9 The “Centres of Remembrance” in post-communist Europe

José M. Faraldo

Introduction

For more than 40 years, the communist dictatorships of Central and Eastern Europe left a bitter memory of pain and violence. Much of this was caused by the political police agencies that made up an integral part of the system from its inception to its last days. In this chapter, we shall examine the institutions – the “Centres of Remembrance” – that have taken charge of their legacy, focusing on the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, excluding the former Soviet Union and its successor states. We shall then analyse some of the debates that have emerged in the aftermath of the fall of communism, placing these in the broader context of an assessment of the communist dictatorships of the past. Although we will mention some other cases, we shall focus specifically on three institutions that represent many other examples of national debate: the German BStU (Bundesbeauftragten für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Federal Commissioner for Records of the State Security Service of the former German Democratic Republic); the Polish IPN (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Institute for National Remembrance); and the Rumanian CNSAS (Consiliul Național Pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității, National Council for the Study of the Archives of the Securitate).

Structure and functions of the communist secret police

The emergence of these police forces can be dated back to the very commencement of the communist regimes.¹ The latter half of 1944, for example, saw the infiltration of communists into the political police forces of the hitherto right-wing dictatorships in Bulgaria and Rumania. Although, in principle, the successor regimes were democracies and the communists were in coalition with other parties, they quickly took control of the police force – both uniformed and secret. The first months of 1945 saw the creation of the Polish secret police, in the image of the Soviet organization, as well as the emergence of a security department in the newly resuscitated Czechoslovakia, which relied on the existing organization but doubled it in

number and would eventually supplant it. At the beginning of 1945, even before the Soviet occupation of the country, the first communist secret services were also formed in Hungary and were later to be unified and formalised around 1950. The East German secret police, on the other hand, was only to emerge from 1950 onwards, when both German communists and the then USSR opted for the two-state solution.

The various different police forces were also to undergo various reorganizations, sometimes forming an integral part of the corresponding Ministry of the Interior (as was the norm in the Stalinist years, due to their centralising tendencies) or as independent agencies under the authority of the Ministry for the Presidency. In any case, actual control during the whole period was to belong to the central committee or politburo of each communist party. The typical duality of every true socialist state was also reflected in its secret police: on the one hand, there was the entire structure of the state which was built with an apparently democratic structure, with elections and parliaments, and on the other hand, there was the ultimate – real – power which was that of the communist party, which held the reins of power directly. One of the basic resources of this power were the secret police forces. The level of control of the Party upon these bodies increased from 1953, because the Stalinist purges of the 1930s had left the communist elites traumatised and had severely punished the party itself.

The control of police forces was generally entrusted to highly reliable party officials, with many years of militancy behind them and who were often members of the politburo, and thus part of the core of political power. Relations between the party and its respective police forces were hierarchical, with the party ensuring that the police did not accumulate too much power. These forces were subject to party orders and sometimes lacked power over their members.

The different secret police forces generally possessed a complicated, multi-departmental structure, and dealt with a number of tasks that were often far removed from each other. For example, in 1989, the East German Stasi had a department VI within its structure, whose function was to control and issue passports – similar to that of other police agencies, and which now comprises the bulk of the archival material that has been preserved. There was also a secretariat that took care of the Dynamo football club – each political police officer in the Eastern Bloc had his football team. In addition to these departments, there were other more authentically secret police departments, such as department XI (encryption), III (listening and radio counterespionage) and the “M” secretariat (correspondence surveillance).

The numbers of members of the secret police varied greatly over time and are not easy to define: Were the informants and *moles* members or not? Can a person who was registered but did not provide information be considered an informant? Many of these problems of definition have marked subsequent disputes about how to prosecute informants. In any case, by 1989

the Securitate had about 15,000 official members and between 400,000 and 700,000 informants (for a total population of 23 million); the Stasi had 90,000 members and about 174,000 informants (population 17 million); and the Polish SB had 24,000 members and about 98,000 informants (population 37 million).²

With the fall of the regimes of state socialism in 1989, the political police were disbanded in most countries. In some cases, radically so – as in the former GDR, Czechoslovakia or the Baltic states – and in others more slowly – as in the case of Poland. In Rumania and Bulgaria, the respective police forces were to retain an enormous amount of power and would, to some extent, influence the move towards parliamentary democracy. The differences in the dissolution of the police forces would also largely determine their *Aufarbeitung*, i.e. the historical and political assessment of their actions and crimes. This evaluation was to be possible, thanks to the legacy that the secret police left in the form of large quantities of archive material.

The archives of the secret police: the “Centres of Remembrance”

By “Centres of Remembrance,” we refer to official institutions whose mission is to preserve the archives of the police or political police under the communist dictatorships, while offering a service to those affected (the victims) and to researchers. Apart from this basic function, these “centres” are able to carry out very different tasks, depending on the legislation of each country, such as legal work (prosecution of crimes by special prosecutors) and education (propaganda and civic education on the dictatorships).³

Their special relevance and the impact of their work and holdings on the societies in question have given rise to considerable controversy and fired tough debates, influencing the consideration of history as a discipline in the countries affected by such phenomena. A fact that has had great social relevance is that all these countries possessed a wide network of informants and collaborators of the political police, who, sometimes out of conviction, sometimes for money and other times through blackmail or pressure, agreed to inform on their own relatives.⁴ The importance of these institutions, which are devoted to the preservation of historical sources and their scientific evaluation, among other things, is so enormous that detailed analysis may shed a great deal of light on the evaluation of the dictatorships of the past; the public use of history; the processes of transition from dictatorship to democracy; and archival organization and the social and political limits of opening up archives. In analysing the scandals as a result of the revelations of these materials, we encounter phenomena which range from the abuse of certain political powers aimed at harming opponents to the consequences which the actions of former political police and communist repression have on the societies which have emerged from dictatorships.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, few countries allowed themselves the luxury of actively and effectively purging the former rulers. The situation was still too unstable: Soviet armies were still based in many of these countries,

the position of the former communists was still too strong and their control of many political and economic resources was still too great. In time, however, specialised institutions would emerge which, while being custodians of the archives of the political police, undertook the job of building a general awareness of the harm done by the communist dictatorships and especially their organs of repression.

The first such centre of remembrance was the Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the former German Democratic Republic (BStU). The founding legend of this centre was based upon events at the demise of the dictatorship, when members of the civic movement raided various Stasi buildings to prevent the archives from being destroyed.⁵ This civic movement culminated in the storming and occupation of the Stasi headquarters in Berlin on 15 January 1990. This was the first – and last – freely elected parliament in the GDR that passed the law dissolving the Stasi and opening up its archives. Shortly afterwards, the GDR itself disappeared and the federal parliament of the reunified Germany passed the so-called Stasi Archives Act (*Stasi-Unterlagen-Gesetz*) on 29 December 1991, which was to lay the foundations for the development of the BStU. The situation was thus very different from that of other post-communist countries: the assessment of the dictatorship was to some extent “from outside”. The fact that the new Germany had a precedent for assessing the past of the National Socialist dictatorship was not unrelated to the relatively rapid action of the state, which led to the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the overcoming of the past, taking on a new meaning.

From the outset, the BStU consists of a central office and several regional offices. Currently, it has a budget of EUR 90.3 million and employs some 1,750 people, of whom only 12 are engaged strictly in research. The materials held by the institution stretch to some 111 kilometres, including the Stasi’s own archives and the materials that had not been archived at the time of the organization’s dissolution. Although there have been slight changes in legislation, the tasks entrusted to the BStU from the beginning have continued and have not changed over the years: to give every citizen access to the results of the surveillance he or she suffered from the Stasi and to allow him or her to prevent this data from being used to their detriment; to ensure the right of citizens to ascertain the extent to which the Stasi influenced and acted in public life; to ensure the use of the archives for the rehabilitation of victims and possible reparation of damages, for the prosecution of the guilty and for scientific research. The first objective mentioned – the possibility of evaluating the materials on oneself – is the one that prevails in the work of the BStU and to which all others are subordinated. It is also the objective which justifies the fact that a separate body was created and continues to be maintained, instead of handing over all these materials to the Federal Historical Archive. The BStU does not have judicial or police powers, although the publication of materials and their availability to the public may trigger the opening of proceedings or investigations by the relevant public prosecutor’s offices. The commissioner’s educational work is part of the powerful and well-equipped civic education machinery (*Bildungspolitische Arbeit*)

typical of the Federal Republic of Germany. In this way, it is offering an invaluable service to historians and, together with the Polish IPN, is the archive most available to the public. However, especially since some court decisions at the beginning of the third millennium, its liberalisation has been interrupted and there is some difficulty in obtaining materials which have not been depersonalised (i.e. with proper names and places deleted).

Since 2018, there has been an intense debate in the press and institutions, promoted by the Commissioner himself, about the future of the BStU. Finally, the German Parliament decided in favour of absorbing the archive into the Federal Archive (*Bundesarchiv*), where general state documents of the GDR and its parties are held. There are dissenting voices, however, such as those of many former dissidents, who believe that this will serve to dilute investigations and hamper accessibility of the documents.

The other institute that eventually became a model in Central Europe is the Polish Institute of National Remembrance. And this is curious because Poland was one of the countries where the assessment of the past was slower at the official level, although it finally accelerated the process. As is usually the case in Poland, civil society had taken the lead, with very active associations that honoured the victims and investigated the past. Polish historiography, too, helped by a generous policy of access to party and state archives, soon achieved international status in the study of the communist dictatorship.

However, the state security archives remained closed until a much later date. A 1998 law creating the “Institute for the National Remembrance” was vetoed by the then president, the post-communist Aleksander Kwaśniewski, on legalistic grounds. This institute was to house the archives of the political police and be responsible for issuing certificates of non-cooperation with the repressive forces as an agent or informant (the so-called lustration process). Of course, this would have meant the end of the political career of many ex-communists. The debate was fairly heated, and it was not until 2000 that the Institute was able to begin its work. The social relevance of the IPN came with the change of government in 2006, when Jarosław Kaczyński and his Law and Justice party came to power. The IPN then became an armed wing of the attempt at rapid de-communisation promoted by this party. The files of alleged collaborators with the political police in communist times came to light at the most profitable time for the new power and were used as a way of fighting its political opponents through a smear campaign. The opening up of the archives to unscrupulous journalists and the “leaks” to like-minded press made the institute the centre of a violent and bitter debate for two years, which divided Polish society and only abated when, in the early elections of 2008, Kaczyński lost power. In part, however, because of the politics of placing trusted people in key positions in the IPN – including the director himself – the institute remained highly politicised, becoming a bastion of national-conservative opposition to the ruling National Liberals.

This situation took a turn for the worse when, in 2015, the Law and Justice party won the elections again. In a period of just over two years, the Institute lost many of its most progressive researchers and dozens of nationalists were hired. The statutes were also changed, as was the way the president of the Institute was elected, to make it more easily controllable.

The importance of the lustration process and the construction of a new policy on the country's history explains the surprising size and multiplicity of the institute's tasks. The IPN's budget in 2009 was around 50 million euros but by 2018 it had reached 85 million (with a certain drop from the previous year). A total of 2,145 people worked at the institute in 2009, 13% of whom were researchers, and the number increased over the years. This has made it the best-funded historiographic research centre in the country. The historians of this institute have done an incredible amount of research in recent years. Several hundred books have been published, dozens of conferences have been organised and many exhibitions have been run. There is no institution in Eastern Europe that has played a more active role in promoting contemporary history than the IPN, although, as we have seen, its political manipulation has been very clear from the outset.

The IPN preserves over 86 kilometres of archives, 35% of which are located at its headquarters in Warsaw. There is also a network of 11 regional offices with an educational, scientific and legal role. The institute – unlike the BStU – is also home to a special prosecutor's office, which in 2008 had 139 prosecutors devoted to prosecuting crimes “against the Polish nation” since 1939. As, unlike the BStU, the IPN is not only responsible for prosecuting the crimes of the communist era, it also investigates the era of the German and Soviet occupations between 1939 and 1945. One of its first challenges, right at the outset, was to carry out an in-depth investigation of the pogrom against the Jewish population in the town of Jedwabne, carried out by its Polish neighbours in 1941. This investigation was considered necessary following the scandal raised by the book *Neighbours* by the Polish historian of Jewish origin, and nationalised American, Jan Tomasz Gross (Machcewicz and Persak 2002). We thus see how occupations and dictatorial regimes that followed one another left traces that, in the end, became linked to the problems of the dictatorships that followed them.

In Rumania, it was not until 1999 that a law made it possible for victims of the regime to view their files. The fact that the political police of the Ceausescu regime have continued to this day has, however, prevented any real discussion over the past. The debates have been very intense, due also, let us not forget, to the fact that Rumania was the only country to emerge from communism through a violent revolution in which at least 1,104 people died and thousands were injured.

Act 187/1999, which regulated the “*lustration*” or monitoring of public employees, also set up the CNSAS, the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives. However, the following year the post-communists won the elections and until 2005 the CNSAS was nothing more than an archive devoid of material (November 2005, 9,142 files). With the change

of government in 2004, when the conservatives came to power and the populist, Traian Basescu, was elected president, the situation changed radically: in December 2005, there was a massive transfer of archives from the Romanian secret service to the CNSAS (1,555,905 files, comprising 1,894,076 case files). A decision by the constitutional court, however, led to Law 187/199 being declared unconstitutional and a paralysis in the progress of the institute that was not remedied until 2008, when a new and much more expansive ordinance made possible a sort of overhaul of the CNSAS.

As of 2010, with the new director, Dragoş Petrescu, archives began to be opened up and the institute has been brought into line with the now customary standards of other institutes. The CNSAS archive, in comparison with the others, is the one that has most probably lost more records, due to the intentional destruction by former members of the secret police. Thanks to the organizational continuity of the secret police, this organization has had more than 15 years to destroy these records. The archive contains some two million files, although almost half of them are also on microfilm. The budget of the CNSAS has been increasing since 2004, and in recent years it has been estimated at three to four million euros. A comparison with the other two institutes presented here illustrates the practical difficulties faced by the CNSAS.

Czechoslovakia carried out a very rapid purge of former communists, which initially proved to be a model for the region. As early as 1989, the Minister of the Interior prohibited members of the political police from taking any action and eventually disbanded the force. An October 1991 law forced a large number of officials and those working for the state to obtain a certification that they had not been informants for the secret police. A special agency was created for this purpose, under the Ministry of the Interior: the Department for the Documentation and Prosecution of communist Crimes. The action of this department was basically official, and it did not allow access to the archives, although, in theory, these were also mostly open from the 26 April 1996 Act onwards. Compared to the GDR or Poland, Czech historians appear to be in less of a hurry to review the communist dictatorship. With the exception of some areas, research has been rather slow. An exception to this is the work of the Institute of Contemporary History at the University of Prague, where a sizeable group of young historians is doing excellent work.

It is precisely this lack of a significant echo from the first purge, together with the example of the neighbouring countries, that led the Czech parliament to create the "Institute for the study of Totalitarian Regimes" (*Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů*) and the State Security Archive, in May 2007. As we can see, the Czech case is somewhat different: the punitive function has been kept completely separate, as has the archive itself. The *Ústav* is above all a research institute, which seeks to clarify recent history – including the period of Nazi occupation from 1938 – and which also has a teaching role and one of civic education.

We have mentioned Czechoslovakia, however we should qualify this. The 1991 law was also valid in Slovakia, but post-communist Slovak politicians did not apply it. When, in 1994, the Czechoslovak state was divided into two independent states, the law ceased to be binding (in 1996, to be precise). It was not until 1998, when Vladimir Meciar's authoritarian government fell, that the real clean-up process began. In 2002, a law was passed which gave access to the archives of the political police and an "Institute for the Memory of the People" (*Ústav Pamäti Národa*) was created, as in the Czech Republic, to investigate not only the crimes of communism but also those carried out between 1939 and 1945 in the fascist Slovak state. However, unlike in the Czech Republic, the law did not remove from their posts those who collaborated with state security, although a certain social pressure has been felt in cases which became known, forcing some of the accused to resign. The Institute for the Memory of the People has also made use of efficient means such as publishing the lists of those figuring in secret police records as collaborators, on the Internet. This gave rise to major controversy, because these lists did not differentiate between volunteer collaborators and citizens who had been used to obtain information, unbeknown to them.

In Hungary, there was an early attempt at a purge; however, the victory of the post-communists did not allow archives to be opened up until 1994 and even then, very slowly. It was only after 2003 when, following a scandal caused by the discovery that the Prime Minister had been an informant, the "Historical Archive of the Hungarian Secret Services" (*Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára, ÁBTL*) was created, which is similar to the centres of remembrance analysed here.

In Bulgaria, there were several attempts to open up police files, but it was not until 1997 that the relevant law was passed, also opening the way for testing among civil servants to ascertain whether or not they had been informants for the secret services. However, in 2002, with the law on state secrets, the archives were closed again. Simeon of Bulgaria and his "national movement" were in favour of keeping the archives closed; however, a change in the balance of power led to the adoption of a new law in 2006 and the creation of the "Committee for the opening of documents and the membership of Bulgarian citizens in state security and the intelligence services of the Bulgarian People's Army". Despite its extremely bureaucratic name, this committee is, in essence, a replica – adapted to the idiosyncrasies of Bulgarian society – of the Central European centres of remembrance.

Little by little, through joint committees, publications and a large number of international seminars and conferences – in which the Polish IPN has been a pioneer – the centres of remembrance have created a working style and a structure of international collaboration which already makes it possible to speak of an established model to assess the past and historical research on the material held by the political police.

Use and abuse of the secret police archives

In July 2010, the Czech historian Jiří Suk said in an interview that the “agentmania” – as he called it – and the hunt for informants led by the media after the fall of communism had been a mistake. In his opinion, the politicised use of public exposure of those who had collaborated with the secret police had done more harm than good to post-communist society. It is true that from the very moment state socialist systems began to fall, the secret police were in the line of fire. Very soon the fear spread that those who had repressed and exercised their power against citizens might continue to do so, from the privileged positions they had access to, thanks to their position in the fallen regime. That explains why, in many of these societies, there was a constant clamour for a lustration of public life.

When, in 1990, West Germany absorbed the German Democratic Republic, the latter was quickly and expeditiously purged of its communist officials. It is true that this move, which occurred at all levels and in circles such as the university, caused most of the teaching staff to lose their posts, leading to protests from East German society itself (Schultz, 2000, pp. 303–324). Former GDR citizens complained that this was nothing more than the desire to “place” unemployed Western academics and officials, which, empirically, appears to be quite true. This led to the reviled ex-communist party taking strong root and surviving the debacle to become one of the main political organizations in the East (Martín de la Guardia, 2005, pp. 285–308). The case of the GDR is also the most extreme as regards opening up archives: the BStU contains all the documents kept by the Stasi and these are available to any researcher, as well as to any person concerned. Those affected have also received certain financial reparations, based on the model of compensation for the victims of Nazism. However, like the latter case, compensation has tended to be small and difficult to obtain. In reunified Germany, the most intense debates have also taken place around the so-called *Ostalgie*, that is, the nostalgic and sometimes benevolent reminiscence of the times lived under the communist dictatorship.

The BStU archives have been the subject of harsh criticism from the outset, and although the debate over their closure and the transfer of their materials to the federal archives flares up from time to time, the continuity of the institute seems assured. From the beginning, the great controversies that have arisen from the archives have been caused by various types of discoveries of sources. On the one hand, the fact that East German politicians, such as Gregor Gysi or Manfred Stolpe, may have been collaborators of the Stasi is repeated in almost every election campaign. This has sometimes led to resignations, but in general, society in the “new *Länder*” (the former GDR) does not seem to have been very affected by these revelations.

On the other hand, and here the scandals have been greater, more and more information has been revealed about the way in which the Stasi infiltrated the Federal Republic of Germany (Amos, 1999).⁶ Let us not forget

that as early as 1974, Chancellor Willy Brandt had been forced to resign when it became known that one of his closest collaborators was a Stasi agent. With access to the archives, the accusations – and proven data – have multiplied. Magazines such as *Konkret*, political parties and associations (both left and right) were financed by East Germany; politicians, police officers and businessmen from all over West Germany had been Stasi informants. In May 2009, a scandal arose at the discovery that Karl-Heinz Kurras, the policeman who murdered the protester Benno Ohnesorg in 1967, had been a Stasi agent. With Ohnesorg's murder began the radicalisation of the German student movement, and the participation of the Stasi in this – through Kurras – was certainly frightening (Kellerhoff, 2010). The thesis of the "Infiltrated Republic" stands at the centre of a bitter debate that has been going on for two decades.

Nor has the debate over the Polish IPN been any less heated, mainly because of its political exploitation. Part of the task entrusted to the institute has been a broad campaign to recover positive aspects of recent Polish history, such as remembering the many Poles who helped Jews during World War II or building a memory of Polish dissidents from the communist period. Much of the IPN's action has been directed at recovering the memory of the anti-communist partisans of the immediate post-war period and promoting the heroes of the resistance. This has sometimes involved conflict, as some of those who resisted were, at the same time, rampant anti-Semites or xenophobes. One example is Józef Kuraś Ogień, an anti-communist partisan, leader of a guerrilla group, who has been accused of anti-Semitic and anti-minority crimes. Thus, while the Polish institute published a hagiographic work on him and paid tribute to him, its Slovak equivalent, the UPN, opened an investigation into Kuraś's crimes against the Slovak minority.⁷

Another interesting case of the use of the institute's power to defend Poland's image is the publication of a book by a Polish American researcher, Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, on the Polish–Jewish conflicts. In his book, Chodakiewicz, who takes an extreme right-wing position, presents a defence of Poland, attempting to free the country from accusations of anti-Semitism by the method of defining the "guilt" of the Jews themselves in the pogroms carried out in the country after the Holocaust. To do this, he uses the techniques of the now classic right-wing revisionism. Interestingly, this book was hastily published by the IPN, just a few weeks before the translation of the book by the American historian of Jewish-Polish origin, Jan Tomasz Gross, appeared in Poland. His book, *Fear*, an intense but somewhat exaggerated analysis of Polish anti-Semitism, had already caused a certain stir in its English version. With the publication of Chodakiewicz's book, the IPN leaders obviously intended to neutralise the consequences of Gross's work (who, as we have seen, had already created controversy with "Neighbours" earlier).

Apart from rebuilding a positive image of Poland, the other pillar of the institute's strategy has been a fierce attack on communism and an attempt to symbolically delegitimise the regime. One of its actions, accepted by the Polish parliament, was the proposal to withdraw special war pensions from the Poles in the international brigades that fought in the Spanish civil war. This led to brief diplomatic tension between Spain and Poland. The Spanish Senate unanimously voted for a petition to Prime Minister Zapatero to act to prevent this.⁸

Slovakia is another good example of the political use of archival policies; accusations against political enemies based on files obtained by obscure means; and of accusations of alleged collaboration with Soviet or local secret services. A good example is the famous press conference held by Vladimir Meciar – the then head of the Slovak government – accusing an opponent of being an informer on the basis of the information contained in the file held by the political police. When asked by journalists where he had got the file, Meciar replied that “he had found it that morning on his desk”, a phrase that in Slovakia has come to mean something that has been achieved by illegal means (Bukalska and Tekieli, 2005, p. 12).

One of the main problems with the existence of these files is the ease with which personal data has been leaked to the media. This has sometimes led to what has been called “wild lustration”, i.e. problems of all kinds and accusations against people whose names have come to light. In 1992, a former Czech dissident, Petr Cibulka, published a list of 220,000 names of people he accused of collaborating as informants with the communist police. Over the years, an official commission recognised only a proportion of these as informants, because the “Cibulka List” (as it was called) also included many who were cited in police documents as “possible targets” but against whom there was no evidence. In the same year, a list of a few dozen names drawn up by the far-right Polish Minister of the Interior, Antoni Macierewicz, caused a scandal that brought down the entire government. The minister, in all probability, used his prerogative to denounce political opponents, including the President himself of the time, Lech Wałęsa, the veteran opponent and Nobel Peace Prize winner. Ten years later, in late 2004, a right-wing Polish journalist and former dissident, Bronisław Wildstein, stole a copy of the list of state security files from the IPN and publicised it over the Internet. It was not possible to know from this who, in the list, were the informants, who were the agents or the victims, so the damage caused to the reputation of many innocent people was quite serious.

Another example is the case of Milan Kundera. The famous Czech anti-communist writer and dissident who in 2008 was accused of having denounced a person during his youth who consequently received a harsh sentence and spent 14 years in prison. A historian at the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes discovered the document. The document was published in the journal *Respekt* and caused a serious scandal, while suddenly placing a Centre of Remembrance that had been operating for only a

short time in the limelight. This story also shows us how the desire of young historians to create a public profile for themselves, and of the research institutes themselves to attract attention, may have led to the search for documents and exposure of famous people, in an attitude that has little to do with purely scientific aspects (Blaive, 2009, pp. 203–225).

In general, in all these countries, the rise to power of populist parties or personalities at different times over the last 20 years has created an atmosphere in which everyone was guilty until proven otherwise, and sometimes even then. Indeed, many former politicians, dissenters or intellectuals are still under suspicion because, it is claimed, even where there are no documents to identify the collaboration of these persons with the police, this is due to the disappearance of these documents from the archives, for obscure reasons and at the hands of unidentified agents.

Conclusions

The importance that the former communist secret services continue to possess in the lives of post-dictatorial Central European societies is not reduced to the very persistence of their staff and their structures, which have generally been greatly exaggerated. The legacy of the secret police covers a wide area that ranges from the symbolic to the political, and which makes it very difficult to overcome the bitterness and resentments produced by the repressive action of the organs of these dictatorships. The supporters of opening up the archives were in the habit of pointing out that the exposure of agents and clarity over the political police would bring much-desired national concord, in a kind of catharsis produced by the truth. This has not been the case, however. In all countries, including Federal Germany, state security files have given rise to controversy and, indeed, continue to stoke the fire of paranoia, ignited, above all, by the mass media.

The scale of these problems largely depends on the degree of politicisation and manipulation that surrounds the archives and centres of remembrance. Politics has found a way to return to historiography, very differently from the communist era, but no less effective. The concept of “historical memory” has been used – and abused – to try to build monopolies of meaning no less than those of the communism of yesteryear, now, to a large extent, projected against it and its memory.

On the other hand, it is true that free access to the archives and a scientific investigation that will necessarily be forced to gradually renounce the vengeful urgency of affected generations will in the long run clarify the role of the police in the repression, debunking some myths and reaching some degree of consensus. As witnesses of the time emerge from the public scene, historians should be able to make use of archive material without so much pressure, thus taking advantage of incredibly rich sources to reconstruct a past that is not only that of moral defeats, hidden betrayals and the miseries imposed by an oppressive state.

Notes

- 1 On these police forces, a general comparative summary: José M. Faraldo, *Las redes del terror. Las policías secretas comunistas y su legado*, Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg 2018. A re-edited and revised manual: Persak, Krzysztof, and Kamiński, Łukasz. 2005, *A Handbook of the Communist Security Apparatus in East Central Europe, 1944–1989*. Warsaw: IPN; Persak, Krzysztof, Kamiński, Łukasz, and Gieseke, Jens, eds. 2009, *Handbuch der kommunistischen Geheimdienste in Osteuropa 1944–1991*. Göttingen: V&R; Persak, Krzysztof, and Kamiński, Łukasz, eds. 2010, *Czekaści. Organy bezpieczeństwa w europejskich krajach bloku sowieckiego 1944–1989*. Warsaw: IPN; National Summaries: Gieseke, Jens. 2001, *Mielke-Konzern: Die Geschichte der Stasi 1945–1990*. Stuttgart and Munich: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt (there is a second revised edition); for Poland: Terlecki, Ryszard, *Miecz i tarcza komunizmu: historia aparatu bezpieczeństwa w Polsce 1944–1990*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie; for Rumania: Deletant, Dennis. 1995, *Ceausescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965–89*. London: Hurst & Co. and New York: M.E. Sharpe; Oprea, Marius. 2008, *Bastionul cruzimii: o istorie a Securității (1948–1964)*. Bucharest: Polirom. A comparative analysis: van de Grift, Liesbeth. 2012, *Securing the Communist State: The Reconstruction of Coercive Institutions in the Soviet Zone of Germany and Romania, 1944–1948*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- 2 Figures in: Persak, *Czekaści*; Stan, *Prezentul*.
- 3 See the foundational charter of the “European Network of Institutions entrusted with the Archives of the Secret Police” 2010 in: *Das “Europäische Netzwerk der für die Geheimpolizeiakten zuständigen Behörden” Ein Reader über die gesetzlichen Grundlagen, Strukturen und Aufgaben europäischer Aufarbeitungsbehörde*. Berlin: BStU, p. 84.
- 4 On police informants: Albu, Mihai. 2008, *Informatorul: Studiu asupra colaborării cu Securitatea*. Bucharest: Polirom; On the actual dossiers and reports: Krone, Tina, Kukurtz, Irena, and Leide, Henry. 1992, *Wenn wir unsere Akten lesen – Handbuch zum Umgang mit den Stasi – akten*, Berlin: BasisDruck; Graczyk, Ryszard. 2007, *Tropem SB: Jak czytać teczki*. Kraków: IPN; Chivu-Duta, Carmen and Albu, Mihai. 2007, *Dosarele Securității: Studii de caz*, Bucharest. Available at <https://www.worldcat.org/title/dosarele-securitatii-studii-de-caz/oclc/895533761>.
- 5 Even though it is possible that a proportion of these protesters were “unofficial informants” of the Stasi who wanted to erase the traces of their collaboration with the regime. This fact, of course, does not imply that it changes the general view of what occurred as a citizen reaction.
- 6 With a sensationalist and vindictive tone, but good data: Knabe, Hubertus. 1999. *Die unterwanderte Republik: Stasi im Westen*. Berlin: Propyläen Verlag.
- 7 “Słowacki IPN ‘przeświecili’ polskiego partyzanta,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 20 December 2008.
- 8 “El Senado defiende a los brigadistas comunistas polacos repudiados en su país,” *El País*, 23 March 2007. For the debate, see: Faraldo, Jose M. 2007, “Rozmówki hiszpańsko-polskie,” *Polityka*, 23 June, pp. 52–55.

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