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The Communist Repression against the Families of “The Enemies of the People” in Romania. Case Study of Fr. Nyitrai Mózes¹

Introduction

After the Second World War, Romania was exposed to a series of repressive measures, just like the rest of the countries under Soviet influence. The newly installed authorities resorted to such measures inspired by their Moscow counterparts in order to control the main institutions and eventually the whole of society.

The Sovietization of Romania targeted all fields of activity, from politics to the economy and culture, and it was performed mostly through violent means. The Securitate (the political police), the Militia, the justice system, but also the military, each had their own contribution in the array of repressive measures undertaken by the new regime.

The reaction of the population to this regime was one of rejection, which triggered a large wave of detentions in the years 1947-1950. Subsequent years were a relatively calm period, during which the regime attempted to become more stable. But as Romania had become part of the “Socialist camp”, major events taking place in other Socialist states – such as Stalin’s death, Khrushchev’s speech at the XXth Congress of the CPSU, 1956 in Poland and especially Hungary – also had a significant impact on the evolution of Romanian society.

In this general atmosphere of so-called “destalinization” during 1956-57, there were still several bundles of resistance active in Romania. In the mountains, lone fugitives or former mem-

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bers of armed resistance groups continued to be a nuisance for authorities. In such circumstances, the years 1957 to 1959 brought with them a second wave of repression. Its purpose was to prevent renewed opposition from the people (after several protests inspired by the events in Hungary). On the other hand, the decision to withdraw Soviet troops from Romania had just been taken and the Communist leaders in Bucharest wanted to show Moscow they could keep the situation under control. It is relevant in the context of our research to point out the fact that, after 1956, many ethnic Hungarians² came under the scrutiny of the Securitate due to the solidarity shown towards the Hungarian revolutionaries and their involvement in activities which were not to the regime's liking. Not least of all, it is important to mention that in 1958, the Romanian Communist leaders had decided to accelerate the process of agricultural collectivization, which required certain repressive measures to subdue the population, especially the rural one, and to make it agree to state control over agricultural organization.

People from all walks of life were subjected to this new repression. As an atheist ideology, Communism positioned itself against the clergy, several thousand priests being arrested and sentenced to prison or other forms of punishment³. One of the priests who suffered during those years, along with his family, was Unitarian priest Nyitrai Mózes.

Our study is based on documents from the Archive of National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (ANCSSA), personal records of former political prisoners from Archive of National Administration of Penitentiaries (ANAP), an oral history interview with Nyitray Csongor, one of the members of the family, who supplied us with very interesting information, as well as several other articles.

² According to the population survey of February 1956, ethnic Hungarians were the most numerous minority in Romania, with a population of 1.587.575 (9,1%) out of the total 17.489.450 people.

³ According to a survey of the prison population done by the International Center on the Study of Communism within the Memorial of the Resistance and the Victims of Communism, it would amount to 2,39% of all political prisoners, which means roughly a few thousand people, according to our estimates.

Several aspects concerning the history of Unitarians in Romania

The Unitarian Church appeared in Transylvania during the 16th Century, in the context of Reform, having adepts among the Hungarian population. During the interwar period the number of Unitarians was of about 60.000, meaning 0,4% of the Romanian population⁴.

During the communist regime the Unitarian Church, just like all the other churches, was affected by repression and the attempts of the state to subordinate it. The main works regarding the history of the Unitarian Church in Romania between 1944-1989 belong to the historians Sándor Kovács, Sándor Oláh and János Pál and focus on destinies of priests⁵, different events and the involvement of important persons from the Church⁶, and not least on the attempts of the Securitate to infiltrate and control the Unitarian Church⁷.

According to Nyitrai Mózes, at least 18 professors of Theology, priests and Unitarian theologians had been condemned after 1956 and had been sent to prisons and working camps until 1964, when they were released⁸.

⁴ *General Census of the Romanian Population from 29th of December 1930, vol. II: Nation, maternal language, religion*, Bucharest, 1938.

⁵ Oláh Sándor, *Egy "demokratikus magatartású pap" az ügynökhálózatban* [A Priest with a "Democratic Attitude" in the Network of Agents]. in "Székelyföld", year XVII, no. 2013/4, pp. 74-95, year XVII, nr. 2013/5, pp. 115-137, year XVII, no. 2013/6, pp. 79-100. Kovács Sándor, *A szabadság és erkölcs dilemmái. Erdő János életpályái 1945-1979 között* [The Dilemmas of Freedom and Morality. The Career of Erdő János between 1945-1979], in Nagy Mihály Zoltán, Zombori István (eds.), "Az egyház hatalma - a hatalom egyháza. A közép-kelet-európai egyházi vezetők fel fogása az állam és az egyház kapcsolatáról 1945 és 1989 között [The Church of Power – the Power of Church. The Perception of the Ecclesiast Leaders on the Relationship between State and Church in the Central and Eastern Europe between 1945-1989], METEM, Budapest, 2015, pp. 117-137.

⁶ Kovács Sándor, "Simpozium 1979". *Dávid Ferenc kultusz: az egyházi üzenet és a politikai ellenőrzés* [1979 Symposium. *The Cult of Ferenc Dávid: The Religious Message and the Political Control*], in *Magyar Kisebbség*, year XVIII, no. 2013/1, pp. 51-81; *Idem*, *Egy hagyaték sorsa. Kelemen Lajos személyi levéltárának "államosítása"* [The Fate of and Inheritance. "Nationalization" of the Personal Archive of Lajos Kelemen], in "Erdélyi Múzeum", year LXXV, no. 2013/4, pp. 108-124.

⁷ Pál János, *Unitárius egyházvezetés 1945-1965 között. Egy célcsoport metamorfózisa?* [Unitarian Ecclesiast Leadership between 1945-1965. The Metaphor of a Target Group?], in "Magyar Kisebbség", year XVIII, nr. 2013/1, pp. 82-175; *Idem*, *Az egyház hatalma, a hatalom egyháza. Az Unitárius Egyház szerepkörei a romániai államszocializmus első két évtizedében* [The Power of Church, the Church of Power. The Roles of the Unitarian Church in the First Two Decades of Romanian State Socialism], in Nagy Mihály Zoltán Zombori István (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 139-163.

⁸ Nagy Ödön, Hermán János, Nyitrai Mózes, *Palástban. Lelkészek szórványban* [In Robes. Priests in Diaspora], Mentor, Marosvásárhely, 2001, p. 392.

Nyitrai Mózes

He was born on October 24, 1913, in Cheia village, close to Turda, in Transylvania, in a peasant family. He studied at the Institute of Reformed Theology in Cluj. During the Second World War, when Northern Transylvania became part of Hungary after the Second Vienna Award of August 30, 1940, he became a priest in the carboniferous Jiu Valley area, Hunedoara County (in Petroșani and Lupeni). During this period, his wife, Berta, who had also studied theology, was a teacher at a confessional school of the diocese⁹. They had four children during that time: a boy, Levente (born 1940), a girl, Gyöngyvér, (born 1940) and the twins Csongor and Tünde (born 1943).

During the war, he was interned at Târgu Jiu internment camp¹⁰. Regarding this moment of his life, things are relatively unclear. His youngest son, Csongor, told us¹¹ he was taken to the camp in 1941 “as insurance for the Romanians left in Northern Transylvania.” His son, Levente, claims in one of his Communist Party autobiographies¹² that his father was interned in 1944 for his “antifascist activity, which he undertook as a member of the Hungarian (social-democratic) Party of Romania”.

In 1946, in a post-war context dominated by shortages of food and Csongor’s health problems, the family left Lupeni and settled in Chinușu¹³, now in Harghita County, an area with a majority of ethnic Hungarians.

Regarding Nyitrai Mózes’s post-war political affiliations, there are once again two distinct opinions. Csongor claims his father was a member of the Social Democratic Party, but after its merger with the Communist Party in 1946, the priests were excluded¹⁴. Levente claims that upon his release from the internment camp,

⁹ Arhiva Consiliului Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității (The Archive of The National Council for the Study of Securitatea Archives - ANCSSA), Informative Fund, file no. 837341, f. 9; Network Fund, file no. 303719, f. 20; Author’s personal interview with Nyitrai Csongor, born in 1941, priest retired. Interview was conducted on 25 March 2016, in Cădaciu Mare, Harghita County and is available in Oral History Archive of The Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile.

¹⁰ Târgu Jiu internment camp was established in 1939 to host Polish war refugees. During the war, ethnic Jews and political prisoners were sent there. After the Communists took power, it was operational for several more years.

¹¹ Interview with Nyitrai Csongor.

¹² ANCSSA, Network Fund, file no. 303719, f. 20.

¹³ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 837341, f. 9; Interview with Nyitrai Csongor.

¹⁴ Interview with Nyitrai Csongor.

his father was a member of the Communist Party¹⁵. Regardless of his party affiliations, it seems certain that he was a sympathizer of the left, which was an advantage in those times and it may have contributed to his appointment as overseer of the milk collection center in Chinușu¹⁶.

But things would not go very well because of the collectivization of agriculture initiated by the authorities¹⁷, and priests were mandated to take part, while constituting an ideological issue for the regime¹⁸.

In 1957, one year after the failed Hungarian Revolution, Nyitrai Mózes moved to Crăciunel, 17 km away, also in Harghita County¹⁹.

The events taking place in the autumn of 1956 in Hungary had a strong impact in Romania, especially in Transylvania, where ethnic Hungarians were more numerous²⁰. The desire for similar events in Romania, in the hope that the West would intervene, sparked a series of groups which talked about the ways in which they could organize for a struggle against the regime, at a time when the authorities were about to quash the last remaining anti-communist groups in the mountains.

In that context, a so-called organization of Young Transylvanian Hungarians (Erdélyi Magyar Ifjak Szövetsége – EMISz) formed in Brasov (named Stalin City between 1950-1960) in February 1957²¹.

¹⁵ ANCSSA, Network Fund, file no. 303719, f. 20.

¹⁶ ANCSSA, Network Fund, file no. 303719, f. 20; Interview with Nyitrai Csongor.

¹⁷ For details about collectivization agriculture see in Polish Language the article of Cosmin Budeancă, *Model sowiecki i początki kolektywizacji rolnictwa w komunistycznej Rumunii (The Soviet Model and the Beginnings of Collectivization of Agriculture in Communist Romania)* in Tomasz Osiński (ed.), „Rewolucja społeczna» czy «dzika przebudowa»? Społeczne skutki przekształceń własnościowych w Polsce (1944-1956)”, Institute for National Remembrance, Lublin, pp. 127-143; Sorin Radu, Cosmin Budeancă, Flavius Solomon *The “Comrades”, Propaganda and the Collectivization of Agriculture in Eastern Europe. The Ploughmen’s Front in Romania*, in “Historický časopis”, 2015, 63, 1, pp. 113-135.

¹⁸ Interview with Nyitrai Csongor.

¹⁹ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 69212, f. 10.

²⁰ For details see Stefano Bottoni, *Transilvania rossa. Il comunismo romeno e la questione nazionale (1944-1965)*, Rome, 2007; Stefano Bottoni, Márton László, Réka László, Klára Lázok, Csaba Zoltán Novák (eds.), *Az 1956-os magyar forradalom és a romániai magyarság (1956-1959) [The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and the Hungarians from Romania (1956-1959)]*, Pro-Print, Csíkszereda, 2006; Dávid Gyula (ed.), *1956 Erdélyben - Politikai elítéltek életrajzi adattára 1956-1965 [1956, Transylvania - biographical database with political prisoners 1956-1965]*, Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület - Polis, Kolozsvár, 2006.

²¹ The aim of the group was to “fight against Soviet imperialism and its local embodiment”, defend Hungarian language, literature and traditions, celebrate Hungarian national and religious holidays, recording all the human rights abuses of

The ideologue of the organization was a young man from Braşov, Orbán László²². He met the Nyitrai family after a bicycle trip²³. He spent the night with them and upon leaving, he was offered to come back during the summer and treat his nasal atrophy at Homorod Baths. Orbán spent the month of August at the Nyitrai family, where he met Levente and Csongor, and informed Berta about EMISZ²⁴.

About these events, Nyitrai Csongor says that “they were swept up by the Hungarian Revolution. It had an echo in Transylvania too, there were some rumors. Young people started organizing and debating. But it wasn’t serious. It wasn’t a threat to the Romanian state, for the regime...”²⁵.

But Communist authorities at the time were very suspicious about perceived potential threats to the regime; once the so-called EMISZ was uncovered, it did not take long before the authorities reached the family of Nyitrai Mózes, on August 17, 1958.

Nyitrai Csongor remembers that after being arrested, all members of the family were taken to a nearby house and interrogated²⁶. Then came the actual inquest in Braşov, on counts of “establishing a subversive organization.” According to documents of the Securitate, the inquest showed Nyitrai Mózes as reserved towards

the Communist regime and the negative effects of collectivization in the villages around Braşov and in the Szekler Land. This information was to be delivered to the United Nations. Several members of this group tried to cross the border into Hungary on June 16, 1957. They were subsequently caught and convicted. János Csongor, *Procesul Organizației Tineretului Maghiar din Ardeal. Studiu de caz (The Trial of Transylvanian Hungarian Youth Organization. Case Study)*, in Ilie Popa (coord.), *Experimentul Pitești. Conference proceedings. Comunicări prezentate la Simpozionul Experimentul Pitești - Reeducarea prin tortură. Cultura, Tineretul și Educația în regimurile dictatoriale comuniste. Ediția a VII-a. Pitești, 05-07 octombrie 2007 [Pitești Experiment. Conference proceedings. Papers presented at the Symposium Pitești Experiment - Re-education through torture. Culture, Youth and Education in the communist dictatorial regimes. 7th editions, Pitești, October 5-7, 2007]*, Fundația Culturală Memoria Filiala Argeş, Pitești, 2008, pp. 347-360. It is important to note that during this period, the political police often invented such “organizations” in order to get themselves noticed by their superior officers and also create a sense of fear among the general population. This was necessary due to the Romanian Communists’ desire to show Moscow they had everything under control and events such as those in Hungary were not possible in Romania. In the following months, and especially in 1958, such “organizations” were invented in order to make collectivization more palatable to the population.

²² Born on July 27, 1939 in Braşov. He was arrested on August 15, 1958, and sentenced to 25 years hard labor for “conspiring against the social order”.

²³ According to a Securitate document, he went to the Nyitrai family in order to learn more about religion. ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 69212, f. 10.

²⁴ János Csongor, *op. cit.*, p. 358, footnote no. 51.

²⁵ Interview with Nyitrai Csongor.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

Orban and “bewildered” after he was informed that the search of his house turned up documents belonging to EMISZ. “Throughout the investigation he seemed completely outside the events”²⁷.

However, Cluj Military Tribunal, in sentence 112 of March 19, 1959, sentenced him to 10 years in prison for “conspiracy / withholding information / withholding information about a conspiracy against the social order.” His possessions were confiscated. It was established that “he knew about the organization in 1957 [...] and he agreed with its program and constitution. He hid the secret archive of the organization”²⁸ and also that “as a Unitarian priest in the summer of 1957, he found out about the EMISZ subversive organization, as well as its counterrevolutionary goals, but did not report them to the proper authorities”²⁹.

In a report of 1968 it is mentioned that 10 years earlier, in 1958, Nyitrai Mózes had allegedly written “an antagonistic sermon” together with Nagy Mihály, which they then proceeded to copy and distribute among other priests³⁰, but it is possible that this activity was only uncovered after the conviction, therefore it played no part in the indictment.

Nyitrai Mózes served his time in Brasov, Târgu Mureş (January 12, 1959), Târgu Mureş (February 17, 1959), Gherla (July 23, 1959), Salcia (September 10, 1959), Giurgeni (June 11, 1960), Ostrov (October 16, 1960)³¹.

There is little information concerning the roughly 6 years of detention. In his memoirs he explains that he himself ended up in the prison from Târgu Mureş, together with his wife and son, but separated one from another in different cells. He states that he have been having the most troublesome memories with regard to this period of time, because although he tried to contact his wife and son, and his wife managed to send him messages, he was in permanent fear for their fate³².

The documents of the Securitate tell us that while imprisoned at Ostrov, he had health problems (pleuritis right base)³³, and in a statement dated August 6, 1964, he claims he has not been punished in any way and that he “worked on the construction of the

²⁷ ANCSSA, Penal Fund, file no. 184, vol. 2, ff. 275-289, apud János Csongor, *op. cit.*, p. 359, footnote no. 51.

²⁸ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 69213, vol. 2, f. 1.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, vol. 1, ff. 2, 3; Archive of National Administration of Penitentiaries (ANAP), personal record of Nyitrai Mózes.

³⁰ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 69213, vol. 2, f. 90.

³¹ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 69212, f. 3; ANAP, personal record of Nyitrai Mózes.

³² Nagy Ödön, Hermán János, Nyitrai Mózes, *op. cit.*, p. 384.

³³ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 69213, vol. 1, f. 3.

dam, digging the irrigation channels, did agricultural work in Salcia labor colony, in Stoenеști, Grădina, Ostrov and Luciu Giurgeni. [...] I once had water in my lungs, but I recovered due to the medical service and returned to free life a fully healthy man”³⁴.

He recounted some of his prison experience to his family. His son, Csongor, remembers that his father “almost died. He was saved by the prison doctor because he gave him something valuable in return, food or cigarettes, I think, and he was so grateful to my father that he cured him”³⁵.

Nyitrai Csongor obtained information about his father from some of his prison mates and from other works. He found out that he had been “the heart of the bunch. [...] He was always the one to find the funny side of things. He had a great sense of humor and he always made laughter out of suffering. And he also held religious service there. This is how he managed to keep people’s spirits alive. [...] But as far as I learned from some books, he was dragged around and fell so ill that he couldn’t walk, and they tried to force him to walk”³⁶.

Decree 411 of July 24, 1964, pardoned Nyitrai Mózes and he was released on August 1, 1964 and resettled in Iobăgeni, Mures County, where his daughter was married to the local priest³⁷.

Several days after release, he declared in writing that he was available for social and professional reintegration, stating that “if I were provided convenient employment, I am determined to start work and not assume my old position as a Unitarian priest”³⁸.

Usually after being released, political prisoners had difficulty finding jobs adequate to their training or health, and father Nyitrai was no exception. Csongor remembers that he even wanted to come work with him as a carpenter: “He came to me to work together as carpenters. But the carpenters I was working with, they were Szeklers from nearby, they didn’t have the guts to take him on board. They said: «How come a priest gonna work as a carpenter? And how you suppose to cuss him when he screws up?»”³⁹

Help came from Unitarian bishop Dr. Kiss Elek, who offered him a small parish in Vadu village⁴⁰, “which never really had a priest. And he made a living off the land, off the livestock... he

³⁴ *Ibidem*, ff. 4-5.

³⁵ Interview with Nyitrai Csongor.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 69212, f. 3; ANAP, personal record of Nyitrai Mózes.

³⁸ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 69213, vol. 1, f. 5.

³⁹ Interview with Nyitrai Csongor.

⁴⁰ Village in Mureș County.

tutored children. Somehow he made ends meet⁴¹. There he got deeply involved in the life of the community and managed to rebuild the church, that had been burnt in the 22nd of September 1944, exactly 200 years after its consecration (at the 22nd of September 1744)⁴². He received the authorization for building the new church at the 6th of May 1971, and he was supported by the community and his family for the construction works (his two sons were involved in effectively building this construction, and Levente's wife contributed to the design of the construction plans)⁴³. His son, Csongor, declared that: "I plastered up the tower and the façade of the church"⁴⁴.

Even as a priest in a small village, the authorities continued to keep a watchful eye on him, as they did with other former political prisoners. In May 1968, the Securitate of Mures County mentioned that "he has a file due to his suspicious connections with former EMISZ members"⁴⁵. The report also mentioned his wife and two other Unitarian priests, Léta Áron, who had been sentenced to 10 years prison in the EMISZ trial, and Kelemen Imre, sentenced to 15 years hard labor.⁴⁶ In addition, the report mentioned visits he received from former prison mates with whom he "discusses their jail time together", according to a Securitate informant⁴⁷. Nonetheless these meetings were documented by the Securitate with the help of informers (for example, out of the 34 Unitarian priests in Mures County 11 were "known as having antecedents" and were surveilled by five informants)⁴⁸.

The authorities were on high alert due to the 400 years jubilee of the Unitarian Church, and some of the security measures included the surveillance of certain priests, among them Nyitrai Mózes. These acts of surveillance involved intercepting the internal and external correspondence and their purpose was to "establish their hostile activities and especially if there is a tendency of reorganization on the principles of the subversive organization they were part of"⁴⁹.

⁴¹ Interview with Nyitrai Csongor.

⁴² Nagy Ödön, Hermán János, Nyitrai Mózes, *op. cit.*, pp. 466-469.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, pp. 466-468.

⁴⁴ Interview with Nyitrai Csongor.

⁴⁵ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 69213, vol. 2, f. 1.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, ff. 1-2; ANAP, personal records of Léta Áron and Kelemen Imre.

⁴⁷ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 69213, vol. 2, f. 2.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, ff. 4-5, 90, 91, 95-96.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, f. 2.

On August 20 1968, his file was closed because “he was not undertaking any subversive activities that might interest us”, but surveillance was kept for the others⁵⁰.

After 16 years of activity in Vadu village and after retiring⁵¹, he and his wife moved to Târnăveni. “Eventually he was able to come home to Târnăveni. But back then you couldn’t become a citizen if you didn’t have any family in the city. So we took them in. We got an apartment in Târnăveni and they lived there. My mother died there, and my father, too, 10 years later. He was nursed by my older sister”⁵².

After 1990, he wrote about his experiences together with two other priests⁵³, but his son claims he could have written more: “It was as if he was holding something back. He talks about his time in prison in a positive light. And even his friends got mad: *Mozsi bacsí, why aren’t you telling it like it was?* Others talked about everything, they weren’t afraid. But dad had suffered so much, maybe he didn’t want to jeopardize the future of his family. So he didn’t say everything”⁵⁴.

He died in 2001 and was buried in the cemetery in Crăciunel.

Nyitrai Berta

His wife, Nyitrai Berta, was born on September 16, 1912, in Satu Nou, Harghita County. She had also studied Theology⁵⁵ and during the war she had been involved alongside her husband in administering Lupeni and Petroșani parishes⁵⁶.

After settling in Chinușu, she became the president of the county womens’ organizations⁵⁷. Her position towards the regime would later change, since as we have already learned, she played a part in the activities of EMISZ.

In a declaration of July 1964, she talks about how her family met Orban: “He came into our house on a stormy day in June 1957, asking for shelter. Later I found out he was gravely ill, and

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵¹ Nagy Ödön, Hermán János, Nyitrai Mózes, *op. cit.*, p. 450.

⁵² Interview with Nyitrai Csongor.

⁵³ More details about the life, activity and sufferings of Nyitrai Mózes and his family members in Nagy Ödön, Hermán János, Nyitrai Mózes, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-476.

⁵⁴ Interview with Nyitrai Csongor.

⁵⁵ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 69212, f. 12. ANAP, personal record of Nyitrai Berta; Interview with Nyitrai Csongor.

⁵⁶ Interview with Nyitrai Csongor.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

in trying to save this boy's life, we offered him to stay with us and use the thermal baths at Crăciunel"⁵⁸.

After Orban spend the month of August 1957 at the Nyitrai family, he continued his correspondence with the priestess and returned to Crăciunel in early October 1957, bringing with him a series of documents (minutes of meetings, manifestoes, letters etc.) and asked her to keep them⁵⁹.

She read them and in October made up a 5-point program, wherein she emphasized the issues which should be tackled by EMISZ members, such as awakening national feelings among ethnic Hungarians, fighting against the law legalizing abortion etc.⁶⁰

The documents stayed at the Nyitrai family until January 1958, and in February, Orban went back to Crăciunel for 3 days and told the priestess that there had been people detained in Brasov.⁶¹

Also in early 1958 at the request of Orbán, Nyitrai Berta made two silk ribbons, on which she wrote with paint "EMISz." and the slogans: "A szabadság kiragad a halálból" ("Freedom snatches you from death"), or "A nép és a haza minden előtt" ("The people and the homeland above everything"). The two ribbons were to be used with the occasion of celebrating the 15th of March⁶² in 1958 at Albești, at the tomb of the poet Sandor Petőfi⁶³.

In her declaration on July 31st, (after her release, without any pressure), she claimed that "I only met Orbán László and Lay Imre and advised them by writing down 5 discussion points and I painted a ribbon for a wreath which the boys wanted to take to Albești, to Petőfi's grave", "among his clothes and his books that he left at our place, I found the record of the organization. Once I found out what it was, I gave it out immediately, without being searched"⁶⁴.

Referring to her mother's involvement in the organization, Nyitrai Csongor says that "she tried to advise the group against anything foolish, some sort of anarchy [...] And she told them to write to the ministry if he wanted to achieve something, write «we are not content with such and such, we kindly ask you for such

⁵⁸ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 69212, f. 16.

⁵⁹ János Csongor, *op. cit.*, p. 358, footnote no. 51.

⁶⁰ ANCSSA, Penal Fund, file no. nr. 184, vol. 2, ff. 297-299, apud János Csongor, *op. cit.*, p. 358, footnote no. 51.

⁶¹ János Csongor, *op. cit.*, p. 358, footnote no. 51.

⁶² March 15 is the day of Hungarians from everywhere.

⁶³ ANCSSA, Penal Fund, file no. nr. 184, vol. 1, ff. 295-29, apud János Csongor, *op. cit.*, pp. 358-359, footnote no. 51.

⁶⁴ ANCSSA, Penal Fund, file no. nr. 184, vol. 1, ff. 295-29, apud János Csongor, *op. cit.*, pp. 358-359, footnote no. 51.

and such.» That’s what I know. And that was her sin, she was seen as an advisor of this group”⁶⁵.

One day before his arrest, on August 14 1958, Orban again sent the documents to the Nyitrai family through their youngest son, Csongor⁶⁶, an event which we will present later in the context of his biography.

Even if August 1958 meant many arrests among EMISZ members, including that of her husband and her 2 boys, Nyitrai Berta was only apprehended on January 6 1959. The inquest and the trial soon followed, and she was sentenced to 25 years hard labor, 10 years suspension of civil rights and confiscation of assets⁶⁷. The reasons for the conviction were “undertaking intense counterrevolutionary activities as part of EMISZ”, “creating a series of nationalist chauvinist slogans”, “taking part in all clandestine meetings, where they discussed fighting against the democratic government of Romania and replacing it with a capitalist regime, as well as unite Transylvania with Hungary” she “made a series of ribbons with nationalist-chauvinist slogans”⁶⁸. In a report in May 1968 of the Securitate Inspectorate in Mureș County they mentioned the reasons that led to the conviction that “in addition agreeing with the activity of the organization, she pledged her support for it. Thus, she provided Orbán L. with books with hostile content from her personal library. He completed the program and statutes of the organization and made its emblem, ribbons and nationalist slogans”⁶⁹.

The conviction shocked the family, as Nyitrai Csongor remembers: “I couldn’t believe my ears when I heard 25 years for mom, 10 years for dad and 6 years for my brother. Until then I kept crying, I had pain. We couldn’t even cry anymore when we heard these numbers”⁷⁰.

Nyitrai Berta served her time in Târgu Mureș, Miercurea Ciuc (June 14, 1959), Arad (March 10 1960), Oradea (October 31 1962)⁷¹.

⁶⁵ Interview with Nyitrai Csongor.

⁶⁶ ANCSSA, Penal Fund, file no. nr. 184, vol. 1, ff. 67-69, apud János Csongor, *op. cit.*, p. 358, footnote no. 51.

⁶⁷ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 69212, f. 2; ANAP, personal record of Nyitrai Berta.

⁶⁸ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 69212, ff. 2, 5, 14-15; ANAP, personal record of Nyitrai Berta.

⁶⁹ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 69213, vol. 2, f. 1.

⁷⁰ Interview with Nyitrai Csongor.

⁷¹ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 69212, ff. 2-3; ANAP, personal record of Nyitrai Berta.

This period is a rather murky one for her, as well. During her time in Oradea, we know she was “singled out for Hungarian nationalist attitudes. She is reluctant about the cultural/educational activities and cannot fulfill her labor quota due to illness, she claims.” The same document mentions that she suffers from “poliarticular rheumatism”⁷².

Decree 411 of July 24 1964 pardoned the rest of her sentence and she was released on July 28 1964. According to her penal records, she was offered residence in Șimleu Silvaniei, and according to the Securitate, in Iobăgeni, where her daughter was married⁷³.

As with most inmates at the time, prison affected her health significantly: “Mother had no teeth left, scurvy set in immediately... And father also, actually. Almost everyone who served time remained toothless”⁷⁴.

In her declaration on July 31 1964, she makes a plea: “I do not wish to defend myself. I know I have made a grave mistake. In 5 and a half years I have learned enough to be able to start a new life”⁷⁵. But as Nyitrai Csongor remembers and the Securitate documents confirm, the Nyitrai’s rejection of any compromise kept them under the scrutiny of the authorities and caused them issues with their reintegration. “My parents did not agree to anything when they were released, this is why they were not helped afterwards. Mother was never ordained as a priest, because she never gave in”⁷⁶.

Regarding the surveillance, in an address from July the 24th 1967 representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Tirgu Mures demanded the Section of Odorhei district to start complex investigations on her (the document specified that she resided in Vadu village, com. Vărgata, Mures County)⁷⁷. Few years later, a report from the Mureș County branch of the Securitate mentions that there were files opened on her and her husband’s names in May 1969. Hers was closed in February 1970 due to being “of little concern,” but she remained under surveillance in her husband’s file⁷⁸.

Nyitrai Csongor believes her mother did the right thing in the EMISZ affair, even if it brought about convictions for herself, her

⁷² ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 69212, f. 14.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, ff. 2-3; ANAP, personal record of Nyitrai Berta.

⁷⁴ Interview with Nyitrai Csongor.

⁷⁵ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 69212, f. 16.

⁷⁶ Interview with Nyitrai Csongor.

⁷⁷ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 69212, f. 12.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, f. 6.

husband and her eldest son, as well as countless issues for the rest of the family. “My mother was an authoritarian woman and she meant well. Maybe it would have been worse if she hadn’t taught those boys to not do anything foolish. But then she would have to turn them in to the Securitate, and it would have been a sin”⁷⁹.

Nyitrai Berta died in 1988 and she is buried in the cemetery in Crăciunel.

Nyitrai Levente

Born on March 1st, 1940 in Lupeni, Hunedoara County, he attended primary school in Chinușu and Mărtiniș, Harghita County. In 1953 he was registered in the Pedagogical High School in Cristuru Secuiesc, but since it was disbanded, he went back to a theoretical high school and graduated in 1957, when he registered for the Institute of Protestant Theology in Cluj⁸⁰.

As previously stated, Orbán László used to talk to the boys when he visited the Nyitrai family. Regarding the events of 1957, Levente wrote the following in an autobiography of 1965: “During the holidays, a guest from Brasov, Orbán Ladislau, told me about his counterrevolutionary activities of his organization⁸¹. In a memorandum written on 6th of July 1964 he mentioned referring to what happened in 1957: “On August 15 1957, at my father’s house in Crăciunel, I talked with the head of EMISZ counterrevolutionary organization, after which I cut off all connections with him. I did not know at that time that I had to report any counterrevolutionary activities, as I was only 17”⁸².

On August 18 1958, he was arrested for being “part of the subversive organization EMISZ”, investigated and sentenced to 6 years correctional prison, without confiscation of assets, for “failing to report”⁸³. As he said later, the conviction came with “total confiscation of property, but without correctional ban or loss of civic rights”⁸⁴.

He served his time in Brașov, Târgu Mureș, Salcia (September 29 1959), Giurgeni (April 10 1962), Periprava (May 20 1962)⁸⁵.

⁷⁹ Interview with Nyitrai Csongor.

⁸⁰ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 837341, f. 9.

⁸¹ ANCSSA, Network Fund, file no. 303719, f. 20.

⁸² ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 657623, f. 2.

⁸³ ANCSSA, Network Fund, file no. 303719, f. 21; ANAP, personal record of Nyitrai Levente.

⁸⁴ ANCSSA, Network Fund, file no. 303719, f. 21.

⁸⁵ ANAP, personal record of Nyitrai Levente.

During this period, as he himself states, he was not “reprimanded in any way or shown any hostility towards the regime” and out of the almost six years he worked 5 “fulfilling almost all the work norms laid down”⁸⁶. He was released on June 23 1964 to be settled in Cheia, Cluj County⁸⁷.

His brother Csongor remembers that Levente served his sentence almost in full, coming home “only two months earlier. We kept in touch. He talked about prison, about father and everything he knew”.⁸⁸

While I don’t have many details about the period of detention, there is more information about what happened after his release, because he remained for some time in the attention of the Securitate.

After release, he tried to find a job, as he could not register for the Theological Institute. He worked for a month as laboratory assistant at “Someșul” Mill, and in autumn 1964, he was assigned as a chemical operator at Turda Chemical Works⁸⁹.

Form one of the informative notes written about him by his foreman, we learn that Levente “feels somehow a lesser person because of prison, but is at peace with his time in jail, because he wasn’t guilty, he didn’t steal, he didn’t kill” and “he did not want to tell anyone he was imprisoned, but it was mentioned in his personal file and all his colleagues knew about it from there”⁹⁰. Elsewhere he tells the Securitate informant that he was locked up because he “wouldn’t betray his mother, who had done something stupid”⁹¹.

As his foreman mentions, Levente did not really feel at home in Turda Chemical Works. Even though he was a diligent worker, the money was not enough for rent, food and clothing, which is why he wanted to “go to any university”, but not Theology, as “there is no future in that”⁹².

But the Securitate did not just wish to find out information, but also recruit him⁹³. On August 17 he was signed on as an informant with the code name “Georgescu Ioan.” The purpose of his

⁸⁶ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 657623, f. 2.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*; ANAP, personal record of Nyitrai Levente.

⁸⁸ Interview with Nyitrai Csongor.

⁸⁹ ANCSSA, Network Fund, file no. 303719, f. 21; Informative Fund, file no. 657623, f. 28; file no. 837341, f. 9.

⁹⁰ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 657623, f. 28.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, f. 29.

⁹² *Ibidem*, ff. 27, 29.

⁹³ *Ibidem*, f. 28.

recruitment was to “establish an informative frame upon elements suspicious of Hungarian nationalist activities” on three people⁹⁴.

From August 17 1965 to January 4 1966, he supplied “18 informative notes” about the attitude and behavior of some of his former prison mates and workmates. But the Securitate was not pleased with “the results.” “The agent manifested a certain preoccupation to fulfil his tasks in the mentioned period of time, but he did not accomplish them according to his possibilities. These things were communicated to him during the meetings, especially at the control meeting”⁹⁵.

His problems with fitting in and adjusting became worse, possibly as a consequence of his time in prison and his status as an informant. Several documents from 1965 mention that “he has been working here for 9 months, but hasn’t found a friend yet. [...] He has no friends, nor girlfriends. He is not very sociable and believes people are mocking him⁹⁶. [...] He claims he cannot find any friends, he feels very lonely. He has nobody here in Turda. He spends his free time walking and watching movies”⁹⁷. “He is a very secluded person; indeed I was informed by his colleagues from work that he would spend hours without saying a word”⁹⁸.

In January 1966 he left for Constanța, where he worked as a painter for the naval works Tomis IV. Then in September 1967 he left suddenly for Mărtiniș, Cluj, where his residence was⁹⁹, but still worked as a painter in Târgu Mureș and Cluj¹⁰⁰.

With these constant changes, the Securitate lost track of him and in 1968, he married Eva, the daughter of Miko Imre¹⁰¹, the prime-curator of the Unitarian Church, and applied for the Theological Institute in Cluj¹⁰².

Once he became a student, the Securitate caught up with him once more, receiving many details – most of them positive – about his behaviour from various informants. One of these informants mentioned in March 1969 that he was “the eldest of the Unitarian students” and “he passed the entrance exam with ten”. He is a

⁹⁴ ANCSSA, Network Fund, file no. 303719, f. 22.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, f. 23.

⁹⁶ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 657623, f. 28.

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, f. 27.

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, f. 30.

⁹⁹ ANCSSA, Network Fund, file no. 303719, ff. 23, 25.

¹⁰⁰ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 837341, f. 9.

¹⁰¹ Mikó Imre (1911-1977) writer, lawyer and Hungarian politician from Transylvania. For more details see Stefano Bottoni, *Talking to the system. A lifelong story of embeddedness. Imre Mikó, 1911-1977*, in “East Central Europe - ECE”, 2016 (in printing).

¹⁰² ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 837341, f. 9; Network Fund, file no. 303719, f. 24;

living example of punctuality and diligence for all students. He is the first to arrive every morning and performs his duties flawlessly. He does not discuss his past and does not have any negative comments about the socialist regime in our country. All teachers have a good opinion about him and he has a positive influence on students, who [...] sincerely esteem him”¹⁰³.

In December 1969, informant “Gyori Lajos” described him as being very reserved, “closed up”, he “doesn’t stay at the Institute, but in town with his relatives” and “he is diligent only in class, during the breaks he doesn’t really talk to anybody, and when he does, it’s only about professional issues. [...] He comes to the meetings between the Orthodox and the Protestant Theological faculties and recites poems in Romanian, which is a great ordeal for him because of his accent. [...] I don’t see any unusual behavior in his regard and I once again emphasize that he is a very withdrawn person”¹⁰⁴.

In another informative note, this time from 1970, he was praised by another informer of the Securitate as “a balanced man, conscientious and – changed”, “much disciplined, serious, who takes notes at lectures, and very well prepared for exams”¹⁰⁵.

From a note from May 1971, written by “The Librarian”, we find out that he was much appreciated and even rewarded by Bishop Kiss Elek, the leader of the Unitarian Church: “He is the most diligent student, not just from his year, but from the whole institute. [...] Bishop Kiss Elek holds him in high regard. He once said he was glad to support Nyitray Levente. Every month he takes an amount from his salary equal to a scholarship and offers it to Nyitray Levente. He is not deterred in this by the fact that Nyitray Levente is the son-in-law of Miko Imre, with whom the bishop is not on very good terms. [...] After returned to the Institute he became even more modest. During the literary meetings I heard very positive political reports from him. I have no reason to doubt their sincerity. Life, the conviction had been like a school to him”¹⁰⁶.

In 1972 he finished his theological studies and was assigned to Comșești Parish, Tureni commune, Cluj County. In 1973 he passed his level exam, and was thereafter reelected as a parish priest¹⁰⁷.

During the following years, he fell off the radar of the authorities, but his discontent towards the situation in Romania grew. In

¹⁰³ ANCSSA, Network Fund, file no. 303719, f. 24.

¹⁰⁴ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 657623, f. 14.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, f. 12.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*, f. 5.

¹⁰⁷ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 837341, f. 9.

1988, while he was a priest in Mihăileni village, Simonești commune, Harghita County, he is singled out once again for “undertaking activities which are hostile to the Romanian state under the cover of religious activities”, for “being dominated by nationalist-chauvinist ideas”, “listening to Western and Hungarian radio stations” and “commenting unfavorably about the living and professional standards in Romania compared to Hungary.” “He has a passion for literature, he writes religious poetry for various celebrations”¹⁰⁸ and “he intends to leave for the People’s Republic of Hungary because [...] he is a Hungarian citizen and he does not belong here”¹⁰⁹.

On February 25 1988, the Militia in Simonești commune sent an address to the Harghita branch of Internal Affairs - Securitate stating that Nyitrai Levente had applied for a permanent visa for Hungary and had claimed that “in Romania there are no rights, you cannot find anything, unlike in Hungary, where you can find anything you like, even jobs for the wives of priests” and “he writes abroad to receive some books about Christianity or other subjects in vain, because they are confiscated at the Romanian border”¹¹⁰. Once he started expressing his desire for emigration and after submitting the documents, the pressures against him have increased and on December the 20th 1988, the Securitate opened a new surveillance file on his name¹¹¹.

At the end of 1988, he received permission to leave the country indefinitely and according to the Securitate sources, there were no more reports on hostile behavior about him¹¹². He then wrote his father about the positive outcome of his application, saying that “I’m taking care of everything now, because I still want to leave this year, so they don’t have time to change their minds and cancel their approval”¹¹³. He did not, however, manage to leave in 1988. In January 1989, he was writing that “after I received the approval, I had to take care of a lot of loose ends and we hope that by the middle of this month we’ll get out of this hell for good. I’m tired of all of this”¹¹⁴.

During February 1989, he managed to leave with his family and settled in Kocsord, north-eastern Hungary, where he was employed as a part-time priest¹¹⁵. Even so, the surveillance file

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, f. 1.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, f. 2.

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*, f. 89.

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*, ff. cover no. 1, f. 110.

¹¹² *Ibidem*, f. 112.

¹¹³ *Ibidem*, f. 3.

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem*, f. 112.

opened in December 1988 was closed only on April 4 1989¹¹⁶. In the closing report, we are told that Nyitrai Levente was “possessed by Hungarian-nationalist ideas that he expresses within his circles, in the country and abroad” and one of the purposes of this file was to “discourage him from undertaking any subversive activities while still in the country”¹¹⁷.

Nyitrai Levente’s destiny was a tumultuous one, like that of many other former political prisoners. His brother, Csongor summed up very well his situation after release: “My brother had issues because after he got out of prison, he was forced to cooperate, «if you want us to help you, you’ll have to help us» sort of thing. And the poor fellow... he was naïve, he promised, but he never found his peace. Eventually he left for Hungary. Only there did he find some peace”¹¹⁸.

Nyitrai Csongor

The youngest of the family was born in Lupeni, on December 1st 1943¹¹⁹. As previously mentioned, due to his health problems the family moved to Chinușu.

In 1957, when Orbán Ladislau arrived at his parents’ house, he was only 14. As the members of EMISZ had already fallen under the watchful eye of the Securitate, Orbán decided to send the documents to the Nyitrai family once more. As Csongor was in Brasov, it was a good opportunity to use him as a courier. In fact, Orbán was arrested the following day, on August 15 1958¹²⁰.

About it Csongor remembers: “I was in Brasov with the leader of this group of young people. We went for a bike ride and then I came home by bus. And he gave me a suitcase with my stuff, and there was also a journal inside, a thick notebook. I think it was where the minutes of the meeting of the organization were written down. But I didn’t care much for that. I gave everything to my mother and the police came later that evening, they thought I’d brought guns. But they didn’t find no guns. But they picked us up and locked us up”¹²¹.

¹¹⁶ *Ibidem*, ff. cover no. 1, f. 110.

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*, f. 112.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Nyitrai Csongor.

¹¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁰ ANCSSA, Penal Fund, file no. 184, vol. 1, ff. 67-69, apud Jánosi Csongor, *op. cit.*, p. 358, footnote no. 51.

¹²¹ Interview with Nyitrai Csongor.

After the interrogations next door, Csongor, his elder brother and their father were taken to the inquest, but because he was underage, Csongor got off easily, after two months. “They hoped to find out something from me, when they interrogated me. They were interested in what I delivered from Brasov. But I didn’t know, and even if I did, I thought about it and didn’t say anything. I had to protect my parents somehow. [...] I came home after two months”¹²².

The interview with Nyitrai Csongor also sheds light on an issue which is falsely depicted in other works, the beatings he allegedly received. He explained where this rumor first came from: “When I came home, they sent me out the prison gate with some money and showed me where the bus stop was. [...] But I only walked. And I wasn’t used to walking... my leg was so swollen it was two weeks before I could walk again. When mother said I came home and couldn’t walk, father thought they beat me up. They didn’t. I heard they beat up other people. That’s how I got away. Maybe it was because I was too young, who knows...”¹²³.

After the parents were convicted, he could not live in the parochial house anymore. He was also forced by the regime to change his residence, and he had to leave for his grandparents village, Cheia, near Turda town, and then to look for a job. But to his surprise he was forbidden to continue with his studies. “In the court verdict we were forbidden the right to study. So I can be an unqualified worker, there’s no need of school for that. What I learned in seven grades is what I am left with”¹²⁴.

He found a job in Turda, as a day laborer and after a while he was employed at the Factory of concrete prefab in Turda, but with some difficulty because of his file and so he realized that his “personal” file would become a problem. “They picked on me when I signed up for the job at the prefab factory in Turda. Until then I had been trying a lot. I stayed for days and weeks in queues, I went every day at the employment office. And at some point there were some jobs for the 18 year-olds, at the concrete factory. [...] I was not 18 yet, I was about to be in that year [...] so I thought they wouldn’t care too much. And I went in the office, the “Personnel office”. She would look at documents and she would give a positive or negative answer. She kept me there waiting until I was the last one there, the woman from the “Personnel”. And when everybody got out from there she invited me in and said my name: Csongor, én ismerlek téged (Csongor, *I know you*, in Hungarian -

¹²² Interview with Nyitrai Csongor.

¹²³ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*.

a.n.) “[...] your mother was my best friend in the Pedagogical School. I don’t fool around when it comes to the work I do. But I want to tell you that you don’t need to suffer for this. I put my job in danger. I just try. I will take your file... but I am not allowed to. And there was a big wardrobe, one meter big, full of files. Your file, I will put it down, beneath all of them. And when they will take the files to check them, they will look at them one by one and by the time they get to your file one or two years will have already passed. And please be hard working so that everybody will say only good things about you and so in the end they won’t be able to sack you anymore”¹²⁵.

At some point there was one opportunity, but the personal “file” proved to be one obstacle impossible to surpass. “I wanted to go to the army’s driving school... at 18 that was a dream for a guy like me, but that implied that I had to be enrolled in the army. So we went to sign up for the army. But then they found my file. And one day I was invited there by an adjutant major warrant officer, with a kind face, and he explained to me: “You sir can’t have a profession, you cannot go to school anymore, you don’t have this right anymore. The law kept this right away from you. Please don’t mind, I can’t do this differently. You have to go. You cannot come to the driving school”¹²⁶.

And life proved to be very difficult for a young boy with no experience, too early taken away from his family. “I managed to make some money, then I could live. Then I could rent something in Turda... and I ate what I could. But then it so happened that I ran out of money and had nothing left to eat. And so for one week I would only eat one cup of tea a day. And some bread that I got from the lady that rented me the room, an old woman. I was working then at the prefab concrete Factory. Hard work... and because I didn’t eat I was very weak... that I fell on the sidewalk at some point. Then I got scared because of what had happened to me and so I wrote to my sister, the one that got married, to send me some money, because I was starving. I was all by myself and I didn’t know to take enough care of the money, to know how much to eat. I loved cakes or juice and so I finished the money before the paychecks”¹²⁷.

At 24 years old, 10 years after he interrupted his studies, he was accepted in high school, at the evening classes. He graduated with great difficulty, as he was supposed to continue with the school in the towns in which he was moving with the construction

¹²⁵ *Ibidem.*

¹²⁶ *Ibidem.*

¹²⁷ *Ibidem.*

company (Cluj, Târgu Mureş, Constanţa)¹²⁸. Another problem was that he was considered a pariah. For example, he now remembers with some amusement that he could not become a UTC member (UTC - Uniunea Tineretului Comunist, Communist Union for Youth - a.n.) or a UTM member (UTM - Uniunea Tineretului Muncitor - Communist Union for Workers - a.n.) afterwards. And then after a year or two the situation got smoother, so smooth that I finally was included in the Unions and I was proud of my UTC membership card (laughing - m.n)¹²⁹.

His personal and family file followed him when he was enrolled in the army: “they sent me to the construction division, which back then was called «diribau». And I was looking at the people there, everybody was once suspected... of political reasons”¹³⁰.

As he was ambitious, he didn't want to accept his fate and after he graduated from high-school, at 31, he signed up at the Theological Reformed Institute from Cluj¹³¹. After he graduated the Institute he was given a parish at “Trei Sate” [Three Villages]¹³², close to Sângeorgiu de Pădure, in the Mureş County. From there he transferred to Adămuş, near Târnăveni, and then to Cobaltesti, from where he retired¹³³.

After the events in 1957 he avoided problems with the authorities and tried to live his life and practice his profession. He was married three times: the first wife left him, the second wife died. After 1990 he received a monthly compensation for the five years of house arrest in Cheia. In 2016 he was living in Cădaciu de Sus together with his wife, in a house that he had managed to build for himself, and was doing agriculture¹³⁴.

The Nyitrai family after 1957

As I mentioned at the beginning of this study, the Nyitrai family had four children. I made an in depth presentation of the boys' destinies, because they were a direct target of the repressive measures taken by the communist authorities, together with their parents. But the daughters had their share of suffering as well, even if in the documents there are not many references to them.

¹²⁸ *Ibidem.*

¹²⁹ *Ibidem.*

¹³⁰ *Ibidem.*

¹³¹ *Ibidem.*

¹³² Village in Mures County, nowadays is part of the Ghindari larger village.

¹³³ Interview with Nyitrai Csongor.

¹³⁴ *Ibidem.*

But I will also refer to the period following the arrests in 1957 and also to a few elements in the biography of the daughters, for a more detailed perspective on the problems the family had to deal with.

So, in August 1957 Nyitrai Mózes and his two boys were arrested. The mother and the two daughters remained at home and, after two months, Csongor came back. In January, the mother was arrested too. Csongor remembers the difficulties his mother had to confront with at the end of the year 1957: she made great efforts to help her husband and son that were still in arrest. “I came home and we tried to do what we could in the household. We had a cow; it was fattened a lot, so that mother could sell it to the slaughter-house. And she received good money for it. And somebody asked the money from my mother: *You give it to me, it is worth it. I have my brother, my brother in law officer at the Securitate.* And he could take father out of jail... She gave the money away and did not get them back. And that person had nobody at the Securitate, they put the money in their pocket”¹³⁵.

But the problems with the neighbors, who wanted to take advantage from the family’s difficult situation, were not the only ones they had to face. “Father used to work a lot. His shed was full with hay. My sister told me, after I got out of jail, that somebody came with the cart and started to load it with hay. They stuffed it with hay and my sister asked: *Where do you take this hay, mister? Your father owes me three carts of hay.* But my father never borrowed anything from anybody, he didn’t need to. He worked until he dropped, but he never borrowed money or something like this. This is how it happened that we, as we were by ourselves, with no parents, were tricked by our own neighbours”¹³⁶.

As the parents were condemned to jail, their sentences also stipulated that their goods were to be confiscated. Nyitrai Csongor remembers when the sentence was executed and how a family from the neighborhood helped them, so that they didn’t lose everything: “It was with the confiscation of our things, the verdict. [...] What they liked more was the furniture in the bedroom. It was from walnut tree wood. Solid! And different other kinds of furniture. They took that away. [...] But they came for the corn, the wheat, the hay, and the animals. And then my sister remained alone at home, I was out of there. And the house was rented by two old people from the neighborhood, who took it on their own

¹³⁵ *Ibidem.*

¹³⁶ *Ibidem.*

responsibility. [...] They knew [...] that they were coming to confiscate things. So the old people took the wheat at their house, they moved everything in their barns, and sold all the animals. So what they eventually managed to confiscate was not so important anymore...”¹³⁷.

During their father and older brother’s detention, the three children who were still free tried to contact and keep in touch with them. “Once we managed... contact, but no visit. But once they established the norm there... then every month they had the right to write a post card and send it home, with a text that was previously decided: I am good, in health, please send me cigarettes, I don’t know what more... and also bacon was possible. It was a two kilogram package. And once I managed to send a package, but then my sister took this on her own shoulders, she had more possibilities and she sent the packages. And we would always manage to sneak in some information to the parents. Me too, where I was, where I am, all that. In good health. My sister also sent a small family photo. The parents were very glad. It was the only thing that connected them to the family outside”¹³⁸.

Nyitrai Gyöngyvér

She was born at the 20th of October 1940 in Lupeni. After the parents were sent to jail and her brother Csongor left for Cheia, she remained in Crăciunel alone¹³⁹.

As already mentioned, some neighbours tried to take profit of her special situation. From the memories of Nyitrai Mózes, besides the case of the neighbour that took their hay in exchange of a supposed debt, some other people came and argued that her parents owed money to them, as well as the Fisc. Moreover, she was called at the Securitate division in Odorheiu Secuiesc to answer some questions, but afterwards she was allowed to return to her home¹⁴⁰.

She was lucky, because the family in the neighbourhood rented the parish house and accepted to live in the kitchen, thus leaving the room for her alone for a few more years, until she was married¹⁴¹.

¹³⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹³⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹³⁹ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 69212, f. 11.

¹⁴⁰ Ödön, Hermán János, Nyitrai Mózes, *op. cit.*, p. 384.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Nyitrai Csongor.

According to the Securitate documents, she was a parish clerk in the village church until the 18th of May 1963 when she was married to the priest Kecskés Lajos and left¹⁴². The fact that she managed to have a family was an important support for Csongor, who argues that after she got married, her house was “the only place where we had a home for our family. It was there that we went «home». She had a place to receive us...”¹⁴³. The father and the mother were sent to Iobageni, Mures County after their release, in the same locality where their daughter, Gyöngyvér, was married¹⁴⁴.

Nyitrai Tünde

She was Csongor’s twin sister and she was born in Lupeni, on December 1st 1943¹⁴⁵. The interview with her brother shows some interesting aspects of her life as well. While the father and the brother were in prison, the mother agreed to the adoption of the younger daughter by her aunt, the husband’s sister, who didn’t get married and kept the name Nyitrai. “All this time mother agreed that the girl had to go there, she was safer. I think she also felt what was about to come. And after a half of a year mother was also taken away”¹⁴⁶.

Conclusions

What happened to the family of the Unitarian priest Nyitrai can stand as an example for the situation of the Hungarian minority in Romania in the context of the 1956 Revolution in Hungary and its aftermath. The involvement of some of its members in the activities of the so called EMISZ organization could not remain unpunished. In those times, any kind of organization that, in one way or another, would question the “new order” installed by communists, was drastically sanctioned. In this case the consequences were immediate and harsh, since it was a group of young people of Hungarian ethnicity (to which the authorities connected

¹⁴² ANCSSA, Informative fund, file no. 69212, f. 11.

¹⁴³ Interview with Nyitrai Csongor.

¹⁴⁴ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 69212, f. 3; ANAP, personal record of Nyitrai Mózes and Nyitrai Berta.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Nyitrai Csongor.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

and arrested other persons, and thus constituted an organization) and since the authorities in Bucharest were afraid that Romania would also face revolts similar to those in Hungary. Moreover, there was also pressure from the center on the local representatives of the Securitate, who were supposed to have results, to identify and then help punish in an exemplary manner those considered “enemies of the people”.

The Nyitrai family, as well as other families, was strongly affected by the generalized repressions in Romania, at the beginning of the Communist regime. All the members of the family were forever marked by this experience. I would review here some of these marks: for many years the family was separated, the underage children who remained at home had to deal with many complications, those arrested faced several health problems, the social and professional difficulties of integration that the family members had to face because of their “file” and, not least, the confiscation of their assets.

In the '50s and '60s Romania to belong to a family that was also an “enemy of the people” was a real challenge. And, unfortunately, this stigma had effects in the following decades, and the case of the Nyitrai family that was presented in this study stands as an example.

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Summary

The Communist Repression against the Families of “The Enemies of the People” in Romania. Case Study of Fr. Nyitrai Mózes

In the first two decades after the Second World War over 100.000 political opponents or possible adversaries of communist regime in Romania were arrested, condemned, stripped off of their goods, and forced to spend several years in prisons. Those who survived and were eventually liberated, constantly wore the stigmata of their political condemnation, and the effects of these political condemnations had also a direct effect on their families.

The family of the Unitarian priest Nyitrai Mózes was among the ones strongly affected by the communist repression. A part of its members were in prison, and for many years the family was separated. The underage children who remained at home had to deal with many complications. Those arrested faced several health problems. The entire family was affected by social and professional difficulties of integration, because of their “files” and the confiscation of their assets. The story of the Nitrai

family is just one out of many other stories of families who had to endure similar experiences during the Communist regime in Romania.

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Key words: Romania, Communism, families in communism, repression, Reformat priests, political police, oral history

Słowa kluczowe: Rumunia, komunizm, rodzina w komunizmie, represje, księża ewangelicy, policja polityczna, historia mówiona

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