

ANDREJ MILIN, MIODRAG MILIN AND CVETKO MIHAJLOV, *SRBI U RUMUNJI ZA VREME KOMUNIZMA. ZVUČNI ARHIV I PRIRUČNIK O STRADANJU* [SERBS IN ROMANIA UNDER COMMUNISM. AN AUDIO ARCHIVE AND A HANDBOOK ON HARDSHIP]. TIMISOARA: SAVEZ SRBA U RUMUNJI, 2011, pp. 552.

*Reviewed by Aleksandra Djurić Milovanović**

The recently published biligual Serbian/Romanian book on the Serbs in Romania in the age of communism, authored by Andrej Milin, Miodrag Milin and Cvetko Mihajlov, is a result of years-long research into the situation of an ethnic minority in Romania in a recent period of history. The situation of the Serbian minority in Romania during the communist era is one of the key issues in understanding the relations between Yugoslavia and Romania after the Second World War. As a direct consequence of the Resolution of the Cominform of 1948, which expelled Yugoslavia from the communist bloc, the Serbian minority was subjected to political and economic pressure and various forms of assimilation and acculturation. Their minority institutions were abolished, religious schools closed down, there ensued individual arrests and trials, and forced group relocation to the Bărăgan Plain. Having refused to comply with the Cominform Resolution, the Serbian minority came to epitomize the “traitor” and “enemy” of the political system in Romania. As a result, its position deteriorated, and conspicuously so after the break of diplomatic relations between Romania and Yugoslavia and the closing of the Yugoslav embassy in Bucharest. In 1951, members of the minority groups from the Banat area along the border with Yugoslavia, such as Serbs, Germans, Bulgarians and Hungarians, as well as persons considered as posing a threat to the Communist Party, were deported to uninhabited areas of the Bărăgan Plain near the Danube Delta. One of the authors, the historian Miodrag Milin, had already devoted a monograph to the ordeal of the Serbs deported to the

Bărăgan Plain (*Srbi iz Rumunije u Baraganskoj golgoti*/Serbs from Romania in the Bărăgan Golgotha).

The book *Serbs in Romania under Communism* comprises an introduction and eleven chapters which mostly consist of selected biographical accounts. In the introduction, the authors stress that the study deals with the question “of political prisoners among the Serbs and investigates the social and legal dimensions of anti-Titoist reprisals against the minority population” (p. 11). Political prisoners — among whom special attention is paid to Laza Adamov, Božidar Stojanović and Miladin Silin — were but a few among the large number of imprisoned Serbs, representatives of minority institutions, local activists, teachers and priests. The chapter “Božidar Stanojević’s notes on the SAF [Slavic Antifascist Front] and the USCDAR [Union of the Slav Cultural Democratic Associations in Romania]” contains Božidar Stanojević’s account of the formation of an antifascist front in the Serbian settlements in the Romanian part of the Banat. The Romanian communist authorities, however, did not approvingly accept the establishment of minority antifascist organizations. The SAF was founded after the liberation of Timișoara, and it soon established a network of organizations in Serbian villages, as well as an antifascist front of women. The SAF subsequently transformed into the Union of the Slav Cultural Democratic Associations in Romania, which was to become the most important Serbian minority organization in Romania.

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In his "Notes", Božidar Stanojević offers a detailed account of all key events in the period between 1941 and 1953. The arrested members of the Serbian minority were brought to trial and sentenced to long-term imprisonment. In the second half of 1949, several SAF members were arrested, which led to the "Indictment against a Group of Spies and Traitors Serving Tito's Fascist Clique". The same chapter also gives an account of the circumstances under which the Serbian members of the USCDAR were accused of "criminal activity" and "espionage". Just like other similar trials, this one was intended to show that the accused were "Yugoslav spies" working against the regime in communist Romania, and it ended with severe sentences. The chapter "Political prisoners: interviews, archival materials, notes, testimonies and life stories" acquaints the reader with the Serbs sentenced to imprisonment between 1948 and 1955 through their short biographies and interviews with them. The chapter "The Serbian Church in Romania under communist terror" presents the documentary material evidencing repression against the Serbian Orthodox Church and its clergy. The authors suggest that the entire Serbian Orthodox Church was under suspicion of "Titoist espionage and hostility against the new republic" (p. 17). It also includes the list of Serbian clerics who were "under police surveillance", obtained from the National Council for the Study of Securitatea Archives (CNSAS) in Bucharest. The chapter "Three interviews 'from the opposite side'" offers interviews with Serbian intellectuals, activists who were witnesses to the persecution of Serbs. It is followed by the texts of Vasile Sandru "Territorial Pretensions" and Vladimir Lj. Cvetković "The Red Army on the Danube and the aspirations of the Serbs in Romania to be annexed by Yugoslavia", and "Photographs of the former political prisoners among Serbs", which

features photographs of prisons, forced labour camps and prison construction sites in Romania. The chapter "Political prisoners: biographies" presents short biographies of about six hundred members of the Serbian minority in Romania who were persecuted and imprisoned throughout the country on account of being politically unsuitable. The book closes with appendices presenting archival documents and the list of seventy-eight former political prisoners whose biographies are not included in the main body of the study. A CD enclosed with the book contains the audio record of thirty-eight interviews portraying the life of Serbs under communism. It adds a new value to the book and opens up the possibility of further research based on the recorded material. The presented biographical accounts reveal the scale of the damaging impact of the communist period on the ethnic minorities in Romania. As a testimony to a period, the oral histories presented in this study shed light on the role of a community's memory in understanding the past and present. Therefore, this book should primarily be seen as a source material for an important period in the history of the Serbian minority in Romania, which partly explains the reasons for its increasing assimilation and decreasing numerical strength. It is also necessary to point out that the volume is bilingual, Serbian and Romanian, which makes it accessible to both Serbian and Romanian readers. To scholars, this rich corpus of material about the Serbs in Romania during communism provides a basis and opportunity for new research into the history of the Serbian community, and to interested readers, it opens a window onto a dynamic period in the recent history of Romania and the Serbian community in that context.