspect mai puțin abordat, și anume imaginea extremei drepte construite de regimul comunist în ziarul *Scînteia*. Mișcarea Legionară a fost considerată de dictatura comunistă drept unul dintre cei mai importanți dușmani, lupta împotriva fascismului devenind o sursă de legitimitate pentru regim. În primele două decenii ale dictaturii, regăsim în abundență articole și discursuri pe această temă, intervențiile cu privire la legionarism devenind însă sporadice spre sfârșitul regimului. Studiul urmărește, în principal, următoarele trei elemente: portretele schițate inamicului, ale liderilor mișcării și ale legionarilor de rând; acuzațiile aduse foștilor membri ai mișcării; precum și relatarea în presă a principalelor procese intentate legionarilor.

Cuvinte cheie: Mișcarea Legionară, România comunistă, *Scînteia*, imaginea legionarului, propagandă

I. Introduction

Scînteia (Eng. trans.: *The Spark*), the newspaper that set the national political line throughout the communist regime in Romania between 1947 and 1989, published an article in May 1945, during the trial of the first fourteen journalists accused of war crimes¹. The article reflected the Communists' indignation at the press's ability to negatively shape public opinion: "Propaganda can influence public opinion (...) Hence the great importance of informative material and of newspapers, in particular, which are within the reach of the broad public. Through unchecked statements, repeated in various forms day after day, to the point of saturation, a given theme of propaganda eventually comes to be accepted by public opinion as self-evident truth, gradually becoming a powerful idea capable of stirring passions and unleashing hatred"². Ironically, although this description perfectly reflected their own practices, the Romanian Communists vehemently condemned the interwar press, in which "ordinary murderers and thieves were portrayed (...) as 'legendary figures', as 'heroes chosen by destiny,' or as 'direct emissaries' of Divinity"³. The far left

¹ The journalists were charged with the following crimes: collaborating with the former dictatorial regimes between 1938 and 1944; adopting anti-national and anti-democratic positions; and "contributing to the creation of a climate favorable to the subjugation of the country". Among those indicted, owners, editors, or contributors to far-right newspapers, were: Stelian Popescu, Pamfil Șeicaru, Ilie Rădulescu, Ilie Popescu-Prundeni, Alexandru Hodoș, Romulus Dianu, Nichifor Crainic, Romulus Seișan, Pantelimon Vizirescu, Aurel Cosma, Grigore Manolescu, Gabriel Bălănescu, Vladimir Christî, and Sergiu Vladimir (Mihaela Teodor, *Anatomia cenzurii: comunicarea presei din România (1944–1947): Monografie* (București: Tritonic Books, 2021), 424-432.

² *Scînteia*, „Ziariștii fasciști vinovați de dezastrul țării au fost trimiși în judecata Tribunalului Poporului – Actul de acuzare”, May 30, 1945.

³ Ibid.

operated in much the same way as its principal ideological adversary, the Legionaries – members of the far-right movement, *Legion of The Archangel Michael* – representing them as capable of “stirring passions and unleashing hatred”⁴, a “discrediting profile (...) of political undesirables”⁵.

It should be noted that until the reappearance of *Scînteia*⁶ – whose activity had been suspended during the National Legionary State (September 1940 - January 1941) – the task of shaping such profiles and waging the fight against the fascist enemy was assumed by *România Liberă*, another newspaper aligned with the communist ideology at that time. Through numerous articles, communist journalists demanded the unmasking and purging of the Legionaries⁷.

Scînteia, described by Mihaela Teodor as “the voice of the Communist Party and the self-proclaimed voice of the people”⁸, returned to readers on September 21, 1944, when its first post-clandestine issue marked its reemergence from underground⁹. In the early years following its reappearance, *Scînteia* published articles aimed at justifying the necessity of the defascistization process as its journalistic discourse consistently returned to the crimes attributed to the Legionaries and their collaboration with Nazi Germany. At the same time, *Scînteia* underscored the Legionary Movement’s responsibility for Romania’s involvement in the war against the Soviet Union, which was depicted as a benevolent and generous ally of the Communists, allegedly the one who had shown “the path to salvation, independence, and dignity”¹⁰. As numerous historiographical sources indicate¹¹, for the Communists the primary concern was seizing and consolidating political power. In pursuit of this goal, the

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Angelo Mitchievici, „Realismul socialist și critica decadenței: biopolitici totalitare”, in *Intellectualii politici și politica intelectualilor*, ed. Daniel Cîțirigă, Georgiana Țăranu, and Adrian-Alexandru Herța (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2016), 165.

⁶ In the footnotes and reference, the change of letters in the name of *Scînteia* from “â” to “î” marks the orthographic change adopted after 1953.

⁷ Teodor, *Anatomia cenzurii*, 113.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Dennis Deletant, *Teroarea comunistă în România: Gheorghiu-Dej și statul polițienesc, 1948–1965* (Iași: Polirom, 2001), 121.

¹⁰ Scînteia, „Cum a lucrat comisia de la Alba-Iulia”, January 7, 1945.

¹¹ For details on communist efforts to consolidate power, see, for example: Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism pentru eternitate. O istorie politică a comunismului românesc* (Iași: Polirom, 2005); Gheorghe Onișoru, *Stalin și poporul rus...: democrație și dictatură în România contemporană. Stalinismul în România* (București: Corint, 2021); Gheorghe Onișoru, *Stalin și poporul rus...: Democrație și dictatură în România contemporană. Premisele instaurării comunismului* (București: Corint, 2021); Dennis Deletant, *România sub regimul comunist* (București: Fundația Academia Civică, 2012); Dennis Deletant, *Teroarea comunistă în România: Gheorghiu-Dej și statul polițienesc, 1948–1965* (Iași: Polirom, 2001); Virgiliu Țărau, „Începutul sfârșitului. Arestări politice după alegerile din noiembrie 1946”, in *Regele, comuniștii și coroana*, coord. Alexandru Muraru and Andrei Muraru (Iași: Polirom, 2017), 132-159.

Legionaries served as a legitimizing instrument, cast as the absolute and perpetual enemy against whom the regime had to remain steadfast and vigilant.

Within this context, the article aims to trace the key characteristics attributed to former Legionaries by the communist regime through the press and to highlight how these portrayals of the enemy served as sources of legitimacy for the regime. By analyzing the depiction of Legionaries in *Scînteia*, the study contributes to a broader understanding of the strategies employed by the communist regime to shape public perception, control historical narratives, and suppress political opposition. To this end, at the methodological level, the research relies on the systematic identification of keywords in the newspaper collection available through the *Arcanum* digital library¹². This approach allowed me to pinpoint the specific issues containing articles relevant to the portrayal of the Legionaries. Based on this material and considering the central themes of the newspaper articles, ranging from moral and physical depictions of the Legionaries to portrayals of their leaders and the trials involving former members, the research was able to identify the most recurrent narrative patterns. These, as the following analysis illustrates, can be mapped onto distinct facets of the personality constructed by the communist press in its effort to craft the figure of an ultimate enemy.

II. Historical Context: Romania Caught Between Political Extremes

Thierry Wolton's notion of the “fratricidal brothers”¹³ – fascism and communism – aptly captures the simultaneous emergence of the two extremes on the Romanian political stage only a few years after the end of the First World War. In a European climate conducive to the rise of such movements, shaped by political instability and economic crisis, the Communist Party of Romania (*Partidul Comunist din România* – PCdR) drew support from the Soviet Union, while the Legionary Movement, by the late 1930s, received the backing of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Both began as marginal groups with limited political influence and few adherents, yet their trajectories soon diverged. Outlawed in April 1924, largely because of its anti-national orientation, the PCdR spent two decades in clandestinity¹⁴, gradually forfeiting even its modest initial political capital. By contrast, the Legionary Movement proved far more adept at mobilizing popular discontent, enabling it to expand its base of support¹⁵.

¹² The entire archive of *Scînteia* (1944-1989) can be found in the Arcanum digital library at the following link: <https://adt.arcanum.com/ro/collection/Scinteia/>.

¹³ Thierry Wolton, *Roșu-brun: Răul secolului* (București: Fundația Academia Civică, 2001), 121.

¹⁴ Deletant, *România sub regimul comunist*, 12.

¹⁵ Onișoru, *Stalin și poporul rus...*, 38.

Within a few short years, it rose from the fringes of politics – winning only a single parliamentary seat in the 1931 elections, secured by its leader Corneliu Zelea Codreanu¹⁶ – to becoming the third largest party by the 1937 general elections¹⁷.

The dictatorial regime imposed by King Carol II in February 1938 nullified this success, outlawing all political organizations except *Frontul Renașterii Naționale* (Eng, trans.: National Renaissance Front), the state's single legal party. The outbreak of the Second World War, Carol II's abdication, and the establishment of the National Legionary State under General Ion Antonescu briefly secured the Legionary Movement a share of power, with its leaders occupying key government posts. Yet this ascendancy was short-lived. Mounting tensions between the Movement and Antonescu erupted in the so-called “Legionary Rebellion” of January 21-23, 1941, marked by violent demonstrations and acts of terror¹⁸. Following the confrontation, Antonescu dissolved the National Legionary State and relegated the Romanian far right to political marginality¹⁹.

Although ideologically the far right and far left appeared to stand at opposite poles and seemed irreconcilable, according to Zigu Ornea, the two ultimately met, if unintended, “at a point leading toward totalitarianism”²⁰. Ornea argues that in sharing “the same anti-democratic aspiration”²¹, they employed similar methods in their opposition to democracy, capitalism, liberalism, and individualism²². Despite their mutual public denunciations, the parallels between Legionaries and Communists at times produced covert forms of complicity. During the interwar period, when the PCdR operated illegally, the far-right borrowed Marxist rhetoric, creating the Legionary Workers' Corps as a tool for attracting and representing the working class²³. Later, during the establishment of the communist regime in Romania, Gheorghe Onișoru notes that party leaders Teohari Georgescu and Ana Pauker pursued a policy of openness toward former Legionaries, ostensibly offering them the opportunity to contribute to the “rebuilding of the country”²⁴. This approach materialized in the so-called “Georgescu-Pătrașcu pact”, an agreement between the Interior Minister Teohari Georgescu and the Legionary leader Nicolae Pătrașcu, which

¹⁶ Zigu Ornea, *Anii treizeci: extrema dreaptă românească* (Iași: Polirom, 2025), 235.

¹⁷ Ibid, 248.

¹⁸ Ilarion Țiu, *Mișcarea Legionară după Corneliu Codreanu. Regimul Antonescu (ianuarie 1941 – august 1944)* (București: Editura Vremea, 2007), 36.

¹⁹ Ibid, 56.

²⁰ Ornea, *Anii treizeci*, 38.

²¹ Ibid, 36.

²² Wolton, *Roșu-brun*, 148.

²³ Armin Heinen, *Legiunea „Arhanghelul Mihail”. Mișcarea socială și organizație politică: o contribuție la problema fascismului internațional* (București: Humanitas, 2006), 270. See also Roland Clark, *Sfântă tinerețe legionară* (Iași: Polirom, 2024), 103-112.

²⁴ Onișoru, *Stalin și poporul rus*, 328.

facilitated the entry of former members of the Legionary Movement into the Romanian Communist Party²⁵. In practice, however, this policy was less concerned with “rebuilding the country” than with deploying former Legionaries as instruments of force in the struggle against the democratic opposition.

Following the coup of August 23, 1944, the Communists sought by any means to place themselves at the forefront of political events even though at that time, they still constituted a minority at the national level. The consolidation of power, secured with Soviet backing, could not be achieved solely through control of the army, the judiciary, and the police²⁶; it also required a second, crucial element: the creation of mass support, which the Communists entirely lacked. According to Dennis Deletant, to achieve this, it was necessary to “eradicate all vestiges of support for the monarchy and for ‘Western’ democracy”²⁷, while presenting themselves as the champions of what they called *real democracy*.

In this context, after reemerging on the political stage, during a period defined by a break with tradition and the consolidation of the regime²⁸, the Communists turned to party publications as a primary instrument for stigmatizing political opposition, compelled to secure both legitimacy and followers. The rhetoric advanced in the press set two worlds in stark opposition: on the one hand, the realm of workers and the proletariat; on the other, that of the “class enemy” and the “traitors”²⁹. Thierry Wolton remarks that this confrontation was framed as an irreconcilable conflict in which the survival of one necessarily entailed the elimination of the other³⁰. The Communists fully embraced this Manichean worldview, insisting that the state could follow only two paths as described in an article from *Scînteia* published in February 1945: “the first, which amounts to a return to the system of fascist dictatorship, to the enthronement of the old terror; or the second, which entails the determined eradication of fascist remnants and reactionary ballast, the creation of peaceful conditions that would allow Romania to join the family of democratic nations”³¹. For them, “no third path exists”³².

²⁵ Ibid, 335-336.

²⁶ Deletant, *România sub regimul comunist*, 55.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Emilia Șercan, *Cultul secretului: mecanismele cenzurii în presa comunistă* (Iași: Polirom, 2015), 69.

²⁹ Alexandra Codău, “The Hate Speech in the Communist Press”, in *Analele Universității „Ovidius” din Constanța – Seria Științe Politice*, no. 5, 9.

³⁰ Wolton, *Roșu-brun*, 148.

³¹ Scînteia, „Postul de radio Moscova despre situația deosebită a României. Care este calea pe care trebuie să meargă România”, February 23, 1945.

³² Ibid.

III. The Press as an Instrument in Constructing the Enemy

The pages of *Scînteia* became the ideal platform for constructing the public image of the far right. The press was tasked to conduct the “declared struggle of the party and the state against presumed enemies”³³, delivering to readers a steady stream of propagandistic articles that clearly reflected the party’s ideology. The newspaper depicted the exponents of Romanian fascism, as “hostile elements,” “traitors to the nation,” and “war criminals,” who, according to the communist narrative, threatened “the fundamental freedoms of the people, the values of national culture and human civilization, Romania’s independence, and even the nation’s very existence”³⁴. With stakes defined in such existential terms, the Communists assumed the role of saviors, claiming responsibility for the defascistization of society and for removing members of the Legionary Movement from public and political life, in accordance with the provisions of the Armistice Convention, which they professed to implement in full³⁵.

To fulfil its ideological mission and justify its broader policy of repression, the Communist regime consistently invoked the figure of the Legionary as the symbolic embodiment of the fascist adversary. Accordingly, beginning in 1944, the year of *Scînteia*’s reemergence in the public sphere, and continuing until the very collapse of the regime in 1989, *Scînteia* regularly published articles focusing on the Legionaries. According to our research, during this period approximately 1,643 pages of the newspaper contained at least one reference to the term “Legionary”. An examination of this quantitative dimension reveals a higher concentration of references during 1944-1948, accounting for 1,198 pages, or 72.92% of the total. This surge reflects the exceptional attention devoted to the Legionaries in the immediate postwar years, followed by a sharp and sustained decline in subsequent decades, distributed as follows: between 1949 and 1959, 271 pages contain mentions of the Legionaries (16.49%); during the 1960s, 68 pages (4.14%); in the 1970s, 75 pages (4.56%);

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ștefan Voicu, „În preajma aniversării a 40 de ani de la marea demonstrație antifascistă de la 1 mai 1939”, *Scînteia*, April 25, 1979.

³⁵ Article 15 of the convention stipulated that the Romanian government was required to immediately dissolve all pro-Hitler fascist organizations on Romanian territory, whether political, military, or paramilitary, as well as any other groups engaged in propaganda hostile to the United Nations and especially to the Soviet Union. It further prohibited the future existence of any such organizations (The Armistice Agreement with Rumania; September 12, 1944, art. 15, *Yale Law School – The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy*, <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/rumania.asp>).

and in the final decade of the regime, 1980-1989, only 31 pages refer to the Legionaries (1.89%).

The high concentration of references to Legionaries between 1944-1948 is closely tied to Romania's transition toward communism. Following August 23, 1944, under growing Soviet influence, the Communist Party sought to present itself as the definitive “antifascist” force, portraying Legionaries as the primary enemies of democracy. During this time, Legionaries remained politically active, attempting to oppose the Communists, organizing actions against them, and maintaining contact with movement leaders in exile³⁶. For the Communists, they represented a real threat and a source of tension, and their systematic disparagement helped legitimize the regime and justify its repressive measures. In the ensuing decades, as the Communists consolidated power and most Legionaries were eliminated, imprisoned, or re-educated, the figure of the legionary gradually lost its central propagandistic role, surfacing only sporadically in the press. By the final years of the regime, references to Legionaries had largely disappeared, with the group no longer perceived as a threat but remembered as a closed, negative chapter in Romania's historical memory.

In addition to the term “legionary”, several related expressions appear in the newspaper selection analyzed. The phrase “Legionary Movement” appeared in 361 pages, “Iron Guard” in 251, while the term “fascist” was featured in no fewer than 16,576 pages. From the multitude of articles devoted to the Romanian far right, the present study focuses on roughly 110 editions of the newspaper that included detailed and significant discussions on the “legionary” issue, allowing for the reconstruction of the propagandistic portrait of the Legionary. Based on the content analysis conducted, several recurring representations of the fascist enemy emerge: the Legionary as *saboteur*, the Legionary as *assassin*, the Legionary as *greedy and servile*, the Legionary as *mystic*, and the Legionary as a *toxic element*. These representations will be further examined in the following section.

IV. Portraits of the Legionaries in *Scînteia*

The Legionary, as a propagandistic prototype, was portrayed as multifaceted though consistently in negative terms, with different aspects highlighted in the press depending on the political context, the regime's adversaries, or broader societal concerns at a given moment. The Legionary was depicted by communist propaganda as the most abject figure in society, variously described as a *hooligan*, *thug*, *executioner*, *cannibal*, *bandit*, *monster*, *beast*, *wolf*, *hyena*, *wasps*, *viper*, or *snake*³⁷. The Legionary emerged in multiple guises, his

³⁶ Onișoru, *Stalin și poporul rus*, 328-333.

³⁷ The Romanian term used is *năpârvă*, which designates a limbless lizard, but more powerfully,

character being defined in relation to the working class, the historical parties, foreign powers, and even the Legionary Movement and its leaders. Within this repertoire, he was classified as *the assassin of the people*³⁸, *a saboteur and profiteer*³⁹, *spy* and *terrorist*⁴⁰, *traitor to the nation*⁴¹, *strike-breaker*⁴², *servant of capitalism*⁴³, *Hitlerite agent*, and later, even as an *American* one. Threats were portrayed as being omnipresent, and thus the Legionary himself became ubiquitous, signs of his infiltration being identified at the National Broadcasting Society, at the Stâlpeni exploitation center, in the Malaxa factories, the lumber mills, the church altar, the university lectern, in municipal offices, estate administrations, when not hidden abroad, he was portrayed as parachuting into the country by the intelligence services of capitalist states. The Legionary was also portrayed as a chameleonic figure: when circumstances demanded, he disguised himself as a National Peasant Party member⁴⁴ and later as someone who assumed the guise of a Communist to conceal his so-called “anti-national” activity⁴⁵.

IV.1. The Saboteur

An article published in February 1945, titled „La Stâlpeni, legionarii sabotează” (Eng. trans.: “At Stâlpeni, the Legionaries Commit Sabotages”), claimed that a forestry exploitation center was “an institution clogged with Legionaries”⁴⁶. According to the writer, the Legionaries had assaulted communist supporters, assisted and sheltered Germans in leaving the country, and sabotaged production. The Legionary thus assumed the role of *saboteur* across various contexts, with the severity of his actions varying accordingly. In some accounts, he was portrayed as a principal obstacle to the very existence and development of the state, undermining democracy⁴⁷ and the reconstruction of the country⁴⁸.

in its figurative usage, it evokes the image of a vile, duplicitous, and malicious individual.

³⁸ Scânteia, „Garda de Fier a înarmat pe tineri și i-a prefăcut în asasini ai poporului”, October 24, 1944.

³⁹ Scânteia, „Să privim lucrurile în față”, February 20, 1946.

⁴⁰ Scânteia, „Actul de acuzare în procesul unor spioni și teroriști parașutați de serviciul de spionaj american”, October 10, 1953.

⁴¹ Scânteia, „Domnul Maniu și Garda de Fier”, November 4, 1944.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Scânteia, „Acuzații sunt mari capitaliști și slugile acestora; legionari epurați, ofițeri deblocați și lepădături ale societății”, November 2, 1948.

⁴⁴ Scânteia, „Huliganii legionari manifestează pe străzile Bucureștiului”, October 15, 1944.

⁴⁵ Scânteia, „Din dezbatările la Plenara C.C. a P.M.R.: Cuvântul tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu”, December 13, 1961.

⁴⁶ Scânteia, „La Stâlpeni, legionarii sabotează”, February 4, 1945.

⁴⁷ Scânteia, „Cine răspunde că în pachetele și cutiile pe care le aruncă legionarii nu sunt instrucțiuni, informații și chiar arme?”, October 24, 1944.

⁴⁸ Scânteia, „Un mișelesc atentat neizbutit împotriva tovarășului Miron Constantinescu”, February 7, 1945.

The Legionaries were also accused of attempting to obstruct “the arrest of war criminals and the workings of the state apparatus; the conduct of the war effort and the fulfillment of the Armistice conditions in order to gain the Allies’ trust”. Additionally, they were also accused of interfering with “the country’s economic recovery through the fight against speculation; the improvement of living standards and general education through the redistribution of land to peasants, the provision of wages adjusted for inflation, and the freezing of prices”⁴⁹. Charged with thwarting the Communists’ recovery efforts, the Legionary was depicted as undermining industry and crop sowing⁵⁰, engaging in black-market operations⁵¹, disrupting transportation (by preventing workers from manufacturing locomotives)⁵², and obstructing the construction of the Danube–Black Sea Canal⁵³.

In so far as these accusations were concerned, some were less conventional, often offered as explanations for the hardships faced by ordinary citizens. Dumitru Mociorniță, an industrialist in the footwear and leather sector, was among those labeled as being a Legionary by the regime. A December 1944 article titled „Jefuitorii poporului. Dece n’au cetățenii ghete. Dece n’au țărani opinci. Dece n’au soldații cisme și bocanci” (Eng trans.: “Plunderers of the People: Why Citizens Lack Shoes, Why Peasants Lack Opinci”⁵⁴, Why Soldiers Lack Boots”), blamed the shortages on Mociorniță: “Fourteen wagons of raw leather turned into gelatin by the plunderer Mociorniță, while ordinary citizens received long prison sentences for possessing a single piece of sole”⁵⁵.

A year later, in 1945, in an appeal aimed at eradicating illiteracy addressed to teachers in the capital, readers were informed that the Legionaries were also responsible for the lack of education in the country, particularly among women. Ignoring the historically subordinate status of women prior to the rise of the far right, fascism was identified as the principal cause of female illiteracy⁵⁶. To punish such acts against the regime, reinforce political power, and justify the hunt for Legionaries, the 1948 Penal Code introduced, among other provisions, the notion of “counterrevolutionary sabotage”⁵⁷.

⁴⁹ Scântea, „Muncitorii din Valea Jiului cer guvern F.N.D.”, February 17, 1945.

⁵⁰ Ștefan Voicu, „Se înlătură buruienile din calea României democratice”, *Scântea*, April 12, 1945.

⁵¹ Ștefan Voicu, „Nici o crușare!”, *Scântea*, May 11, 1947.

⁵² Scântea, „Nicio îndurare pentru trădătorii de țară și dușmanii poporului muncitor!”, October 31, 1948.

⁵³ Scântea, „Actul de acuzare în procesul grupului de sabotori și diversioniști dela Canalul Dunăre-Marea Neagră”, August 30, 1952.

⁵⁴ *Opinci* – traditional Romanian peasant shoes made of leather, fastened with straps around the foot and ankle, commonly worn in rural areas until the mid-20th century.

⁵⁵ Scântea, „Jefuitorii poporului. De ce n’au cetățenii ghete. De ce n’au țărani opinci. De ce n’au soldații cisme și bocanci”, December 10, 1944.

⁵⁶ Scântea, „Analfabetismul trebuie stărpit. Apel către învățătoarele din Capitală și din țară”, April 12, 1945.

⁵⁷ Deletant, *Teroarea comunistă în România*, 74.

IV.2. *The Assassin*

From the early stages of the movement, beginning with the shooting of the Iași prefect Constantin Manciu, and culminating in the assassinations of prominent political figures such as I.G. Duca, Armand Călinescu, Nicolae Iorga, and Virgil Madgearu, the Legionaries transformed political assassination into a tool of revenge to eliminate their opponents by resorting to terror and violence⁵⁸. Consequently, in constructing the portrait of the Legionary, the *criminal* and *extremist* dimension could not be omitted from the pages of *Scînteia*. The Legionary is implicitly an assassin, as acts of sabotage and conspiracies were continuously accompanied by violence and loss of life, manifesting in what the press described as “the most savage chauvinism, anti-Semitism, and imperialism”⁵⁹.

Whereas the Fascist previously killed political figures, joined Nazi criminals in concentration camps, murdered women, children, and the families of peasants conscripted into the war, and persecuted communist workers, in the postwar period he continued assassinations aimed at destabilizing the communist regime. In 1955, following the Bern incident – which involved the occupation of the Romanian People’s Republic Legation in Switzerland by a group of Romanian émigrés and the killing of Aurel Șețu⁶⁰ – the Legionaries would be intensely invoked in *Scînteia* articles. Just days after the incident, the poet Mihai Beniuc’s front-page article, „O crimă ce nu va fi iertată” (Eng trans.: “A Crime That Will Not Be Forgiven”), presented a scathing portrait of the Legionary, whose behavior was described as outright animalistic. In Beniuc’s view, the Legionary was part of the “flock of the bloodthirsty”⁶¹, his hands stained with blood, and he sullied the land, desecrated life, and instilled hatred of fascism among the people wherever he set foot in the country⁶².

The “ferocious miscreants”, as Beniuc called the Legionaries, imposed their convictions through “knife, revolver, and axe”⁶³, weapons used, according to the article, to mutilate university professors, cut off rectors’ ears, ambush and kill ministers, and slaughter communist fighters and laborers as if they were livestock⁶⁴. Several days later, another article by the writer Geo Bogza placed the Legionaries entirely outside the human species: “hands of murderers, specimens with foreheads two fingers narrow and eyes blue or bloodshot, of a kind other

⁵⁸ Heinen, *Legiunea „Arhanghelul Mihail”*, 446.

⁵⁹ *Scînteia*, „Domnul Maniu și Garda de Fier”, November 4, 1944.

⁶⁰ Aurel Șețu was the driver at the Romanian Embassy in Bern, suspected of having been an officer in the *Securitate*, the secret police of the communist regime responsible for surveillance and repression of political opponents.

⁶¹ Mihai Beniuc, „O crimă ce nu va fi iertată”, *Scînteia*, February 22, 1955.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

than human”⁶⁵. Here, the *mystical dimension* of the Legionary was also emphasized. He appeared as a sinister knight of death, a dark prince wielding the knife, a creature combining faith and murder, worshiping and killing in tandem: “The mystique of death was carried so far that it culminated in the absurd cry: ‘Long live death!’”⁶⁶. The *mystical* and the *murderous* Legionary were often conflated in other articles, particularly those published at the beginning of the communist regime. In another article from June 1946, titled „Strigoii Terorismului” (Eng. trans.: “Specters of Terrorism”), the Legionaries were depicted as bloodthirsty barbarians, barely human, as “‘archangels’ prostituting themselves for the marks thrown by Himmler”⁶⁷, their spirit described as “abject and wicked”⁶⁸, authors of “reckless social demagoguery, resorting to obscure mysticism, religious fanaticism, and racist diversion”⁶⁹.

IV.3. The Greedy and Servile

In contrast to the self-image projected by the far left – that of Communists portrayed as loyal, fully dedicated to the socialist cause and their Soviet ally, willing to sacrifice themselves for the regime and the nation’s development – the Legionaries who engaged in sabotage and assassination were depicted as acting not out of ideological conviction, but out of greed and servility. Their loyalties were readily transferable, reducing them to mere instruments, mercenaries “ready to sell themselves to whoever pays more”⁷⁰.

Sorin Toma’s article from October 1948, written when he was editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Scînteia*, described the Legionaries as driven by an insatiable appetite for money, who considered the homeland to be “nothing more than a commodity like any other”⁷¹. Thus, they could easily disguise themselves as members of the National Peasant Party when expedient, and later “shift effortlessly from the payroll of the Gestapo to that of American intelligence, which they served with the same zeal as hired agents”⁷². Legionary journalists, it was claimed, “lent their pen to whichever master paid best”⁷³, while their so-called “nationalism and patriotism” was said to amount to nothing more than lining their own pockets⁷⁴. In this propagandistic construction, the Legionary became the embodiment of the foreign enemy within Romanian society: when the principal threat was Nazi Germany, he was

⁶⁵ Geo Bogza, „Ei au pe mîini vechi pete de sânge”, *Scînteia*, February 27, 1955.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ *Scînteia*, „Strigoii Terorismului”, June 26, 1946.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ *Scînteia*, „Spionajul și teroarea – metode ale politicii cercurilor agresive”, October 13, 1953.

⁷¹ Sorin Toma, „Dușmanii poporului în fața judecării poporului”, *Scînteia*, October 30, 1948.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ *Scînteia*, „Ziaristii fasciști vinovați de dezastrul țării”.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

cast as *Hitler's agent and servant*, when the emerging danger was the West, above all the United States, he was recast as an *Anglo-American agent and a traitor sold to capitalism*.

IV.4. The Toxic Influence

The toxic nature of the Legionary, whose soul was said to be “flooded with poisonous hemlock”⁷⁵ and “corroded by hatred”⁷⁶, did not remain confined to himself but was imagined as spreading to all who encountered him, particularly corruptible youth. Journalists, described as the “vipers of Romanian writing”⁷⁷, were among those accused of tainting the soul of the Romanian people by poisoning public opinion and the collective conscience during the interwar years. One article published in April 1945 claimed that poisoning was not only spiritually and psychologically in nature, but that it had been used by the Legionaries as a practice to harm inmates in prison. At Doftana, where Communists had been incarcerated in the interwar period, the prison doctor – himself a Legionary – was alleged to have “poisoned the inmates, subjecting the sick to a destructive treatment”⁷⁸.

In the army, reactionary pamphlets were portrayed as disseminating “legionary poison in large doses”, evoking the “dark period of fascist tyranny”⁷⁹. From the lectern, transformed into a fascist platform, university professors, deans, and rectors were accused of corrupting and poisoning the student body⁸⁰. Through exposure to fascist ideas, *Scînteia* described how “the generous youth, capable of total devotion, was diverted from its natural path and set upon a course entirely alien to its own character”⁸¹, leaving Communists, in turn, to assume the mission of detoxifying the younger generation.

IV.5. The Leaders

If up to this point, the characterizations of the Legionaries bore a general character, we should note that the patterns identified were not limited to the rank-and-file Legionaries. After all, the initial impulse to repudiate them was, unsurprisingly, linked to the movement's leaders, whose messages mobilized members and shaped specific forms of behavior. Articles in *Scînteia* did not overlook Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and Horia Sima, the central figures of the Legionary Movement. Codreanu (known as “the Captain”), who had been the charismatic founder of the movement and who had acquired the public image of a martyr after his death, was assigned similar labels, described in turn as a

⁷⁵ *Scînteia*, „Nu mai sunt fasciști în România?”, April 21, 1947.

⁷⁶ *Scînteia*, „Lupii vor să curgă sânge”, February 8, 1945.

⁷⁷ *Scînteia*, „Lașitatea și slugărnicia stăpînesc frazele ziariștilor antonescieni”, June 2, 1945.

⁷⁸ *Scînteia*, „Balaurul” Doftanei în fața Tribunalului Poporului”, April 7, 1945.

⁷⁹ *Scînteia*, „Reacționarii din armată folosesc metodele antonesciene”, February 18, 1945.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Scînteia*, „Ziariștii fasciști vinovați de dezastrul țării”.

“traitor”, “partisan of imported totalitarianism”, “gunman”⁸², “assassin,” “Hitler’s ambassador,” “criminal”⁸³, and “Gestapo agent”⁸⁴. Silviu Brucan, a communist politician, found Zelea Codreanu to be responsible for “the vile conspiracy against the peoples of the world, of which the Romanian people too was a victim”⁸⁵.

In contrast to Codreanu, Horia Sima, who rose to the leadership of the movement after Codreanu’s death and later continued to direct its activities from exile, would appear far more frequently in the newspaper’s pages. While the former, already assassinated during King Carol II’s dictatorship and transformed into a symbolic figure, no longer represented a direct threat to the Communists, Sima was perceived as a tangible danger, a fact reflected in recurring articles containing damning portrayals of him. He was depicted as a “ghoul”⁸⁶, “Legionary bandit”⁸⁷, “heinous criminal”⁸⁸, a Führer “who daily incites attacks over Radio Donau”⁸⁹ and “the greatest criminal in the history of the Romanian people, who sold Transylvania to the Germans and who now serves as the most despicable and vile tool of Hitler’s Germany”⁹⁰.

IV.6. On Trial

The major trials in which Legionaries stood as protagonists offered journalists yet another opportunity to construct portraits of the far right, with entire pages of the daily newspaper filled with indictments, micro-biographies of Legionaries, witness testimonies, and sentences. The first trial against fascists was that of the medical students, covered in a dedicated column titled “*The Legionary Trial*”, where the Communists voiced indignation and demanded punishment for the provocative students who allegedly “represented a criminal conception that had led the Romanian state into the disastrous situation inherited from Antonescu’s war”⁹¹.

Following the establishment of the People’s Tribunal, another trial closely covered by *Scînteia* was that of the fascist journalists, accused of “collaboration with the ‘dictatorial’ political regimes of 1938–1944; ‘anti-national attitudes and actions’; ‘attacks on democracy’; and ‘participation in creating a

⁸² Scînteia, „Iuliu Maniu complice al lui Codreanu. Dovada legăturilor dintre cei doi trădători”, *Scînteia*, June 8, 1945.

⁸³ Scînteia, „Iuliu Maniu – adevăratul conducător al Gărzii de Fier”, Year I, no. 246, June 9, 1945.

⁸⁴ Scînteia, „Procesul conducătorilor fostului P.N.Ț. Actul de acuzare”, November 2, 1947.

⁸⁵ Silviu Brucan, „Urmașii Muenchenezilor nu învață minte”, *Scînteia*, February 19, 1948.

⁸⁶ Scînteia, „Un cuib de fasciști la ‘Carpatina’”, *Scînteia*, October 16, 1944.

⁸⁷ A. Vasiliu, „Stărpirea criminalilor de războiu în țările eliberate”, *Scînteia*, May 18, 1945.

⁸⁸ V. Iliescu, „Nici o țară care se respectă nu poate tolera activitatea teroriștilor fasciști!”, *Scînteia*, March 15, 1955.

⁸⁹ Scînteia, „Huliganii legionari manifestează pe străzile Bucureștiului”.

⁹⁰ Scînteia, „Huliganii și-au schimbat cămășile”, October 17, 1944.

⁹¹ Scînteia, „Ancheta provocatorilor de la medicină trebuie lărgită”, January 12, 1945.

climate conducive to the enslavement of the country”⁹². The accused journalists were subjected to caricatural depictions, along the usual individual portraits provided by the articles published in *Scînteia*. Pamfil Șeicaru, owner of nationalist publication, *Curentul* (Eng. trans.: *The Current*), was depicted as “one of the principal agents of Nazi-fascist propaganda in Romania”⁹³, held responsible for poisoning public opinion and for his support of imperialism. Nichifor Crainic, director of *Calendarul* (Eng. trans.: *The Calendar*) and *Gândirea* (Eng. trans.: *The Thinking*), both nationalist publications, was presented as a traitor and false prophet⁹⁴. Stelian Popescu, proprietor of *Universul* (Eng. trans.: *The Universe*), newspaper of right-wing orientation – was described as “greedy, blackmailer, impostor, audacious”⁹⁵ and accused of fomenting racial hatred, promoting chauvinism, undermining democracy, glorifying fascism and Hitlerism, and supporting both the Legionary Movement and Antonescu’s regime and war.

Perhaps the most elaborate portrait, serialized across multiple issues, was that of Radu Gyr⁹⁶, presented to readers as “the Reptile – poet and ideologue”⁹⁷. During the trial, Gyr was described in the article „Ziariștii trădători în fața judecății poporului” (Eng. trans.: “Traitorous Journalists Facing the Judgment of the People), as one who “writhes with feline gestures (...) striving desperately to appear as a lyricist (...) yet betrayed by his sinuous movements, by his elongated, smooth, reptilian head crawling among corpses and ruins, among the sufferings of hundreds of thousands blinded by his ‘battle songs’ and ‘ballads’ stained with blood”⁹⁸. In the communist interpretation, Gyr’s status as an intellectual compounded his guilt, his moral authority carrying “more weight than that of one hundred Legionary thugs”⁹⁹.

In a similar fashion, the key figures of another trial, arguably the most significant in the series of antifascist proceedings, the Trial of the Great National Betrayal¹⁰⁰, were depicted in meticulous detail. The accused held responsible for the “country’s disaster”¹⁰¹ were featured in multiple newspaper

⁹² Teodor, *Anatomia cenzurii*, 432.

⁹³ Scînteia, „Ziariștii fasciști vinovați de dezastrul țării”.

⁹⁴ Scînteia, „Act de acuzare împotriva lui Stelian Popescu și a lui Nichifor Crainic”, May 30, 1945.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Radu Gyr (1905–1975) was a Romanian poet, journalist, and assistant professor. Closely associated with the Legionary Movement, he authored poems that became Legionary hymns and contributed articles to far-right newspapers during the interwar period. Under the National Legionary State (1940–1941), he held the positions of Legionary commander and General Director of Theaters.

⁹⁷ Scînteia, „Ziariștii trădători în fața judecății poporului”, June 1, 1945.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Scînteia, „Rechizitoriul în procesul ziariștilor”, June 3, 1945.

¹⁰⁰ The principal trial held at the Bucharest People’s Tribunal in May 1946 prosecuted individuals who had occupied leadership positions in the former government, headed by Marshal Ion Antonescu.

¹⁰¹ Scînteia, „Măine începe Procesul Marei Trădări Naționale”, May 6, 1946.

sections „Cum arată azi conducătorii „Cruciadei”” (Eng. trans.: “How the Leaders of the ‘Crusade’ Look Today”); „Chipurile lor!” (Eng. trans.: “Their Faces!”), which faithfully conveyed the courtroom atmosphere to readers while deriding the defendants. Radu Lecca, Commissar for Jewish Affairs under the Antonescu regime, was described as seemingly preoccupied, “with an Apache-like face and the gaze of a frightened dog”¹⁰²; Traian Brăileanu, Minister of Education in Antonescu’s government, had “a cretinous look”¹⁰³, appearing “thin and wiry, with a bony face and deeply sunken eyes”¹⁰⁴; other ministers – Bușilă, Marinescu, Tomescu, Dobre – were depicted as if “taken from a box, only their ties missing”¹⁰⁵. All were framed as scoundrels, who were feigning opposition to the Legionaries while conveniently “forgetting” their role in imprisoning patriots and antifascists in camps, prisons, and Siguranța cellars¹⁰⁶.

The same terms, reformulated and rearranged but essentially unaltered, used repeatedly to describe the Legionaries, recur throughout these articles. In an article from June 1946, during the Iași pogrom trial, journalist N. Corbu labeled the defendants as “a gallery of monsters”¹⁰⁷, while in another case, accused spies were referred to as “a handful of enemies of the people, cruel and cowardly”¹⁰⁸. Reinforcing the narrative of Legionary brutality, a 1949 article that focused on the trial of a subversive-terrorist gang, revealed that “the bandits’ savagery went so far that they killed one another”¹⁰⁹, while the trial of the group of saboteurs at the Canal once again highlighted the scheming and destructive nature of the Legionary, determined to obstruct the Canal’s construction and to “restore the bourgeois-landlord regime”¹¹⁰.

IV.7. The Legionaries Reemerge

The virulent portrayal of the Legionary in the newspaper *Scînteia* persisted until the final years of the communist regime in 1989. Although more than half of the articles dedicated to the Legionary Movement were published between 1944 and 1947, the communist press continued in subsequent decades to exploit the idea of the Legionary threat whenever the context allowed. The danger of a fascist dictatorship was repeatedly invoked, suggesting to the readers that it was solely thanks to the protection offered by the communist regime that

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Scînteia, „Procesul Ion Antonescu: Chipurile lor!”, May 9, 1946.

¹⁰⁵ Scînteia, „Măine începe Procesul Marei Trădări Naționale”.

¹⁰⁶ N. Moraru, „Trădătorii”, *Scînteia*, May 11, 1946.

¹⁰⁷ N. Corbu, „Ziua a doua a procesului masacrului dela Iași. Interogatoriul acuzaților din boxă a scos la iveală bestialitatea criminalilor fasciști”, *Scînteia*, June 17, 1946.

¹⁰⁸ Scînteia, „Eri a început Procesul grupului de complotiști, spioni și sabotori – Actul de acuzare”, October 29, 1948.

¹⁰⁹ Scînteia, „Procesul bandei subversive-teroriste. Depozițiile martorilor acușării și apărării aduc noi dovezi zdrobitoare ale acțiunii criminale ale bandiților”, June 25, 1949.

¹¹⁰ Scînteia, „Actul de acuzare în procesul grupului de sabotori și diversioniști”.

the state was spared such a grim fate. Thus, in moments of crisis, during commemorations, or simply in explanatory articles on Legionary doctrine and the party's antifascist struggle, propagandistic discourse would cast yet another arrow at the long-defeated enemy, maintaining the illusion of a perpetual threat in society.

Less than a month after the 1977 earthquake, an article by the writer Mihai Stoian, entitled „Cine uită nu merită” (Eng. trans.: “Those Who Forget Do Not Deserve”), delivered a sharp critique of the Legionaries in exile, using the context of the disaster to remind readers, by analogy, of another “cataclysm that haunted the country – the ‘Green Earthquake’”¹¹¹. In a similar vein, the commemoration of Nicolae Iorga's assassination by Legionaries became an opportunity to repeatedly reactivate antifascist rhetoric. Although initially marginalized and placed on the index in 1948, Iorga began to be elevated to the top of the “communist national pantheon” during the 1960s¹¹², and the press periodically published commemorative articles aimed at reinforcing the Legionary's criminal image. Decades later, in 1980, historian Florin Constantiniu would write: “By assassinating the creator of a scientific oeuvre of prodigious scope and exceptional value (...) the Iron Guard once again revealed its true face, as a fascist-style terrorist organization, opposed to the interests and aspirations of the Romanian people; a weed grown from the seed of hatred and nurtured by international fascism, above all Nazism, to exploit its poisoned fruits against Romania”¹¹³.

V. Conclusion

By tracing the main characteristics attributed to the Legionaries and identifying the recurring narrative patterns, the study has shown how the press crafted a coherent, multifaceted image of the enemy. The analysis of the communist press shows that the figure of the Legionary was consistently shaped through a rigid ideological lens that denied any resemblance between communism and the far right, transforming the former members of the Legionary Movement into the embodiment of the absolute enemy. Initially, in the immediate postwar years, Legionaries were portrayed as an imminent political threat, and their systematic demonization in the press served to

¹¹¹ Mihai Stoian, „Cine uită nu merită”, *Scînteia*, April 3, 1977.

¹¹² Georgiana Țăranu, *Nicolae Iorga și seducția fascismului italian* (București: Humanitas, 2025), 14.

¹¹³ Florin Constantiniu, „O lecție a istoriei, o condamnare mereu actuală a ororilor fascismului”, *Scînteia*, November 27, 1980; see also: N. Rădulescu, „Douăzeci de ani de la asasinarea lui N. Iorga”, *Scînteia*, November 30, 1960; *Scînteia*, „25 de ani de la asasinarea lui Nicolae Iorga. O figură proeminentă a culturii românești”, November 27, 1965; Ion Spălățelu, „File din cronica celei mai întinse perioade din istoria modernă a României. 30 de ani de la asasinarea de către legionari a lui Nicolae Iorga”, *Scînteia*, November 26, 1970.

legitimize repressive measures and consolidate the Communist Party's authority. Over time, even as most Legionaries were neutralized and their direct political relevance diminished, the communist press continued to invoke the Legionary in moments of crisis, commemorations, and ideological discourses, reinforcing the perception of a perpetual threat and frequently turning them into scapegoats for the regime's shortcomings.

Ultimately, the findings highlight the important role of the communist press in consolidating political legitimacy and suppressing any form of opposition, whether extremist, as in the case of the Legionary Movement, or democratic, as with the historical parties. The Communists went beyond establishing a one-party system and censoring public discourse. In keeping with the logic of totalitarian control, they also sought to instill a profound hostility toward their political adversaries, employing the press, especially the daily newspaper *Scînteia*, as a central tool of propaganda. Through this sustained effort, the communist press shaped collective memory and defined enduring enemies in ways that legitimized the regime's rule and maintained the narrative of antifascist vigilance long after the Legionaries' real influence had faded.

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