

# Between Constraint and Community Service

Transylvanian Intellectual Imre Mikó  
and the Securitate<sup>1</sup>

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This article is part of a larger project about state-society relations in communist Romania focusing on conformity, adaptation and coexistence with the system. Its overall aim is to explore the motivations and patterns of collaboration among the Transylvanian Hungarian minority through the life of lawyer, politician and writer Imre Mikó (1911–1977), a leading personality of that community whose strategy of collaboration will be at the center of this analysis. Reconstructing the unconventional symbiosis that existed between the security organs of a national communist system and a conservative-minded minority intellectual may help to reframe our understanding of state-society relationship in Ceaușescu’s Romania. Oversimplifying definitions still attached to late communism in Romania such as “sultanism” or “total control” should be critically reshaped. Ceaușescu’s dictatorship might be better explained by the point Stephen Kotkin made about Romania being an institutionalized compromise between the populace and the large “uncivil society” comprised of party cadres, executive authorities and collaborators. That peculiar social body filled the vacuum of the missing political opposition, and forced almost any potential opponent to accept the regime or at least parts of it (such as the political police) as a legitimate partner.<sup>2</sup>

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2 Stephen Kotkin: *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment*. New York 2009, pp. 11–16.

### The context of a biographical study: collaboration as practice

The point of departure of this article is the state security file produced on a Central European intellectual who lived as a minority suspended between two states (Hungary and Romania) and differing political regimes from the 1920s to the 1970s. The most important source for this study is the ten-volume documentation of the relationship between Imre Mikó and the Romanian state security apparatus. Six of them contain operative investigations carried out on him (Ro. fond informativ), while the other four testify to his confidential work for the Securitate as a professional secret police informer both during the 1950s and, more crucially, in the 1970s (fond rețea).<sup>3</sup> The primary analytical framework is provided by the seminal works of Rogers Brubaker, Holly Case, and Gábor Egry on everyday ethnicity practices in Transylvania.<sup>4</sup> Upon encountering Imre Mikó's story, one is fascinated by how he was able to adapt to the changing political situation with each political change. A closer inspection provides a grasp of his strategies of survival or adaptation, and an understanding of how he continuously worked to rewrite his own past. We can trace this creative process through the Soviet-type self-biographies Mikó was often encouraged, and sometimes forced to write about his life after 1948, with a particular focus on the formation of personality and wartime political attitudes.<sup>5</sup> When dealing with Imre Mikó and the practice of collaboration in the age of extremes, the historian faces a moral panic that might be overcome by unveiling and rationalizing the secret by using Mikó's story as a sort of crowbar to pry open the complex mechanisms of accommodation, collaboration, and political lobbying in an authoritarian/totalitarian society.

3 Material on Mikó can be found in the Romanian state security archives: ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, dosar 235727, vols. 1–6 and Fond Rețea, dosar 182274, vols. 1–4. I also investigated some files belonging to members of his family: ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, dosar 361284 and Fond Rețea, dosar 179592 (both referring to Kornélia Kauntz, his wife); Fond Penal, dosar 051247, Fond Informativ, dosar 574526 and Fond Rețea, dosar 389336 (all referring to József Kauntz jr.); Fond Rețea, dosar 174944 (Ágnes Kauntz, József Kauntz's wife).

4 Rogers Brubaker et al.: *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*. Princeton, Oxford 2006; Holly Case: *Between States: The Transylvanian Question and the European Idea during World War II*. Stanford 2009; Gábor Egry: *Etnicitás, identitás, politika. Magyar kisebbségek a nacionalizmus és a regionalizmus között Romániában és Csehszlovákiában 1918–1944* [Ethnicity, Identity, Politics. Hungarian minorities between nationalism and regionalism in Romania and Czechoslovakia 1918–1944]. Budapest 2015.

5 On Soviet subjectivity, see the seminal articles of Jochen Hellbeck: "Working, Struggling, Becoming: Stalin-Era Autobiographical Text". In David L. Hoffman (ed.): *Stalinism: The Essential Readings*. Hoboken, NJ 2003, pp. 181–206, and id.: "Galaxy of Black Stars: The Power of Soviet Biography" in: *The American Historical Review* 114: 3 (2009), pp. 615–24.

The entangled history of Imre Mikó also refers to the dilemma finely elaborated by Cristina Petrescu of “resistance through culture” during the last decades of Romanian communism, a practice theorized *ex post* by philosopher Gabriel Liiceanu and widely criticized as the epitome of merely symbolic disagreement and the lack of concrete political engagement.<sup>6</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, “resistance through culture” represented a tolerated form of expressing discontent. It did not comply with the concept that Western scholars had in mind when coining the term “dissident”, nor did it correspond to the definition which the critical intellectuals of Central Europe and the Soviet Union adopted for themselves.<sup>7</sup> This life practice can be the best detected in the case of philosopher Constantin Noica, whose collaboration with the communist authorities has been at the center of both scholarly investigation and public debate.<sup>8</sup> In his critical analysis of Noica’s personal file, political scientist and former dissident Gabriel Andreescu wonders what the elder philosopher who lived isolated and forgotten in a Transylvanian village after serving a long prison sentence could have gained from collaboration with the political police. Noica asked the officers with whom he had regular contacts to help him to defend Romanian culture threatened with extinction. This claim seems absurd to Andreescu: how could Noica consider the Securitate a dispenser of culture? The only thing that the Securitate could do for the philosopher was to facilitate the granting of passports in favor of his disciples, and the publication of their works.

As a number of Securitate files unveiled in recent years show, commonly used expressions such as “collaboration”, or “agent” require serious conceptual reshaping. During the last decades of the communist regimes, significant parts of the Romanian elite worked together with the state security organs in order to influence foreign public opinion. For many, collaboration meant not spying on someone, but trying to achieve some political, national or personal

6 Gabriel Liiceanu: Jurnalul de la Păltiniș: Un model paideic în cultura umanistă [The Păltiniș Diary: A Paideic Model In Humanist Culture]. Bucharest 1990, pp. 13–14. An informed critique of the idea of “resistance through culture” in Gabriel Andreescu: Existența prin cultură. Represiune, colaboraționism și rezistență intelectuală sub regimul communist [Existence Through Culture. Repression, Collaboration, and Intellectual Resistance under the Communist Regime]. Iași 2015.

7 Cristina Petrescu: From Robin Hood to Don Quixote: Resistance and Dissent in Communist Romania. Bucharest 2013, p. 34.

8 For early criticism of Noica’s stance, see Adrian Marino: Politică și cultură. Pentru o nouă cultură română [Politics and Culture. For a New Romanian Culture]. Iași 1995, p. 84. See also the discussion of Noica’s case in Gabriel Andreescu: Cărturari, opozanți și documente: Manipularea Arhivei Securității [Writers, opponents, and documents. The Manipulation of the Securitate Archives]. Iași 2013.

goals with the infrastructural help of the security services.<sup>9</sup> Among the most interesting examples of this, one might recall Silviu Brucan's gradual conversion from early Stalinism to a critical stance on Ceaușescu's ethnocentric and narrow-minded ideological mindset. A senior party officer with a high-ranking diplomatic past as Romanian ambassador to Washington prior to his break with Ceaușescu, Brucan became an influential "dissident". He had long been used by Romanian intelligence as a messenger and informal lobbyist to the United States, where he traveled to teach university courses on the internal dynamics of the communist system. Before every mission to the United States, Brucan was informed about his operational tasks, the most important being neutralization of the campaign launched by the Hungarian émigré community to expose the discriminatory policies of the Romanian government against the Hungarians of Transylvania.<sup>10</sup> A similar job was assigned to the Chief Rabbi Moses Rosen, who took advantage of his frequent trips to the US and other Western countries to offer his interlocuters, especially international Jewish organizations, an idealized image of the conditions of the Romanian Jewish community, which was actually disappearing through the emigration formally agreed to between Romanian and Israeli authorities.<sup>11</sup>

Noica's commitment in favor of the preservation of Romanian culture at every cost more closely resembles Mikó's ambivalent practices towards a system he never identified with but loyally served for decades as a Russian teacher (1948–1958), bookshop keeper (1958–1969) and, after full rehabilitation, as assistant editor at the "Kriterion" publishing house and informal leader of the Hungarian intellectual milieu (1970–1977).<sup>12</sup> What might have prompted an intellectual belonging to the ill-fated Hungarian minority, who considered Communist ideology foreign to himself, and who suffered significant deprivation in the first decades of communism, to turn to the political police for an audience for his criticisms? A possible interpretative key for unconventional collaboration from a minority perspective is provided by the anthropological

9 For a general overview, see Cristian Vasile: *Viața artistică și culturală în primul deceniu al regimului Ceaușescu 1965–1974* [Arts and Culture in the first Decade of the Ceaușescu regime]. București 2014.

10 Radu Ioanid: *Dosarul Brucan. Documente ale Direcției a III/a Contraspionaj a Departamentului Securității Statului (1987/1989)* [The Brucan File. Evidence from the Counterintelligence Department of the State Security 1987/1989]. Iași 2008, pp. 147–151.

11 On Moses Rosen's operative surveillance, see: Anca Ciuciu: *Acțiunea "credinciosul": șef rabinul Moses Rosen și comunitatea evreiască în arhivele C.N.S.A.S Securității* [The "Believer" Action: Chief-Rabbi Moses Rosen and the Jewish Community in the CNSAS Archives]. București 2008.

12 This expression is borrowed from József Lőrincz: *Ambivalent Discourse in Eastern Europe*. In: *REGIO. A Review of Studies on Minorities, Politics, and Society* (2004), pp. 148–71.

paradigm of liminality. This helps explain how a minority community and those individuals who form them behave in times of heavy political pressure, such as the Stalinist period and the national communist offensive.<sup>13</sup>

This attempt to reshape the collective identity also resulted in a more general self-reflection that caused the new generation of Hungarian intellectuals raised in a minority position after the First World War to put at the center of their goals the idea of “serving the people” given the perceived urgency of rebuilding the ethnic foundations of the Hungarian minority community.<sup>14</sup> The new “minority man” was ontologically supposed to be part of a broader, organic community, guided by a stable set of values, traditions and expectations. Members of the new elite were expected to honestly fulfill their professional duties, while sacrificing their personal advantage in the name of a higher collective interest. Therefore, minority life was to become an everyday struggle to preserve a way of life and the minority’s irreducible diversity.<sup>15</sup> The ideology of service to the people was born in the wake of the trauma of Trianon and reached its peak in the 1930s and early 1940s under the influence of very different ideological currents such as Italian fascist corporatism and the social doctrine of the Catholic Church shared by Protestant Hungarian denominations, as well as leftist collectivism and agrarian socialism. After the Second World War and the communist takeover, this “collaborative” mindset survived, albeit emptied of its theological content and became the informal justification for collaborating, or at least coming to terms with the national communist regime of Romania.

### **Public intellectual and rising star of Transylvanian politics: the “first” life of Imre Mikó**

Imre Mikó was born in 1911 into a prominent Unitarian family that had belonged to the Transylvanian Hungarian middle class of Kolozsvár (Ro. Cluj-Napoca, de. Klausenburg) since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Unitarian Church had been founded in 1568 in Transylvania by Ferenc Dávid

13 Victor Turner: *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca, NY 1967.

14 György Beke, Ferenc László (eds.): *Erdélyi Fiatalok – dokumentumok, viták (1930–1940) Securitații [The Magazine Erdélyi Fiatalok – documents and debates (1930–1940)]*. București 1986–1990.

15 See the evolution of the related empirical research from the seminal PhD thesis by József D. Lőrincz: *Letters to the editor: the values guiding an East European minority during transition*. Florence 2001 to the collective volume Nándor Bárdi, Tamás Gusztáv Filep, József Lőrincz (eds.): *Népszolgálat. A közösségi elkötelezettség alakváltozatai a magyar kisebbségek történetében [Service to the People. The Changing Forms of Community Advocacy in the History of the Hungarian Minorities]*. Pozsony 2015.

and was regarded the most radical Protestant denomination for its rejection of the dogmas of the divinity of Christ and the Trinity of God. Due to its historical connection to the Hungarian ethnicity in a multinational region, for centuries the small Unitarian church of Transylvania – counting fewer than 70,000 faithful – has played an outstanding role in the preservation of Hungarian culture too. Over the previous two centuries, the Mikó family had contributed to this tradition with a bishop, a minister of finance and foreign affairs, several noted scholars, and a theology professor among its members. After completing secondary school in 1928, Mikó joined the Faculty of Law of the Romanian University of Cluj, where he graduated in 1934. By that time he had been a leader of the school's reading group and had already published articles in a Unitarian newspaper.<sup>16</sup> His early life was defined by family tradition, as the Mikós had been legal advisors to the Unitarian Church for three generations.<sup>17</sup>

While at university, Mikó founded, together with some like-minded students, a youth branch of the Székely Society, an organization which helped Hungarian students from the most densely Hungarian-inhabited area of Transylvania, the Szeklerland (Székelyföld in Hungarian; Secuime in Romanian) located in the eastern corner of the region. This gave them a forum for discussing the most basic questions confronting Transylvanian Hungarians, and also for issuing projects of social reform and even exploring socialism.<sup>18</sup> During the great depression of the early 1930s, Mikó was briefly personally attracted by Marxism, as were many fellow intellectuals at the time. Traces of dialectical materialism can be found in his first, path-breaking book published at the age of 21, a sociographical study on ethnic coexistence in Transylvanian villages.<sup>19</sup> But ideologically speaking, Mikó was much closer to the social progression fostered by the Hungarian populist movement, and was also influenced by the Romanian scholar Dimitrie Gusti's sociological school at the University of Bucharest.<sup>20</sup>

16 See György Gaál: Mikó Imre pályakezdése az Unitárius Kollégiumban [Mikó Imre's Early Career at the Unitarian College of Cluj]. In: *Keresztény Magvető* no. 2 (2011), pp. 175–190.

17 See in detail his self-biography published immediately after his death: Imre Mikó: A csendes Petőfi utca [The Quite Petőfi Street]. Kolozsvár 1978, pp. 5–134.

18 Sándor Balázs: Mikó Imre. Élet-és pályakép. Kéziratok, dokumentumok (1933–1968) [Imre Mikó. An Intellectual Biography. Manuscripts, Documents 1933–1968]. Kolozsvár 2003, pp. 75–82.

19 Imre Mikó: Az erdélyi falu és a nemzetiségi kérdés [The Transylvanian village and the national question]. Kolozsvár 1932.

20 On the Transylvanian reception of the Hungarian populist movement see István Papp: A magyar népi mozgalom története 1920–1990 [History of the Hungarian national movement 1920–1990]. Budapest 2012, pp. 152–153; on the impact of Gusti's school on Mikó see: Balázs: Mikó Imre, pp. 69–70.

Mikó's juvenile radicalism was soon tempered by experience. As he wrote in 1932 to his cousin and intimate friend Béla Jancsó during a ten-month apprenticeship at the central office of the Hungarian Party:

These are not times for business as usual, but for active organization. Even so, you still have to earn a living. Politics is like wearing a mask; you can never say exactly what you think if you want to achieve your aim. This is what I'm learning in my current job.<sup>21</sup>

Mikó belonged to the first generation of Hungarian intellectuals who had to confront the trauma of the Trianon Peace Treaty, which meant not only Transylvania's forceful separation from Hungary as a "mother country", but also the vanishing of an imperial national identity.<sup>22</sup> Coming to terms with Romanian rule over Transylvania implied an internal tension between *Realpolitik* and a plea for unmaking the unjust peace settlement. After completing his studies in international law in Budapest and later in Paris, he started a political career in the service of the minority community in the mid-1930s. The Hungarian National Party of Romania appointed him head of its Bucharest office in 1937, when he was just 26.

In 1938, after Charles II, King of Romania introduced a corporative dictatorship amid the dissolution of all existing parties, Mikó remained in the capital as general secretary of the newly established Hungarian minority organization, the Hungarian Popular Community (Hu. Magyar Népközösség), acting under the umbrella of the Romanian National Renaissance Front (Ro. Frontul Renașterii Naționale). His job was the same as before: leading an office for minority complaints. Mikó got into the thick of this non-ideological, highly pragmatic political culture of everyday bargains. He also got to know how the various ministries and agencies really worked, and realized the importance of personal ties to certain bureaucrats, even in order to redress the complaint of a fired railway worker or to obtain a state pension for a retired judge.<sup>23</sup>

21 Jancsó Béla hagyaték – Kolozsvár, Erdély-Múzeum Egyesület Kézirattára, 67. tétel: Mások levelei Jancsó Bélához. (Béla Jancsó Files, Society for Transylvanian Museum Manuscript Collection, 67. folder. Letters to Béla Jancsó.) Imre Mikó's letter to Béla Jancsó, Bucharest, 23 January 1932. This and all the following translations are the author's.

22 The intellectual debate of the interwar period on the concept of the homeland has been summarized by Nándor Bárdi: *Otthon és haza. Tanulmányok a romániai magyar kisebbség történetéről* [Homeland and Fatherland. Studies on the History of the Hungarian Minority in Romania]. Csíkszereda 2015, chapters 4, 5, 8 and 9.

23 His activity as one of the leaders of the Hungarian Popular Community is documented in the ANR, Fond 2240, Preșidenția Consiliului de Miniștri 1925–1958, dosar 1464 (Subsecretariatul de Stat al Naționalităților, 1939 – Cereri și reclamații privind naționalitățile minoritare). Several documents related to that period ended up in his personal file issued by the Communist political police: ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, dosar 235727, vol. 2, ff. 14–25.

The active collaboration of part of the Transylvanian Hungarian elite with the Romanian nationalist state was largely debated within the minority press, and Mikó himself was the object of criticism. He answered that the Hungarian Popular Community led by former Hungarian foreign minister Miklós Bánffy had to be regarded as a historical necessity to protect the demographic and economic integrity of the local Hungarian population from attacks by the Romanian far right.<sup>24</sup>

In September 1940, after the Second Vienna Award had returned Northern Transylvania to Hungary, Mikó experienced a major turning point. Although he declared later that he would have preferred to pursue an academic career, he accepted appointment as a member of the enlarged Hungarian Parliament in Budapest as a representative from Transylvania. In May 1941, he also became general political secretary of the newly established Transylvanian Party (Hu. Erdélyi Párt), representing the traditional local Hungarian elite, and he headed the party's central office in Budapest. The years 1940–1944 are a key to understanding Mikó's subsequent collaboration with the communist regime. The short Hungarian intermezzo was also the only moment when Mikó held effective power as a member of the Hungarian political elite. The controversial role he and his party played during these years represented the most powerful source of culpability and social stigmatization after 1944, during his “second life”. His strong Transylvanian identity made him view the narrow-minded, socially ruthless Hungarian rule over Transylvania with growing skepticism. Nevertheless, he remained politically committed to a party that stood for Hungarian supremacy in Northern Transylvania as an ally of every incumbent Hungarian government between October 1940 and August 1944. Mikó might have been critical of Horthy's Hungary in private, but never contested what he considered to be the legitimate political and social order.<sup>25</sup>

As scholars have recently pointed out, even before the new archival evidence emerged, Mikó occupied a key position in the party's hierarchy. He

24 Imre Mikó: Huszonkét év. Az erdélyi magyarság politikai története 1918. december 1-től 1940. augusztus 30-ig [Twentytwo Years. The Political History of the Transylvanian Hungarian Community from December 1, 1918 to August 30, 1940]. Budapest 1941.

25 See the op-ed articles written in 1943 and 1944 for the Kolozsvár-based newspaper *Ellenzék: Magyarság és erdélyiség* [Hungarianness and Transylvanianness], 13 November 1943; *Erdély ügye* [The Issue of Transylvania], 23 August 1944. Also see the diary of a fellow MP and close friend which was only published in 2014 but circulated for a long time as a manuscript, Sándor Vita: *A Hiteltől a Tisztelt Házig: Visszaemlékezés, napló (1934–1944), Országgyűlési beszédek (1943–1944)* [From the Hittel journal to the Hungarian Parliament: Memoirs, Diary 1934–1944]. Ed. and intro by Attila Gábor Hunyadi. Kolozsvár 2014.



could best be described as a “centrist” politician who always tried to hold together different approaches in the name of Hungarian national interests in Transylvania.<sup>26</sup> He was among the advocates of a “moderate”, “legally fixed” anti-Semitism, but during a 1942 parliamentary speech he pushed for radical land reform to be carried out by dispossessing Romanians for the benefit of the local Hungarian middle class.<sup>27</sup> His radical stance towards the sizeable North Transylvanian Romanian community might sound surprising after the compromises he had made in the 1930s. It can still be understood by taking into account the notion of post-Romantic “national essentialism” described by Balázs Trencsényi.<sup>28</sup> The ethnocentric ontology of the nation as a physical body to be preserved and nourished at all costs made any further and even tactical reconciliation between the two nationalizing states struggling over Transylvania impossible after 1940. Although he was personally opposed to the routinization of political violence, Mikó came to share the view that a “viable” solution to the nationality issue in his homeland could be only achieved within the framework of Hitler’s “New Europe”. Moreover, until Romania’s change of sides in August 1944 made every illusion about Hungary’s alliance with Nazi Germany collapse, Mikó maintained that it was necessary to preserve the political unity of Transylvanian Hungarians in a right-wing coalition of all national forces.<sup>29</sup> During his entire political activity before 1944, and also his later efforts toward full rehabilitation, Mikó always preferred to work *within* the system, respecting the legal framework. Only after the Romanian antifascist turn of August 1944 did Mikó start lobbying for a separate peace agreement and trying to build a bridge between the

26 Gábor Egrý: Az erdélyiség “színeváltozása”. Kísérlet az Erdélyi Párt ideológiájának és identitáspolitikájának elemzésére 1940–1944 [The Changing Mood of Transylvanianness. Attempt at an analysis of the Ideology and the Identity Making of the Transylvanian Party]. Budapest 2008, pp. 92–93.

27 Holly Case: Between States: The Transylvanian Question and the European Idea During World War II (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009, p. 128. See also András Tóth-Bartos “Szórványkérdés és birtokpolitika Észak-Erdélyben 1940–1944 között [Diaspora Issues and Property Politics in Northern Transylvania 1940–1944]”, in Nándor Bárdi, Ágnes Tóth (eds): *Önazonosság és tagoltság. Elemzések a kulturális megosztottságról* [Self-Identity and Differentiation. An Analysis of the Cultural Cleavages]. Budapest 2013, pp. 285–314.

28 Balázs Trencsényi: A nép lelke. Nemzetkarakterológiai viták Kelet-Európában [The Soul of the People. Debates on the National Character in Eastern Europe]. Budapest 2011, p. 11.

29 Confidential circulars to local branches by the Transylvanian Party’s leadership: MNL OL, Fond P-2256 (Béla Teleki Papers), ff. 6–10 (24 July 1943), ff. 166–167/1944 (15 February 1944), ff. 230–231/1944 (without date, but May 1944). See also the personal message of Imre Mikó to the party members of his electoral college in the Székelyland, on the eve of his visit to Székelyudvarhely, *ibid.*, ff. 253–254 (17 May 1944).

bourgeois parties and the persecuted communists, who were supposed to play a key role in postwar Transylvania.<sup>30</sup>

### **An exemplary prisoner: coming to terms with Soviet communism, 1944–1948**

Imre Mikó's "second", mostly hidden and silent life started immediately after the Romanian/Soviet joint liberation of Kolozsvár/Cluj, on 13 October 1944. On that day Mikó was arrested along with another 5,000 people, mostly ethnic Hungarians living in the city and its surroundings, and deported to the forced labor camp of Taganrog, on the Sea of Azov in the Soviet Union.<sup>31</sup> The almost four years spent in Soviet captivity have been the least known episode of his life. According to family members, he never told them any details about what happened there, except some innocent anecdotes.<sup>32</sup> Securitate informants reporting on him during the 1950s and 1960s were also unsuccessful in getting him to talk about this period. In the self-biographies written for the Party and Securitate after his return (1948–1956), he touched only briefly on his captive experience.<sup>33</sup> Twenty years later, he gave a more thorough description of this period of his life in his first meeting with a high-ranking Securitate officer.

Available information shows, however, a degree of political involvement that goes far beyond the struggle for survival (according to one historian, more than a third of all deported civilians from Kolozsvár/Cluj died on the road or in the detention camps).<sup>34</sup> Imre Mikó learned Russian quickly, became an interpreter-translator and, as such, a mediator between the military command and the 6,000 prisoners of camp no. 251. More importantly, he managed to be appointed leader of the antifascist collective created among the Romanian and Hungarian inmates. In this capacity, he lectured on Soviet economic and social achievements, and edited the Hungarian-language wall newspaper. Mikó's new political engagement during Soviet captivity might be corroborated by his personal file

30 Vita: A Hiteltől, pp. 275–295. A general overview of the political situation in Northern Transylvania in late 1944, Mihály Zoltán Nagy-Gábor Vincze: Autonomisták és centralisták – Észak-Erdély a két román bevonulás között (1944. szeptember – 1945. március). [Autonomists and Centralizers – Northern Transylvania between the Two Romanian Takeovers September 1944 – March 1945]. Kolozsvár, Csíkszereda 2004.

31 János Murádin: "Malenkij robot – Kolozsváriak szovjet fogságban". [Malenki Robot – Citizens of Kolozsvár/Cluj in Soviet Captivity]. In: *Történelem és Muzeológia – Internetes Folyóirat Miskolcon* 2 (2014), pp. 81–85.

32 Interview with Lőrincz Mikó and Zsuzsa Mild (Cluj 2014).

33 ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, dosar 235727, vol. 2, f. 3. Self-biography of "Hunyadi Ioan" (Imre Mikó's first conspirative name). Cluj, 26 June 1953.

34 Murádin: "Malenkij robot", p. 83.

conserved in the Russian State Military Archive (Ru. Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voenno-istoricheskii arkhiv – RGVA).<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately however, personal files of war prisoners belonging to the antifascist groups are still classified. An informal statement released on the basis of the file only accessible to the RGVA staff claims that his political activities were appreciated by the camp’s authorities.<sup>36</sup>

Secondary literature on prisoners of war in Stalin’s USSR helps us understand the content of anodyne expressions such as “active antifascist” and raises further research questions about the role Mikó played during captivity.<sup>37</sup> Working on previously closed sources referring to the activity of antifascist groups, Maria Teresa Giusti shows the active involvement of the Soviet state security apparatus, the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (Ru. Narodnyi komissariat vnútrennikh dél, NKVD), in both monitoring and selecting for recruitment those prisoners who might serve the Soviet cause after returning home.<sup>38</sup> More generally, historians working on Russian sources contend that it was precisely among the inmates admitted to the elite unit of “antifascist groups”, the so-called “actives”, that the Soviet authorities sought a new, loyal political and cultural ruling class. Mikó himself declared that he was, as a “former member of the Hungarian parliament”, the “most interesting inmate” of his camp, and underwent several interrogations about his past activities.<sup>39</sup> It is understandable that the Soviet authorities desired to have him on their side, as a “positive” example of political reeducation to be presented to other Romanian and Hungarian prisoners. Among his belongings, there are even pictures of Mikó speaking to a crowd in a Soviet prisoner’s uniform. Military historians asked to comment on these photographs declared themselves amazed that Mikó was allowed to take them home.<sup>40</sup> Most probably, his intention was to provide concrete evidence of his successful political conversion. Private documents, such as the extensive correspondence he sustained with his family between late 1945 and

35 Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voenno-istoricheskii arkhiv (Russian State Military Archive) Moscow, File (delo) no. 01216098, Imre Mikó.

36 Personal communication by Vladimir I. Korotayev, vice-director of RGVA to Attila Seres, head of the Hungarian Archival Office in Moscow, 24 Apr. 2014.

37 Éva Mária Varga: “Magyar hadifoglyok és internáltak a Szovjetunióban az oroszországi levéltári források tükrében (1941–1956)” [Hungarian War Prisoners and Internees in the Soviet Union in the Mirror of the Soviet Archival Sources 1941–1956], PhD thesis, ELTE University. Budapest 2008, in particular pp. 224–232; Maria Teresa Giusti, *I prigionieri italiani in Russia* [The Italian prisoners in Russia]. Bologna 2014, pp. 157–204.

38 *Ibid.*, 189–196.

39 ACNSAS, Fond Rețea, dosar 182274, vol. 3, f. 233. Imre Mikó first meeting with Gen. Major Constantin Ioana, chief of Cluj county state security apparatus. Cluj, 10 Dec. 1974.

40 The pictures taken during his captivity are part of the family archives located at Imre Mikó’s homeplace in Cluj. The material is currently under catalogization; I had access to it thanks to the courtesy of the Mikó family.

mid-1948, reveal a high degree of creative adaptation to the new situation.<sup>41</sup> The general tone of the few longer, more articulated messages was not of resignation, but of optimism and commitment to family and community life. Although Mikó knew that his political career was over due to his past, he repeatedly manifested his will to join the newly established Hungarian-language university of Cluj as a law professor and encouraged his wife, Kornélia Kauntz, who incidentally was the daughter of the German consul of Cluj and a former graduate of Vienna Consular Academy conversant in six languages, to keep working in the shoe factory where she had been employed after 1945, and adjust to the “new world we have to live in from now on”.<sup>42</sup> Survival in the new situation, the Soviet-type communism introduced to Romania, required a mixture of old and new skills. As a trained international lawyer, Mikó was pragmatically interested in the Soviet nationalities policy and the opportunities it opened for Hungarians in Transylvania to integrate into the new communist Romanian state after Hungary’s definitive loss of the region.

### **Painful setback: from Russian teacher to blackmailed second-class citizen**

Starting in the summer of 1948, when he was finally allowed to regain personal freedom, Imre Mikó spent more than twenty years working on a single project: his personal rehabilitation. The polyglot lawyer and rising star of the Transylvanian politics, the habilitated young university professor and brilliant publicist, returned home as a teacher of Russian language and literature in his former Unitarian College, where he was also in charge of the school’s library and ideological training.<sup>43</sup>

Russian was his fourth tongue, after German, Romanian and French (English came last in the 1960s, when he was appointed as General Curator of the Unitarian Church and intensified his social life by meeting the international Unitarian movement representatives visiting Romania). Through a curious accident, the former bourgeois politician and member of the “Horthyist parliament” was among the very few persons in Cluj to have a good command of Russian. Intellectual skills, dynamism and exceptional adaptability ensured his successful reconversion into a respected “socialist” citizen.

41 About 200 manuscript letters sent by, or sent to Imre Mikó in Hungarian, Romanian, German and French have been preserved in the family archive.

42 Imre Mikó’s letter to Kornélia Kauntz. Taġanrog, 22 Mar. 1948.

43 Mikó’s teaching and political activity between 1948 and 1958 is carefully documented by the correspondence between his school and the local School Inspectorate. ANDJC, Fond “Sámuel Brassai”.

For ten years, Imre Mikó was apparently able to escape the grim fate awaiting most of the Transylvanian Hungarian conservative elite and also a number of prominent left-wing personalities caught in the internal purges: imprisonment, deportation to labor camps and/or total economic deprivation. Although the still young Mikó had turned into a private citizen and was not entitled to take part in the public sphere, his expertise was needed. The ethnic Hungarian philosopher Gábor Gál, founder of the left-wing journal *Korunk* in the late 1920s, as well as Hungarian communist publicists Ernő Gáll and Edgár Balogh, employed him as a translator of Stalin's and Lenin's works.<sup>44</sup> After graduating from Bucharest's Maxim Gorki Institute in 1954, Mikó held methodological seminars and also became the main author of the first Hungarian-language manual of Russian, published in 1958, just a few weeks before he was fired during a nationwide campaign against "politically unreliable" cadres.<sup>45</sup> For several years, Mikó worked as a storekeeper and street book vendor for the regional press trust, and supplemented his meager salary by providing private lessons and translating.<sup>46</sup> Finally, in 1963, he was promoted to manager of the university bookshop, while in 1964 he was elected General Curator of the Unitarian Church with the decisive agreement of the state's cult inspectorate. In 1969 he was allowed to join a key institution of communist cultural policy, the Writers' Union, and in 1970 his rehabilitation was complete when he was given the decisive support of the ethnic Hungarian party nomenclature as a staff member of "Kriterion", the newly established editing house in charge of literature and poetry of the so-called "cohabitating nationalities" of Romania.

What helped a model citizen with no political ambitions avoid repressions in the early 1950s, and what barred him from full professional rehabilitation for such a long time? For almost three decades, the political police spent a huge amount of time, and human and material resources, unmasking Imre Mikó's "secret" past. For about thirty years and without significant interruptions, dozens of informants were put to "work" on him (eighteen of them have been identified so far). However, until 1970 they could not hand over a single piece of negative information on Mikó's attitude towards the regime.<sup>47</sup> Why did they need to gather so much useless information? The ideological drivers

44 ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, dosar 235727, vol. 3, ff. 126–127.

45 Mikó Imre: Orosz nyelv. Tankönyv a magyar tannyelvű iskolák VIII. osztálya számára [Russian Language. Textbook for 8th Year Pupils attending Hungarian-language Schools]. București 1958; id.: Orosz nyelv. Tankönyv a magyar tannyelvű iskolák X. osztálya számára [Russian Language. Textbook for 10th Year Pupils attending Hungarian-language Schools]. București 1958.

46 ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, dosar 235727, vol. 3, f. 103.

47 See the reports collected on Mikó from the 1960s: *ibid.*, vols. 3 and 5.

of this compulsive inquiry changed from the 1950s, when the Securitate aimed to prevent former elites from “restoring capitalism”, to the 1970s when security had a new focus. Then, Mikó’s collaboration with the “Horthyist” authorities shifted from personal stigmatization into the concept of a virtual collective enemy: Hungarian irredentism.

In the 1950s, Imre Mikó was recruited twice as a secret informant. On 15 January 1952, Lieutenant József/Iosif Kovács, himself an ethnic Hungarian, wrote the first “operative profile” of the candidate, Mikó, after laborious background work. He described Mikó as “ideologically fit” to work as an informer. During preliminary conversations, Kovács wrote, “we could make up our mind that he wants to change and give his contribution to the building of socialism.” This was followed by a psychological remark:

He is a clever, cautious, man of forethought, the kind of person who is able to invent himself in every system because he is talented, precise and trustworthy. He is an extremely active element, who easily wins the confidence of the interlocutor. He also has some experience in gathering confidential information, because under the Horthy regime [*between 1940 and 1944 – S. B.*] he got in touch with Swedish journalists, then handed over their information to his left-wing contacts.<sup>48</sup>

The truth of the last sentence is doubtful, for no other mention of this can be found outside this file. However, this poorly trained and almost illiterate young officer had a point. Mikó really wanted to cooperate with the communist state because as a disciplined citizen he accepted its norms, whatever they were. Unfortunately for him, the early Securitate preferred blackmailed secret informants to voluntary helpers of the regime. In February 1952, under the psychological constraint of the choice between cooperation and deportation to the forced labor camps by Danube-Black Sea Canal, Mikó signed his first cooperation agreement with the Securitate and he was assigned the pseudonym “Hunyadi Ioan”. He also undertook the task of providing information about the interwar and wartime activity of former colleagues and friends belonging to the Transylvanian Hungarian liberal-conservative elite.<sup>49</sup> The pressure put on him to disclose the “hostile activity” of former fellow party members transformed a seemingly appeased citizen and member of the old elite into a psychologically fragile secret helper. Understandably, the Securitate was not satisfied with his work. His handling officer Kovács also became the object of

<sup>48</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Rețea, dos. 182274, vol. 1, f. 72.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., ff. 10–14. Mikó’s reports from 1953 and 1954, ff. 47–56.

internal criticism for not gathering enough negative evidence on Mikó, whose case was taken away from him and given to the more scrupulous lieutenant Vasile Lupșă. In April 1955, the new handler placed Mikó under arrest as a war criminal and threatened him with court martial unless he agreed to “work intensively” on the “Hungarian nationalist problem”.<sup>50</sup>

Mikó’s second forced collaboration between May 1955 and November 1956 was as brief as it is problematic to assess. This time, he knew that despite ongoing de-Stalinization, his personal freedom and the future of his large family depended on full cooperation with the regime. His personal operative file under the new pseudonym “Dumitrescu Ioan” contains valuable evidence. While he never reported on conversations he had with acquaintances, he prepared short and penetrating biographical portraits of over one hundred relatives, friends, colleagues, and members of the old local Hungarian elite.<sup>51</sup> Even if they were mostly neutral and focused on facts, some might have been damaging to persons accused of being members of the Horthy-era military counterintelligence, or of collaborating with its police. Other reports could not be found in his personal file, but copies of them were placed into the operative files opened on other targeted personalities of the Hungarian minority such as Ernő Teleki<sup>52</sup> and György Bethlen,<sup>53</sup> but also foreign citizens visiting Romania such as the Cluj-born Magda Orbán, a Calvinist theologian living in Budapest suspected of gathering “compromising information” on Romania.<sup>54</sup>

After the outbreak of the 1956 Hungarian revolution, Mikó’s collaboration came to an abrupt end. This happened on his own initiative, under the growing moral pressure felt as a Russian teacher *and* a secret informant of the Romanian political police in the bloody aftermath of the Hungarian uprising. On November 16 he addressed a long hand-written letter to the first party secretary of Cluj. The text summarized his biography, paying special attention to the left-wing political contacts Mikó claimed he had from the pre-1944 era, and to his professional achievements in communist Romania. Mikó also reminded his distinguished reader that he had never been sentenced for his past activities (and so from a *judicial* point of view he did not have anything to regret). He then concluded his heartfelt appeal by asking for full rehabilitation and also for an end to “harassing him once a week for a certain control”, which

50 The interrogation carried out by Lupșă on Mikó: ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, dosar 235727, vol. 3, ff. 26–37 f. Mikó’s second self-biography and secret engagement in ACNSAS, Fond Rețea, dos. 182274, vol. 1, ff. 59–62.

51 *Ibid.*, ff. 19–46.

52 Mikó’s report on him in ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, dosar 263675, ff. 277–279.

53 Mikó’s negative characterization in ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, dosar 0185019, f. 16.

54 Mikó’s reports in ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, dosar 234084, ff. 112, 140 and 159.

clearly meant ending cooperation with the Securitate. The result of this highly unusual self-denouncement was predictable. The secret police received a copy of his letter from party headquarters, and excluded him from the agents' network in January 1957 and also started investigating him for "Hungarian nationalism".<sup>55</sup> In the convulsive aftermath of the Hungarian revolt, Mikó's individual gesture of human dignity merged with the overall impact of Soviet intervention and the subsequent beginning of harsh reprisals not only in Hungary, but also in Romania. Here, the repression assumed the character of a political and ethnic cleansing that targeted members of the old elites, especially clergymen, intellectuals and aristocrats.<sup>56</sup>

After losing his job as a school teacher, Mikó was placed under general surveillance as the former leader of a "fascist party". He spent the following decade trying to rise again from the bottom of social ladder. Until the mid-1960s, this task proved extremely difficult, even if he managed to cope with the tight state security control on him. He had become so prudent and suspicious that the Securitate's informants were unsuccessful on a number of occasions when they tried to stimulate political discussions with him. He knew the correct answer to uncomfortable questions. When "incidentally" asked in 1963 by a good friend about the disappearance of bilingual signs in central Cluj, Mikó first shocked his friend by claiming it was high time that the local Hungarians improved their Romanian language skills, and then he switched the conversation to less dangerous topics.<sup>57</sup> But it was not always easy to avoid harassment and compromises. After 1956, the Securitate successfully approached at least two other members of his family. His wife Kornélia, a brilliant woman whose only crime was that she was the daughter of the pre-war German Consul of Cluj, was recruited in January 1959 after an 18-hour interrogation. Until 1965, when she was excluded for "insincerity", she had to report on colleagues at the Dermata/Clujana shoe factory, and also on family acquaintances and "old specialists" of bourgeois origin.<sup>58</sup> Mikó's brother-in-law József Kauntz, an accountant with a university and work record in wartime Nazi Germany, was recruited after suffering two years of administrative detention in 1950–52 to become, in the 1960s, a qualified agent in charge of commercial and political contacts with West German personalities at home and abroad.<sup>59</sup>

55 ACNSAS, Fond Rețea, dos. 182274, vol. 1, f. 76.

56 On the post-1956 repression in Romania, Stefano Bottoni: "Nation-building through judiciary repression: the impact of the 1956 revolution on Romanian minority policy". In: Attila Hunyadi (ed.): *State and Minority in Transylvania, 1918–1989: Studies on the History of the Hungarian Community*. New York 2012, pp. 403–442.

57 ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, dosar 235727, vol. 3, f. 64.

58 ANSAS, Fond Rețea, dosar dosar 179592.

59 ACNSAS, Fond Rețea, dosar 389336.



This personal history of collaboration and continuous adaptation to a changing reality after the communist takeover cannot be separated from the parallel vicissitudes of his family and his milieu. For the Mikós, collaboration was not only a tool of survival or a political gesture, but also became a peculiarly shared and collectively familiar experience.

### Talking with the system: Mikó's collaboration in the 1970s

The most intellectually engaging period of Imre Mikó's collaboration with the Romanian communist regime was definitely the last one, which started after 1970, when he finally became an assistant editor of the "Kriterion" publishing house. The solution to the puzzle of his return to working as an informer is not to be found in individual privilege, but in the multitude of concessions made to marginalized elite groups during the first "liberal" years of Nicolae Ceaușescu's rule.<sup>60</sup> According to Securitate files, Mikó was pleased by what he rightly perceived as the completion of his long-awaited rehabilitation.<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, his literary appointment had been preceded from 1964 by his election to the post of General Curator of the Unitarian Church (1964–1969). The polyglot and elegantly dressed Mikó played a key role in organizing the celebration in Cluj of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his religious denomination in August 1968, an event attended by hundreds of foreign guests, many from the United States.<sup>62</sup> An even more relevant act was the declaration of support for Ceaușescu's independent policy signed by Mikó and other influent personalities of Transylvanian cultural life during the Czechoslovak crisis.<sup>63</sup> On the basis of the available evidence, one may presume that his acceptance of the existing regime relied not on mere opportunism, but on the rationale that a gradual reorientation of Romanian communism from Soviet dependence to a quasi-alliance with the West might have been beneficial to Transylvanian Hungarians.<sup>64</sup> In the 1970s, Mikó turned into an informal leader of his ethnic community, second only to Roman Catholic Bishop

60 Vasile: *Viața intelectuală*, pp. 129–30.

61 ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, dosar 235727, vol. 6, f. 416.

62 *Ibid.*, ff. 463 and 480.

63 Novák Csaba Zoltán: *Aranykorszak? A Ceaușescu-rendszer magyarságpolitikája 1965–1974* [Golden Age? The Hungarian Policy of the early Ceaușescu Regime 1965–1974]. Csík-szereda 2011, p. 51.

64 According to what he told his old friend Zsigmond-Gyallay Pap during their confidential meeting in New York in 1973. Gyallay-Pap reported his conversations with Mikó to József Takács, chief of the Hungarian section of the radio station Voice of America. Gyallay-Pap's letter to Takács, undated but early December 1973 (Teleki Béla hagyatékából, számozatlan doboz, New York, Magyar Ház) [Teleki Béla Private Papers. Unrecorded box. New York, Hungarian House].

Áron Márton, whose prestige exceeded that of any other of its members. Following his political instincts, after forty years Mikó was again involved in the role he excelled in, that of behind-the-scene policy maker. He became the informal advisor to János Fazekas, the highest-ranking Hungarian communist official of the time in Romania: Fazekas was a full member of the Political Executive Committee and Romania's Vice Prime-Minister.<sup>65</sup> From Mikó's perspective, he just regained the social status he always felt he deserved. As part of the official socialist cultural network, he could now influence public opinion by editing historical books about prominent Hungarian intellectuals of the past, by giving interviews, by writing popular articles on a wide range of subjects, including minority rights, and by delivering commemorative speeches at popular universities and religious festivities.<sup>66</sup> His semi-public activity also included active and concrete lobbying that was reminiscent of the old role of "troubleshooter" he played in interwar Romanian political life. He gathered and handed over complaints and collected money and support to renovate churches and (Hungarian) historical monuments, while ceaselessly praising Romanian-Hungarian brotherhood.

From 1971 to 1977, when he died, Imre Mikó was under constant, albeit discrete state security surveillance under the codename "Molnár". The investigation file (Ro. Dosar de urmarirea informativă) opened on him in June 1971 was only closed due to "lack of evidence" after he started to collaborate again.<sup>67</sup> As the Romanian historian Dragoș Petrescu has pointed out, it was precisely the short-lived cultural liberalization and the increased opportunity for travel abroad that stimulated a wave of ideological heterodoxy that challenged the monolithic unity of the Romanian party around 1968.<sup>68</sup> The Securitate perceived a higher level of threat at the time due to the increase of personal contacts, especially with Romanian-born U. S. and West German citizens. Following the changing mindset of the top party leadership and probably working towards it, the state security began to have a paranoid fear of Hungarian nationalism/chauvinism/irredentism (terms often used as synonyms).<sup>69</sup> Every

65 In a recent interview (Budapest, 2015) the poet Sándor Kányádi took all the credit for recommending Mikó to Fazekas. It seems however that a key role might have been played by the influential director of the Kriterion publishing house Géza Domokos.

66 His role as a public intellectual after 1970 was even quantitatively impressive. The most up-to-date publication record lists no less than 154 pieces in the period 1970–78: <<http://mikoimre.adatbank.transindex.ro/>>, 05.11.2017.

67 ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, dosar 235727, vol. 4, f. 184.

68 Dragoș Petrescu: Closely Watched Tourism: The Securitate as Warden of Transnational Encounters, 1967–9. In: *Journal of Contemporary History* 50 (2015) 2, pp. 337–353.

69 See the seminal article published in the internal bulletin of the Romanian political police describing the specificity of the hostile activity carried out by citizens of Hungarian ethnic background: Major Ludovic Kiss: Particularități ale activității ostile dusă de persoane din

form of “Hungarian” complaint could be countered with this standard accusation. When in 1971 János Fazekas asked Mikó and János Demeter, then professor of law at Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj, to draft a minority code, the Securitate was alarmed, because of the growing ethnic solidarity they perceived between the Hungarian communist apparatus and the traditional bourgeois intelligentsia to which Mikó belonged.<sup>70</sup> The powerful image of an ideological short circuit was conveyed and even fueled by a number of Hungarian informants, the most influential of whom was the historian and political activist Lajos Jordáky, followed by the literary critic István Szócs.<sup>71</sup> Intellectuals from a working-class background were not happy about the public comeback of a prominent member of the prewar conservative elite who cast a shadow over genuine worker culture. They repeatedly warned the Securitate that old-school intellectuals were hijacking the whole Transylvanian Hungarian culture under the flag of an inherently reactionary project: the reification or, better put, the “patrimonialisation”/“heritagisation”<sup>72</sup> of an idealized Hungarian past, obtained by turning back the clock to the 1930s nationalist ideology of “serving the people”. What was worse was that they were doing so with the consent of leading party officials.

Unlike in earlier times, Mikó’s provision of secret information as an informant after 1970 was gradual and seemingly voluntary. His bargain with the Securitate was not about personal freedom and physical survival, nor just a figment of his education, nor merely made out of respect for authority. It was a power game related to service to a collective entity identified as the Hungarian community of Transylvania. Service, here, also meant complying with rules and making moral compromises. When a law was published in 1971 requiring Romanian citizens to report any conversation they might have with foreign citizens,<sup>73</sup> Mikó obediently fulfilled the obligation and started reporting on visitors he

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rîndul naționalității maghiare [Specific Features of the Hostile Activity Carried Out by Persons Belonging to the Hungarian Nationality]. In: *Securitatea* no. 3 (1969), pp. 28–33.

70 Draft in ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, dosar 235727, vol. 6, ff. 229–230.

71 Starting from 1968, Jordáky regularly informed both the party leadership and the Securitate about “negative tendencies” affecting Transylvanian Hungarian cultural life. His most relevant reports on Mikó under the codename of “Ion” in: *ibid.*, ff. 202–203 (15 Aug. 1972), ff. 160–172 (22 Dec. 1972), ff. 104–116 (5 Mar. 1973). Szócs, codenamed in this period “Tatár Péter”, reported several times on Mikó’s ideological diversion: *ibid.*, ff. 54–59, 154–5, 242–243.

72 On this concept, see François Hartog: *Régimes d’historicité, Présentisme et expériences du temps* [Regimes of Historicism. Present Age and the Experiences of Time]. Paris 2003.

73 Alina Ilinca, Liviu Marius Bejenaru: *Secretomanie și controlul informațiilor în România socialistă (1965–1989)* [Secretomania and the Control of Information Flow in Socialist Romania 1965–1989]. In: *Arhivele Totalitarismului* 3–4 (2006), pp. 146–157.

<[http://www.cnsas.ro/documente/istoria\\_comunism/studii\\_articole/activitati\\_plan\\_intern/Secretomanie%20si%20controlul%20informatiilor.pdf](http://www.cnsas.ro/documente/istoria_comunism/studii_articole/activitati_plan_intern/Secretomanie%20si%20controlul%20informatiilor.pdf)>, 25.10.2015.

received from Hungary, the United States, and West European countries.<sup>74</sup> In 1973, collaboration became closer and more demanding. Mikó had been invited by an old friend, the Unitarian priest and former Hungarian Member of Parliament in 1945–47 Sándor Szent-Iványi, to undertake a conference tour in the United States. The Securitate was long undecided whether to support Mikó's journey, when its political content was ambiguous, even if the official topic of the planned talks was seemingly innocent: the biographic genre in the Transylvanian literary tradition. The Securitate's Cluj County branch even engaged in a rare disagreement with central authorities in order to prevent Mikó from getting a passport: they reported to Bucharest that "he is known for nationalist-irredentist beliefs and hostile attitude towards our socialist order", but nevertheless Mikó was finally granted an exit visa due to the personal intervention of Fazekas.<sup>75</sup>

The one-month journey to the United States represented a turning point in the relationship between Mikó and the Securitate. In January 1974, he handed over an eight-page typewritten report to Major Florian Oprea,<sup>76</sup> the officer responsible for the "nationalist-irredentist" problem at Cluj County Securitate and the personal handler of dozens of intellectuals. The paper described not only the circumstances of his invitation on the behalf of the American Hungarian Library and Historical Society, but also the discussions held with the members of the audience, mostly members of the old Hungarian elites who considered him a "good Hungarian". According to them, Mikó deserved to be admitted to Hungarian House in New York, as he was on 15 November 1973, when he spoke before almost 200 persons as the first guest to Hungarian House from Romania. Several months before, the same privilege had been denied to the "communist" group of Transylvanian writers (András Sütő, Árpád Farkas, Sándor Kányádi, Győző Hajdu and "Kriterion director Géza Domokos) who were visiting the United States for the first time amid controversies surrounding their commitment to the regime. The most interesting part of Mikó's report was the section of biographical portraits of sixteen leading personalities of the Hungarian diaspora whom he had met during his tour of Hungarian-inhabited cities. Mikó provided the Securitate with fresh insights on the internal cleavages between "reactionaries" and "liberals", alleged that some had FBI links, and also explained to the Securitate which of these groups "could be useful to us". Mikó clearly purposely used the plural as a mark of his grasp of the linguistic code system of Romanian national communism.<sup>77</sup>

74 ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, dos. 235727, vol. 6, ff. 419–420.

75 Ibid., ff. 534–546.

76 Florea's cadre file: ACNSAS, Fond Cadre, dosar O-102.

77 ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, dosar 235727, vol. 6, ff. 42–49.

Until 1974, Mikó's new position as an informal and occasional collaborator did not imply regular meetings with handling officers, or any formal task. Only in January 1975 did the local Securitate report that Mikó had been recruited "in the absence of any formal engagement" (Ro. *recrutat fără luare de angajament*), a jargon expression referring to highly qualified informers who had been used to promote or defend the external image of Romania in the West.<sup>78</sup> In early 1976, under the guidance of his handling officers Mikó (codenamed either "Micu" or "Marcu") managed to be invited on a tour of conferences by István Szépfalusi, a Protestant priest who had settled in Vienna after 1956 to become a leading figure of the Hungarian diaspora, with excellent connections in the Austrian government and diplomacy.<sup>79</sup> The result of this effort was Mikó's one-month trip to West Germany, Austria and Switzerland, on which he was accompanied by his wife in the spring of 1976. This time, Mikó's operative goals had been jointly set up in advance by the local Securitate and the foreign intelligence unit. A Securitate agent living in Austria, the journalist István Tartler Baróti codenamed "Timár", visited Mikó to give him a copy of a book recently published on the Transylvanian ethnic issues by one of Mikó's old friends, the publicist Elemér Illyés.<sup>80</sup> According to the plan issued by the state security, Mikó undertook the task to "review" the book, which he considered dangerous for its blunt criticism of Romanian nationalities policies, to visit Illyés at his home in West Germany, and to convince Illyés to take advantage of Mikó's assistance in the preparation of a "more objective" new edition.<sup>81</sup> On his return, Mikó produced a report rated of the highest operative interest by the Securitate's foreign intelligence section.<sup>82</sup> The Securitate was aware that the presence of Mikó at meetings of the Western Hungarian diaspora would help dismiss allegations of mistreatment of the Transylvanian minority. Mikó's credibility was enforced by his post-1944 personal story of deprivation. Most people listening to him had not known him personally before, but all had heard that he was a respectable member of the old Transylvanian society, who had been persecuted precisely for not being communist and pro-Romanian.

This meticulous attempt to "positively influence" the Hungarian émigré community reflected the impact of the first major setbacks suffered by Romania's foreign image after the country's opening to the West, between 1976 and

78 ACNSAS, Fond Rețea, dosar 182274, vol. 2, f. 36.

79 *Ibid.*, vol. 3, f. 97.

80 *Ibid.*, f. 159.

81 *Ibid.*, ff. 166–170.

82 Mikó's report in: *ibid.*, ff. 36–48. For the foreign intelligence's evaluation, see *ibid.*, vol. 2, ff. 11–12.

1978. Young educated people belonging to the second generation of Hungarians living in the Western diaspora started unprecedented mass mobilization to protest against Romania's abuses of the Transylvanian Hungarian minority.<sup>83</sup> In 1976 and 1977, several well-attended and widely publicized campaigns were organized in the US, where Congress was discussing the renewal of the Most Favored Nation clause granted to Romania in 1975. These campaigns inflicted a blow on the US policy of support for the Ceaușescu regime, and provoked distress among formerly confident Romanian authorities. Mikó, like many senior members of Transylvania's political elite such as his former party boss Béla Teleki (with whom he talked before his US trip and later in May 1976), was opposed to demonstrations of open dissent.<sup>84</sup> In accordance with the official Romanian line, he continued to argue that any complaints should be discussed and solved within the existing framework. Mikó was then used, with his full consent and approval, as a channel to "temper" the diaspora, for whom the worsening situation of the Hungarian minority in Romania was becoming a pressing issue, and even a potential bridge to Kádár's Hungary. As Mikó argued in his analysis of the Western European Hungarian émigré community, the Romanian state should have started a dialogue with those "democratically minded" groups and individuals who looked at the Transylvanian issue in "realistic terms".<sup>85</sup>

In the last years of his life, Imre Mikó became a qualified, highly appreciated informant for the Securitate although he never officially adhered to communism, nor substantially changed his mind over Transylvanian issues. For its part, the Securitate never stopped regarding him as a potential threat, due to his former ties to the now remote right-wing nationalist past. Nevertheless, Mikó accepted the notion that being a non-communist authority behind the scenes suspended between the external perspective of the outsider and the embeddedness of the insider implied a triple commitment. First, there was his commitment to public community work as editor of the major Hungarian printing house and curator general of the Unitarian church, an honor he resumed in 1973 and held until his death. Second, there was his semi-formal and confidential personal advice to deputy prime minister and Executive Political Committee member János Fazekas. Last but not least, there was his secret dialogue with the political police on a wide range of ideological and political issues.

<sup>83</sup> The most notable case was the foundation in early 1976 of the New York-based Committee for Human Rights in Romania (CHRR).

<sup>84</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Rețea, dosar 182274, vol. 3, f. 27.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

The pragmatic reasons for Mikó's final cooperation with the Securitate stemmed from a mental mindset that resulted from a life-long experience of an unequal relationship with authoritarian or totalitarian political structures. For Mikó, collaboration with the legitimate authorities, regardless of the ideological system they represented, was part of the business of a political person like himself. He repeatedly expressed in public and private his dislike of the primitive culture of Romanian national communism, even if he appreciated the Romanian pro-Western and anti-Russian foreign policy in comparison to the Kádár regime's servile obedience to Moscow.<sup>86</sup> Most Hungarian intellectuals in Transylvania showed growing admiration for Hungary's economic achievements and the social peace guaranteed by Kádár's internal consolidation. However, Mikó seemed to share the negative perceptions that were stirring and expressed by populist Hungarian intellectuals such as Gyula Illyés, László Németh and János Kodolányi, with whom he felt more akin. After the first visit Mikó paid to Hungary after the war, in 1971, he maintained that Hungary was no better place to live than Transylvania, and that consumerism there was killing national values.<sup>87</sup>

The most intriguing feature of Mikó's effective cooperation with the Romanian Securitate is represented by the long series of meetings with Major General Constantin Ioana, the chief of the Cluj county state security branch.<sup>88</sup> Mikó and Ioana met no less than 16 times, between December 1974 and August 1976, usually in Ioana's office in Cluj's Traian Street. A tape recorder helped Securitate staff to prepare lengthy handwritten minutes of every talk.<sup>89</sup> Why did Mikó agree to talk to the well positioned representative of a system he never felt really part of? And what might have been the Securitate's expectations of a man described as "influential", "extremely clever" but also labeled "deeply nationalist"? The Ioana-Mikó talks of the mid-1970s are a first-rate source for the study of accommodation techniques during late socialism. The senior officer was well aware of the intellectual stature and political experience of the man standing before him, and he did not ask Mikó for information. He accepted the idea that Mikó used these regular meetings to carry on political

86 *Ibid.*, f. 221.

87 ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, dosar 235727, vol. 6, f. 251.

88 Ioana's cadre file: ACNSAS, Fond Cadre, dosar 00037.

89 Transcript of talks in ACNSAS, Fond Rețea, dosar 182274, vol. 3, ff. 216–233 (10 Dec. 1974), ff. 189–202 (26 Dec. 1974), ff. 203–215 (14 Jan. 1975), ff. 176–188 (5 May 1975), ff. 147–157 (18 July 1975), ff. 136–144 (15 Oct. 1975), ff. 124–135 (28 Oct. 1975), ff. 114–122 (26 Dec. 1975), ff. 106–112 (13 Jan. 1976), ff. 97–106 (19 Feb. 1976), ff. 131–135 (24 Feb. 1976), ff. 159–176 (5 March 1976), ff. 66–70 (17 Apr. 1976), ff. 49–65 (24 May 1976), ff. 14–22 (9 Aug. 1976); *ibid.*, vol. 4, ff. 2–8 (16 Aug. 1976).

conversations about current issues. A wide range of sensible topics such as concrete pledges of fealty from the Hungarian minority, worsening bilateral relations with Hungary, or the negative impact of the emigration of more and more Hungarian intellectuals were discussed by the two with a surprising degree of openness. Mikó explained to Ioana why Bucharest was wrong to restrict the Hungarian cultural and educational network. According to him, growing state-sponsored nationalism was uselessly radicalizing the stance of valuable left-wing intellectuals who might have been, or used to be, loyal citizens and close political allies.

Increasingly concerned about the nationalist turn of the Ceaușescu regime after 1974, Mikó used the only instrument of moral suasion available to him as a non party-member: personal contact. He probably hoped that his message would be transmitted to the top political level, and improve the overall condition of the Transylvanian Hungarian community. Unfortunately, there is no evidence of bottom-up internal communication of the political messages Mikó transmitted to the Securitate. The eventual impact of his informal lobbying cannot yet be assessed. Nevertheless, some tentative lessons can be drawn from his case and brought to the historical debate. The first is the difficulty of applying to it definitions and analytical categories in use hitherto. Departing from Lynne Viola's discussion of power techniques of the Soviet-type regimes,<sup>90</sup> one has to conclude that expressions like "perpetrator" or "victim" do not reflect the extreme complexity of this biography. The moralistic insistence inherent in the notion of "opportunism" is also of little help in trying to explain how Imre Mikó was able to work with mutually incompatible political regimes without becoming a "man without face" or a political puppet. One interpretative key might be found in the notions of service and embeddedness. From the 1930s to the late 1970s, Mikó chose to act according to the formal rules required by the political system he was living in. This personal stance necessarily implied a wide range of compromises. The analysis of this story of collaboration and mutual distrust between a déclassé member of the elite and the dogmatic representatives of Romanian national communism may help us grasp the more general evolution of power techniques from open brutality to sophisticated manipulation. At the same time, long-period biographical analyses of former conservative personalities who joined the communist intelligence network might help us follow the trajectory from moral rejection of the regime to a critical accommodation to it.

90 Lynne Viola: "The Question of the Perpetrator in Soviet History". In: *Slavic Review*, 72: 1 (2013), pp. 1–23.