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HUMAN RIGHTS AND INDEPENDENT TRADE UNIONISM IN LATE 1970'S ROMANIA: THE CASE OF SLOMR

Broadly speaking, the current paper analyzes the way in which human rights discourses were appropriated, enriched and instrumentalized in the onset of social turmoil in Eastern European state-socialist regimes after 1975. It explores the way in which seemingly local events were entangled in larger networks of interconnections and in broader processes. By going beyond the teleological analysis of dissent and the fall of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the current analysis reveals the opportunities and the limitations of the post-1975 human rights discourses for effecting change or reform.

More specifically, while questioning the way in which Romanian workers sought to address their dissatisfaction in matters concerning labor relations in the late 1970's, the current research focuses on the endeavors to create the Free Trade Union of Romanian Workers (SLOMR; in Romanian: *Sindicatul liber al oamenilor muncii din România*) as an independent trade union in 1979. I argue that SLOMR exemplifies the diversity of human rights discourses and epitomizes one of the most salient collective action attempts to create a nation-wide independent organization aimed at defending workers' rights in state socialist Romania.

In this sense, the transnational turn of the current paper allows the exploration of this topic beyond a quantitative analysis of SLOMR's impact in creating an oppositional movement,¹ allowing a shift of the scope from the usual focus on individuals and state relations to a three level analysis, by incorporating international accords and organizations in an analysis structured on three main parts. Thus, the first section focuses on the human rights discourses following the signing of the Helsinki Accords, as citizens from various countries used the language of human rights as a means to strengthen their cases by shaming the authorities into respecting their own claims of material betterment for all.

Based mainly on Secret police archives and Radio Free Europe records and focused on the intellectual and practical elements that contributed to SLOMR's development,

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¹ When referring to "opposition" I turn to Jan Wielgohs and Detlef Pollack's interpretation of the term, denoting "opposition" in regard to groups that sought, via various forms of organized collective action, not only to extend personal freedoms under the existing regime, but in addition to question publicly the legitimacy of this regime. The term "opposition" describes the political formations that emerged from the dissident milieu in the late 1980's to challenge the regimes, and press them to give up, through organized actions – most visibly through demonstrations and the demands for round table negotiations. For more on this see: Jan Wielgohs, Detlef Pollack, *Introduction*, in Detlef Pollack, Jan Wielgohs (eds.), *Dissent and opposition in communist Eastern Europe: origins of civil society and democratic transition*, Burlington, VT, Ashgate, 2004, p. xi.

the second part analyses the members' endeavor to create an independent organization that sought to defend workers' interests, and the efforts of gaining official recognition for their cause.

The third section analyzes the local and international attempts at convincing the Romanian authorities to legitimize SLOMR as a trade union. Both the struggle for wider international exposure (via Radio Free Europe or the activities of the French Committee for the Defense of Human rights in Europe) as well as the way in which SLOMR's discourse was instrumentalized by international actors (International Labor Organization, French and British trade unions, Amnesty International) are the key elements of this analysis.

The original elements of my study are multifold: while contributing to a seemingly separate Romanian historiography on workers actions on the one side, and human rights movement on the other, the current paper provides factual information about a movement which was only partially researched before, while also creating the premises for wider comparison on a larger Eastern European scale.

Activism and human rights

In the mid 1970's, the parameters of the human rights debate shifted from the international arena of intergovernmental agencies to the level of national and transnational activism, fostering the institutionalization of organizations with the main scope of defending human rights at a global level in compliance with principle VII of the Helsinki Final Act. As a new concept, human rights led to the emergence of new systems of knowledge as people tried to come to grips with it.²

In different parts of the world, various groups were organized in the mid-1970's in order to promote or to monitor the implementation of principle VII, leading to the crystallization of a human rights consciousness in the international arena. After the Helsinki Final Act, various human rights advocates, promoters of religious freedom and condemners of ethnic discrimination tried to formulate their grievances. The most prominent example in this sense were the Moscow Helsinki Group formed by Yuri Orlov in May 1976, the Committee for the workers' defense (KOR) in Poland and Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, all of them making direct appeals to the international instruments for the defense of human rights.³ Other examples in this sense were the Helsinki Watch Group and The American Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe.⁴

Set against this background, Romanian state officials took the chance to put into practice their own approach to human rights and took actions they perceived to be in Romania's own national interest. In this sense, the Romanian orientation towards an improvement of the state of human rights under the conditions of the existing system was encouraged by significant changes in the international context.⁵ At the same time, human rights advocates in Romania were considered betrayers of the country or individuals

² Petra Goedde, *Global Cultures*, in Akira Iriye, Jürgen Osterhammel (eds.), *Global interdependence: The World after 1945*, vol. 6, *A History of the World*, Cambridge, MA Belknap Press, 2013, p. 544.

³ Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History*, Cambridge, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010, p. 161.

⁴ For more information on the Commission's activity see: Victor-Yves Ghébal, *La diplomatie de la détente: la CSCE, d'Helsinki à Vienne (1973-1989)*, Bruxelles, É. Bruylant, 1989, p. 64.

⁵ Jan Wielgohs, Detlef Pollack, *Comparative perspectives on dissent and opposition to communist rule*, in Detlef Pollack, Jan Wielgohs (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 47.

manipulated by international reactionary forces,⁶ elements that refused to understand the inseparable link between the rights and the duties of Romanian citizens. Thus, liberties and rights needed to be understood in a certain social context based on order, legality, discipline and responsibility.⁷

In a country where the authorities relied on its channeling and strict control of communication and media⁸ into a “monocentric system of uniformizing communications”,⁹ RFE gradually gained popularity among the Romanian population, resembling a surrogate local radio, not only by informing about national and international affairs, but also by giving a voice to their grievances that were sent through letters.

In the case of SLOMR, Radio Free Europe not only played a crucial role in informing their listeners about the development of international agreements concerning human rights (Helsinki Final Act), but also about the formation of various movements across Eastern Europe demanding human rights recognition (Charter 77) and the institutionalization of the Workers’ Defense Committee (KOR).

Thus, the radical alternative media, played in this case by Radio Free Europe, should be placed within the larger context of state power, hegemony, and insubordination.¹⁰ As stated in 1973, RFE’s main function was to promote the application of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). At the same time, the Romanian secret police declared that the activities of all Western stations broadcasting to Eastern Europe constituted “espionage and the promotion of anti-state activities”.¹¹ In spite of this situation, the Romanian station of Radio Free Europe had for decades the largest audience of all international broadcasters, and, in most years, the highest percentage of listenership in all of its target countries.¹²

When compared to earlier examples of people’s discontent, the repertoire deployed by SLOMR initiators reveals a further diversification, as RFE played an important role in disseminating the level of success/failure and the methods used in formulating grievances. In this sense, at the moment of RFE’s broadcast about SLOMR, the cases of the Jiu Valley miners’ strike in 1977, the case of Vasile Paraschiv’s individual struggle for independent labor unions since 1971 and Goma movement’s demand for human rights in 1977 were all known to the Romanian listeners of RFE. As RFE constantly announced its’ listeners about the human rights violations and various forms of discontent within the Eastern bloc, SLOMR initiators perceived the idea of human rights and the international conventions on this matter, which emerged with prominence after the Helsinki Accords of 1975, as a legitimate basis for their claims.¹³

⁶ “Romanian situation report/7: 9”, 9 April 1979. HU OSA 300-60-1: 130; RFE/RL Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Subject Files; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

⁷ Emanuel Copilaș, *Ideologie și politică. Helsinki 1975 și problematica drepturilor omului în România socialistă* [Ideology and politics. Helsinki 1975 and the issue of human rights in state-socialist Romania], in “Anuarul Institutului de Istorie ‘George Barițiu’”, Series Historica, vol. L, 2011, p. 241.

⁸ John Downing, *Radical media: rebellious communication and social movements*, Thousand Oaks, Calif, Sage Publications, 2001, p. 355.

⁹ Peter Gross, *Mass media in revolution and national development: the Romanian laboratory*, Ames, Iowa, Iowa State University Press, 1996, p. 11.

¹⁰ John Downing, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

¹¹ Germina Nagat, *Ceașescu’s war against our ears*, in A. Ross Johnson, R. Eugene Parta (eds.), *Cold war broadcasting: impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: a collection of studies and documents*, Budapest/New York, Central European University Press, 2010, p. 230.

¹² Nestor Ratesh, *Radio free Europe’s impact in Romania during the Cold War*, in A. Ross Johnson, R. Eugene Parta (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 207.

¹³ “Free trade union formed in Romania”, Munich, 7 March 1979. HU OSA 300-60-1: 419; RFE/RL Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Subject Files; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

While anticipating the repressive measures by the authorities, SLOMR initiators sought to address daily life problems emerging from labor conditions by framing their demands not only within the Romanian legislation, but also within the broader framework of human rights. They did this by invoking the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, seeking for international legitimation and support from abroad. But the success of their attempts to persuade the government to obey its own laws and international covenants¹⁴ heavily depended not only on international support, but most importantly, on alternative structures to fill the gaps in society regarding education, information and social support, which were not allowed to exist by a state focused on maintaining only one way of understanding reality.¹⁵ In SLOMR's case, the deficit of organizational resources of individual groups sought to be compensated by external support networks¹⁶ inevitably leading to a discrepancy between the perceived structural opportunity and the actual context within which they were situated.¹⁷

SLOMR's initiators sought to refrain from grievances of a political nature by focusing on work-related issues, confirming the Leninist principle that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, was able to develop only trade union consciousness,¹⁸ but since the trade unions were held responsible at all times for implementing the party's program,¹⁹ requiring further mobilization of labor, they challenged the Party's decisions as the vanguard of the proletariat, transforming it into a political claim.

Workers and trade unions in the Romanian socialist system

According to Murgescu, the Romanian socialist system of the 1970's was relatively adapted for industrial development inspired by the experience of the late 19th century and early 20th century, but did not manage to adapt to the new demands of the global economy in the phase of post-industrial development.²⁰ Rather arising from an integral, self-propelled movement in society, Romania's economic growth in the period is seen as a "forced" one, as it implied an acceleration of the tempo, compelled from above by the bureaucracy. This combination featured a very high investment and low consumption proportions, a specific set of priorities and an accelerated utilization of the obvious potentials for extensive development, focused on quantity at the expense of quality.²¹

¹⁴ Benjamin Nathans, *The dictatorship of reason: Aleksandr Vol'Pin and the idea of rights under "Developed Socialism"*, in "Slavic Review", vol. 66, no. 4, December 1st 2007, p. 631.

¹⁵ "Solidaritatea internațională există dar nu poate să cadă din cer" [The international solidarity exists but it cannot fall from the sky], by Vladimir Krasnosselski, 3 Mar. 1988, HU OSA 300-60-3: 11; RFE/RL Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Records Relating to Romanian Opposition and Protest Movement; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

¹⁶ Jan Wielgohs, Detlef Pollack, *Comparative perspectives on dissent and opposition to communist rule*, p. 45.

¹⁷ By political opportunity structure is to be understood the respective specific constellations of political and institutional contextual conditions structuring the chances of success for political actors. For more information see: *ibidem*, p. 47.

¹⁸ Vladimir Lenin, *What is to be done?*, 1902, p. 17, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/download/what-itd.pdf> [last accessed August 1st 2018].

¹⁹ Daniel N. Nelson, *The worker & political alienation in Communist Europe*, in "Polity", vol. 15, no. 2, 1982, p. 193.

²⁰ Bogdan Murgescu, *România și Europa: acumularea decalajelor economice (1500-2010)* [Romania and Europe. The accumulation of economic gaps (1500-2010)], Iași, Polirom, 2010, p. 404-405.

²¹ János Kornai, *The socialist system: the political economy of communism*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992, p. 197.

The evolution of the Romanian economy in the period of 1978-1981 inflicted on the population's trust in the authorities, as the control was further intensified in order to counteract the negative trends.²² In the second part of the 1970's, the decline of oil production and the increase of exports were combined with a rise of the external debt from 5.2 billion dollars in 1978 to 9.5 billion dollars in 1980.²³ In response to these situations, the regime decided to limit consumption, and main sectors that were targeted were households and street lighting, even though their significance in the overall picture was only around 7% in 1980. According to Murgescu, the economic impact at the macro-level was very limited and these restrictions only contributed to the population's discomfort.²⁴

At the same time, the state continuously asserted efficiency and productivity in the official discourse as means to back the division of labor and legitimize its control over resources and ownership. As the cult of labor mainly acclaimed production and manual labor as society's central motif, the workplace became the foundation for social effect in the citizen's life.²⁵

According to Nelson, workers relied on trade-union membership for most benefits, such as housing at an affordable cost, pension and sick leave, nursery for children, health care, and transportation to the workplace.²⁶ In this sense, The General Union of Romanian Trade Unions (UGSR; in Romanian: *Uniunea Generală a Sindicatelor din România*) was the largest of the country's mass organizations, with a membership of around 7 million in 1980's. Headed by a Central Council, the UGSR consisted of 11 labor union federations and 41 area councils, one for each county and the city of Bucharest. The Central Council had a chairman, appointed by the PCR Central Committee, eight vice chairmen, two secretaries, and an executive committee of 48 members.²⁷

The primary function of the labor unions was the transmission of party policies to the rank and file. The UGSR statutes specified that the organization conducted its activities under the political leadership of the PCR with a similar provision being included in the statutes of the UGSR counties' committees. In early 1971, PCR made some attempts at reforming and democratizing UGSR and its component unions. Ceaușescu promised workers protection of their interests and a voice in the appointment of industrial management, as the labor unions would no longer be "transmission belts", but would serve the party as a framework for organizing consultations with the masses and as a forum where workers could debate the country's economic and social development.²⁸

With the aim of improving the planning and administration processes of the economy, the enterprises were bound to present various reports concerning the efficiency of indicators dealing with working hours, total work force, production, raw materials index, as well as profit indicators. As Burakowski argues, these indicators were introduced at the

²² Adam Burakowski, *Dictatura lui Nicolae Ceaușescu 1965-1989. Geniul Carpaților* [Nicolae Ceaușescu's dictatorship 1965-1989. The genius of the Carpathians], translation by Vasile Moga, Iași, Polirom, 2011, p. 355.

²³ Bogdan Murgescu, *op. cit.*, p. 394.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 396.

²⁵ David A. Kideckel, *The solitude of collectivism: Romanian villagers to the revolution and beyond*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1993, p. 61.

²⁶ Daniel N. Nelson, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

²⁷ TUC delegation to Romania, July 17-19, I.C.11/7, August 4, 1980, Trades Union Congress collection, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick (MSS.292D/949.8/3).

²⁸ Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Rolul și atribuțiile sindicatelor din România* [The role and the attributions of Romanian trade unions], București, Editura Politică, 1981, p. 34.

beginning of 1978 for two main reasons: to reduce the falsified data from the enterprise level and to introduce a principle that directly connected income with work efficiency. In this sense, according to the Central Committee's decision, income was calculated at the enterprise and individual levels, with workers' wages depending not only on their work efficiency, but also on the general results of the enterprise.²⁹

As Kideckel argues, although the official discourse was advocating the workplace democracy (in Romanian: *autoconducerea muncitorească*), the industrial, agricultural and commercial frameworks were all tailored at boosting the centralized state, complementing the institutions of state power, which neutralized their decision-making process and their formal democratic rules.³⁰ Nevertheless, the workers could hope for increased benefits only in the case where the enterprise would have exceeded the production plan, which had been previously set to the maximum exploitation levels of the equipment and work force. As a result, the only way to exceed the plan was with the use of unpaid labor, and additional raw materials, previously set by the economic plan.³¹

In this context, by mid-1978, corruption scandals erupted, involving the incorrect usage of funds and raw materials. One of these scandals is discussed by Burakowski: in Piatra Neamț city, following a superior control, it was revealed that local party activists and state functionaries were using state resources to build both residential and holiday homes. The regime used these cases in order to unveil corruption at a local level by sanctioning and providing media coverage on the topic in the official press, thus portraying the central administration's capacity of control and demonstrating its will to fight against wastefulness.³²

SLOMR's case reflects the workers' disenchantment with the regime's policies, reflecting their belief that the official institution responsible for their protection, UGSR, was falling short on expectations and did not listen to their grievances. As Nelson argues, one must not confuse workers' alienation from leaders and bureaucracy with anti-communism or non-socialist ideals. Workers might have thought that their government had failed to eliminate the class biases of capitalist systems, and had continued old inequalities under new names.³³ This assumption is further revealed by Manolache's analysis of the citizens' complaint letters addressed to the Romanian Communist Party. These complaints mostly took issue with shortfalls in socialist social rights, especially concerning the state's promissory note of material provisioning befitting a "workers' and peasants' state." This practice was not singular to Romania, but had similar equivalents in the Soviet Union and other East European states.³⁴

On many occasions, those who were supposed to handle workers' grievances were accused of being corrupt, while the main topics for workers' discontent dealt with poor working conditions, low payments, unworthy promotions, damages to state assets, leading to a growing dissatisfaction as no actions were previously taken.³⁵ In her analysis of complaint letters, Manolache highlights the solidarity between claimants in

²⁹ Adam Burakowski, *op. cit.*, p. 324.

³⁰ David A. Kideckel, *The solitude of collectivism*, p. 61.

³¹ Adam Burakowski, *op. cit.*, p. 327.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 328.

³³ Daniel N. Nelson, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

³⁴ Paul Betts, *Socialism, Social Rights, and Human Rights: The Case of East Germany*, in "Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development", vol. 3, no. 3, 2012, p. 419.

³⁵ Dana-Ioana Manolache, *Scrisori către PCR. Oamenii muncii și problemele lor în scrisorile către Nicolae Ceaușescu* [Letters for RCP. The workers and their problems in the letters addressed to Nicolae Ceaușescu], PhD dissertation, University of Bucharest, 2014, p. 132.

the name of the party and the society, acknowledging and legitimizing the leader and the state institutions,³⁶ with the leader being portrayed as the one to bring back the equilibrium, serve justice and protect the aggrieved ones.³⁷

It is difficult to comprehend whether the workers were devoted to the socialist cause or whether this was only a stylistic strategy in their approach towards the authorities by following the official discourse. Nevertheless, there was a thin line between having your grievance ignored and being investigated by the *Securitate*. In a discourse published in “Scântea” [The Spark] on the 2nd of October 1968, Nicolae Ceaușescu, pointed out that only a crazy person would not see the benefits of socialism. Teodor Negulescu and Vasile Paraschiv’s cases are just two examples in this sense: the former, a worker at “Textila” – Buzău enterprise, following his complaints to the Party about the abuses and irregularities from his workplace, was investigated by the secret police, fired from his job and sent to Săpoca psychiatric hospital.³⁸ The latter received a similar treatment over the years for leaving the Communist Party and demanding independent free trade unions.³⁹

The SLOMR initiative

The origins of SLOMR reside in the initiators’ humanistic orientation of their professions. In this respect, the physician Ionel Cană was well aware of the worsening working conditions from “Industria Socialiste” enterprise from Balș, where the risk increments were suspended in 1978.⁴⁰ In the months that followed, Ionel Cană approached priest G. Calciu-Dumitreasa, familiar to RFE’s audience for his series of lectures “7 words for the youth” [in Romanian: *7 cuvinte către tineri*] which subsequently brought him to the *Securitate*’s attention.⁴¹

In the early days of 1979, the physician Ionel Cană and the priest Gheorghe Calciu-Dumitreasa had the first discussions on the necessity to form an organization aimed at defending workers’ rights. The secret police interceptions indicate that Cană and Calciu met and discussed whether they should give their real names or not, and agreed that a founding group should be mentioned, not only a single person.⁴² Furthermore, following Gh. Brașoveanu’s expertise on economic matters, a founding document was drafted and plans were made to create files with individual cases, addresses and their problems.⁴³

On March 4th 1979 the Romanian unit of Radio Free Europe announced the foundation of an independent trade union in Romania and broadcasted the content of SLOMR’s establishing document.⁴⁴ The declaration bore the signature of 20 people, of

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 169.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 172.

³⁸ Silviu Alupeș, *Cazul Negulescu. Un nebun pentru liniștea țării*, in “Tinerama”, 9-15 septembrie 1994, p. 11, *apud* Mădălin Hodor, *Ce nu cuprinde un dosar de securitate* [What you won’t find in a Secret Police file], in Gheorghe Onișoru (ed.), *Totalitarism și rezistență, teroare și represiune în România comunistă* [Totalitarianism and resistance, terror and repression in Communist Romania], Studii 1, București, CNSAS, 2001, p. 190.

³⁹ Vasile Paraschiv, *Lupta mea pentru sindicate libere în România: terorismul politic organizat de statul comunist* [Vasile Paraschiv: My struggle for free trade unions in Romania], edited by Marius Oprea, Oana Ionel and Dragoș Marcu, Iași, Polirom, 2005.

⁴⁰ Ionel Cană, *Sindicat liber și dictatură* [Free trade union and dictatorship], vol. 1, Iași, PIM, 2015, p. 14.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

⁴² ACNSAS, fund Informativ, file no. I 258979, vol. 1, f. 16.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, f. 19-22.

⁴⁴ “Domestic Bloc”, no. 10, 4 March 1979, D.C. HU OSA 300-60-1: 419: Labor/TU: Free trade unions 1979-1987; RFE/RL Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Records Relating to Romanian Opposition and Protest Movement; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

which 16 were allegedly workers from the city of Turnu Severin, while the rest of them were from Bucharest: Ionel Cană, physician, general practitioner, Gheorghe Brașoveanu, economist, Nicolae Gugu, veteran member of the Communist Party, and Gheorghe Frățilă, cameraman.⁴⁵

One of the main characteristics of the SLOMR movement was its struggle for official recognition by the authorities. Although my research reveals that the organization aimed at responding to certain social issues, it also highlights once more the rigidity of the Romanian political system. In this sense, it is important to acknowledge that there were no other legal artifices that could sustain their cause, as it was the case for KOR in Poland, whose institutionalization largely benefited from a pre-War law concerning relief committees.⁴⁶ SLOMR's founding document claimed that the trade union was in conformity with Romanian legislation; at the same time, their struggle for workers' rights was centered on the most important documents of the international community: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the U.N.'s International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ratified by Romania in 1974).⁴⁷ While declaring its affiliation to the ICFTU,⁴⁸ it highlighted that it did not focus on actions of a political nature, but rather on the rights deriving from labor relations. In this respect, their endeavor shares a similar approach with the movement of the so-called *pravozashchitniki* or *zakonniki* (defenders of rights) in the Soviet Union, with Alexandr Vol'pin described as "the first to understand that an effective method of opposition might be to demand that the authorities observe their own laws."⁴⁹

SLOMR's aims were the fight against abusive firings and pensioning, precarious hygiene, safety and working conditions. Moreover, it requested the revision of the law of pensions adopted in 1977 and a reduction of the weekly working hours. According to the document, people were invited to join the trade union by mail or phone call, with no membership fee being requested. While anticipating that repressive measures would follow, the signatories invited the sympathizers to form local committees and to keep the organization alive, despite the initiators' arrest.⁵⁰ Following the publication of SLOMR's founding declaration, in early March 1979, Virgil Chender, allegedly representing The Unofficial Trade Union of Workers, Peasants and Soldiers of Mureș county (an organization with a claimed number of 1487 members), met with Ionel Cană and declared his union's affiliation with SLOMR.⁵¹

According to secret police interceptions, the RFE announcement stirred some discussions in Harghita County, where people appreciated the support of French trade

⁴⁵ "Free trade union formed in Romania", Munich, 7 March 1979. f. 525. HU OSA 300-60-1: 419; RFE/RL Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Subject Files; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

⁴⁶ Jan Józef Lipski, *KOR: A History of the Workers' Defense Committee in Poland, 1976-1981*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985, p. 45.

⁴⁷ "Buletinul Oficial al Republicii Socialiste România" [The Official Bulletin of the Socialist Republic of Romania], 20 Nov. 1974. HU OSA 300-60-1: 317; RFE/RL Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Subject Files; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

⁴⁸ In 1949, early in the Cold War, alleging Communist domination of the WFTU's central institutions, a large number of non-communist national trade union federations (including the U.S. AFL-CIO, the British TUC, the French FO, the Italian CISL and the Spanish UGT) seceded and created the rival ICFTU at a conference in London attended by representatives of nearly 48 million members in 53 countries.

⁴⁹ Benjamin Nathans, *op. cit.*, p. 630.

⁵⁰ "Domestic Bloc", no. 10, 4 March 1979, D.C. HU OSA 300-60-1: 419; Labor/TU: Free trade unions 1979-1987; RFE/RL Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Records Relating to Romanian Opposition and Protest Movement; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

⁵¹ "Political program", no. 31, 23 March 1979, ANIC, fund Anneli Ute Gabanyi, file no. 156, f. 19-24.

unions, and were assessing the importance of organizing a strike through the newly announced trade union.⁵² In Hunedoara County, a few people joined the movement, hoping that the organization could facilitate their departure from Romania.⁵³ In a different case, the medic Pogan Emil signed up to the organization, requesting assistance in finding a job for his wife.⁵⁴

In Ialomița County, according to the interceptions, there were people who were skeptical about joining the organization, predicting that the attempt would be short-lived, despite the support from abroad.⁵⁵ In Iași County, people wrote to the Bucharest group requesting further information about the legal status of SLOMR and its connection with state institutions,⁵⁶ similar approach being taken by individuals from Maramureș County. As for other identified individuals from Constanța, Dâmbovița, Ilfov counties, they joined SLOMR and requested assistance in obtaining the necessary documents for leaving the country.⁵⁷

Adherence and complaints about working conditions came from Arad County,⁵⁸ while people from Brașov requested assistance in solving abusive firings.⁵⁹ Other demands dealt with assistance in obtaining the approval for receiving medical treatment abroad,⁶⁰ complaints about various problems in the enterprise production process,⁶¹ as well as work-related litigations.⁶² Moreover, legal suggestions were sent, in an attempt to further facilitate SLOMR's legality; apart from an updated SLOMR statute, it was proposed that the term "free" be replaced by "independent", thus avoiding any claims that the official trade unions were not free.⁶³

Immediately after Radio Free Europe announced the formation of SLOMR, its three leaders, physician Ionel Cană, Father Gheorghe Calciu-Dumitreasa, and Gheorghe Brașoveanu were arrested on March 10, 1979⁶⁴ for conspiracy against the socialist order.⁶⁵ Shortly after, Ilie Popovici and Alexandru Nagy sent abroad new lists with supporters⁶⁶ but in early April, RFE stopped airing the names and the addresses of the new adherents, as announcements about new lists of adherents continued to appear until late April 1979.⁶⁷ Concomitantly, there were people who tried to form a provisory committee; under the coordination of Nicolae Dascălu, a teacher from Bucharest, as they demanded a survey by the International Federation of Trade Unions to assess whether Romanian workers would need another trade union. Moreover, there was also the request for

⁵² ACNSAS, fund Documentar, file no. 14945, vol. 7, f. 1-2.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, f. 5-8.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, f. 25.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, f. 30-31.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, f. 32.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, f. 49-62.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, file no. 8852, vol. 6, f. 229.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, f. 233.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, f. 234.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, f. 245.

⁶² *Ibidem*, f. 247.

⁶³ Idem, fund Informativ, file no. 423686, f. 47.

⁶⁴ "Romania's Free trade union members arrested", f. 1. HU OSA 300-60-1: 419; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Subject Files; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

⁶⁵ Ionel Cană, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

⁶⁶ *Remember: România 1979 – membrii Sindicatului liber continuă acțiunea* [Remember: Romania 1979 – the members of the free trade union continue their action], in "Dialog", no. 63, Mar. 1989, p. 4.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*.

permission in promoting their program in Romanian media, and for the possibility of renting a place for a headquarters, thus enjoying the same rights as UGSR.⁶⁸ Although Ionel Cană currently contests Nicolae Dascălu's role as a president of the organization,⁶⁹ Carl Gibson's accounts,⁷⁰ as well as RFE materials, indicate that Nicolae Dascălu assumed the role of SLOMR's spokesman following the initial group's arrest and their subsequent surveillance by *Securitate*, by forming a provisory committee.⁷¹

In another example, following their meeting in Bucharest with Nicolae Dascălu,⁷² Carl Gibson and Erwin Ludwig, two ethnic Germans from Timișoara, formed a local SLOMR committee in a different region of the country, allegedly spurring the interest of around 150 sympathizers, but only gathering around 20 signatures.⁷³ Shortly after they convinced Felon Sacerdoțeanu to hold the presidency of the organization,⁷⁴ Gibson was convicted on the basis of organizing an anarchic group with hostile conceptions against the socialist ethics.⁷⁵

On the 18th of April 1979, RFE again aired pieces of information about SLOMR, whose sympathizers signed a collective letter to Ceaușescu, demanding the stoppage of repression.⁷⁶ The sympathizers highlighted that their endeavor was following Ceaușescu's critique at the UGSR Congress from March 1971, on the fact that workers participation was needed in the processes involving various measures for the development of Romanian society.⁷⁷

By the summer of 1979, all the activities initiated around SLOMR since late February came to an end at the national level. According to a secret police document from September 1979, there were no reports of any new activities in this respect.⁷⁸ Ionel Cană, Gh. Brașoveanu, G. Calciu-Dumitreasa, Nicolae Dascălu, Carl Gibson and Erwin Ludwig served prison time on various accusations, and apart from the main figures involved in the SLOMR endeavor, there were also dozens of sympathizers imprisoned or intimidated.

Following his release from prison in the autumn of 1979, Carl Gibson left Romania and engaged in popularizing SLOMR's cause and its repression by the authorities. After giving two interviews about his life and his activity around SLOMR at RFE in November that year, Carl Gibson also established connections with Ion Solocalu, the editor of "Dialog", a magazine published by the Democratic Circle of Romanians from Germany [in Romanian: *Cercul democrat al românilor din Germania*], for which he gave multiple interviews in the years that followed.

⁶⁸ "Political program", no. 45, 6 April 1979, ANIC, fund Anneli Ute Gabanyi, file no. 156, f. 25-31.

⁶⁹ Ionel Cană, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

⁷⁰ Carl Gibson, *Symphonie der Freiheit – Widerstand gegen die Ceaușescu-Diktatur: Chronik und Testimonium einer tragischen Menschenrechtsbewegung, in literarischen Skizzen, Essays, Bekenntnissen und Reflexionen* [The symphony of freedom. Opposition to the Ceaușescu dictatorship. Histories and Testimonies of a tragic human rights movement in literary sketches, essays, confessions and reflections], Dettelbach, J. H. Röhl Verlag, 2008, p. 84.

⁷¹ ACNSAS, fund Informativ, file no. 257993, vol. 2, f. 12-15.

⁷² *Remember: România 1979 – membrii Sindicatului liber continuă acțiunea*, p. 4.

⁷³ ACNSAS, fund Informativ, file no. 257993, vol. 1, f. 26.

⁷⁴ Carl Gibson, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

⁷⁵ Interview with Carl Gibson, transcription by Ion Solocalu, *Să nu regreti niciodată ce-ai făcut* [Never regret what you have done], in "Dialog", no. 62, Apr. 1986, p. 13.

⁷⁶ "Domestic bloc" (unspecified number), (no date), ANIC, fund Anneli Ute Gabanyi, file no. 156, f. 46-64.

⁷⁷ ACNSAS, fund Informativ, file no. 423686, f. 47v.

⁷⁸ Idem, fund Documentar, file no. 14945, vol. 6, f. 335-337.

Two years after Carl Gibson's departure from Romania, he was approached by Ion Ganea⁷⁹ in order to commence the procedures for submitting a complaint against the Romanian government at the International Labor Organization.⁸⁰ Following Gibson's accounts, as the organization could not be approached by individuals on this matter, there came the idea of forming a SLOMR informal support committee to pursue their interest. Apart from Gibson himself, this committee also came to include people like Radu Câmpeanu, Ion Ganea, Cicerone Ionițoiu, Vlad Dragoescu, Michel Korne, Ion Solacolu.⁸¹ With Carl Gibson representing SLOMR's cause abroad,⁸² the committee compiled a file with materials published by the French press and met with Blaise Robel, representing the World Confederation of Labor (WCL), and Gérard Fonteneau, vice-president of the International Labor Office (ILO).⁸³

Even though the support coming from WCL was not as prominent as in the Polish case,⁸⁴ it definitely was not negligible. Persuaded by the evidence provided by the SLOMR informal support committee,⁸⁵ the representatives of the WCL⁸⁶ alleged that the Romanian authorities practiced various methods of intimidation, arrests and beatings, while using pretexts that were designed to conceal the anti-union nature of their actions.⁸⁷ Their complaint from July 1981 marked the beginning of a three-year investigation from the ILO's Committee on Freedom of Association (CFA) concerning Romania's compliance with Convention no. 87⁸⁸ and no. 98.⁸⁹

By that time, the international arena was already acquainted with the International Labor Organization's cases on matters concerning violations of workers' rights to association and collective bargaining. As the only tripartite United Nations agency, ILO had been investigating complaints against East European governments in terms of trade

⁷⁹ After the Second World War, Ion Ganea was a member of the Liberal Youth, a youth organization of the Romanian National Liberal party. Between 1959-1964 he was imprisoned for conspiracy. He left for Switzerland in 1978 and placed under secret police surveillance in 1981. For more details about his life please see: Ion Ganea Argeș, *Cinci ani în gulagul românesc* [Five years in the Romanian Gulag], București, Vremea, 2014.

⁸⁰ Carl Gibson, *op. cit.*, p. 346.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 345.

⁸² Idem, interview by author, telephone interview, 19 May 2016.

⁸³ Idem, *David și Goliath: sindicatul liber și guvernul român* [David and Goliath: The free trade union and the Romanian government], in "Dialog", no. 26, Aug. 1982, p. 7.

⁸⁴ For more information on ICFTU and WCL support on KOR and Solidarity, see: Idesbald Goddeeris (ed.), *Solidarity with Solidarity: Western European Trade Unions and the Polish Crisis, 1980-1982*, Lanham, MD, Lexington Books, 2010, p. 101.

⁸⁵ Carl Gibson, interview by author, telephone interview, 19 May 2016.

⁸⁶ Blaise Robel to Francois Blanchard, 10 July 1981. HU OSA 300-5-190: 38; RFE/RL Research Institute; Analytics Research Department; Records of Vlad Socor; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

⁸⁷ International Labor Office, *Case No. 1066 (Romania): Complaint presented by the World Confederation of Labour against the Government of Romania*, in "Official Bulletin", vol. LXVII, B 1, 1984, p. 25, [http://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/P/09604/09604\(1984-67-series-B\).pdf](http://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/P/09604/09604(1984-67-series-B).pdf) [last accessed August 1st 2018].

⁸⁸ In 1948, the ILO adopted the organization's 87th Convention: Freedom of Association and the Protection of the Right to Organize. The aim of this Convention was to protect the right of workers and employers to create and maintain organizations independently of governments. For more details about the convention please see: International Labor Organization, *Convention C087 – Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, 1948 (No. 87)*, http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312232 [last accessed August 1st 2018].

⁸⁹ In 1949, the ILO adopted another important Convention which is No. 98: the right to organize and collective bargaining, as it expands on the right to organize. For more details about the convention please see: International Labor Organization, *Convention C098 – Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98)*, http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_Ilo_Code:C098 [last accessed August 1st 2018].

union rights since the 1950's, but the number of cases multiplied in the late 1970's, with USSR⁹⁰ and Poland being put on the spot on such issues.⁹¹

The CFA's 1066 case consisted of a series of inquiries between the Romanian government and the International Labor Office. While both the WCL and the Romanian government were asked by the committee to provide further information on the matter, the Report indicates that the WCL supplied numerous documents based mainly on French publications, in order to support its' allegations. In doing so, it provided further information on the persons involved and the repression faced.⁹² As the committee requested further clarifications on the reasons for arrest and detention of the named persons, the Romanian government firstly denied the existence of the organization, and later claimed that most of the named persons did not exist, as the authorities indicated that they were unable to locate them at the specified addresses.⁹³ As the complaint made further allegations and the government failed to provide sufficient information, CFA requested the Romanian government's approval for a direct contact mission, which was rejected.⁹⁴

In order to prove their respect for human rights, and particularly freedom of association, the Romanian government answered that the unity of workers dated from the late 19th century, and that the freedom of association was guaranteed by the Constitution, while The General Union of Romanian Trade Unions, an organization with 7.5 million members, stood as an example in this sense.⁹⁵ Thus, the Romanian government's reply is similar to the ones promoted by the Soviet Union on earlier accounts. In Jacobson's view, while the USSR had cooperated with the CFA's investigation to the extent of replying to questions and supplying documents, it also attempted to indirectly develop the proposition that there was actually greater freedom of association than in non-communist countries.⁹⁶

It is important to contextualize the Romanian government's initial attempt to portray SLOMR as a committee for the defense of human rights. Following this thought, any allegations about SLOMR as a human rights committee could have been dismissed on the basis of non-interference in internal affairs as per Principles VI and VII of the Helsinki Final Act.

Based on the information provided by both the WCL and the Romanian government, the CFA concluded in November 1984⁹⁷ that in spite of the attempts to dismiss the trade union character of SLOMR, its aims at promoting and defending workers' interest fell under the definition contained in art. 10 of Convention no. 87. The fact that SLOMR intended to struggle for human rights was not considered sufficient evidence to prove that the organization was not of a trade union character.⁹⁸ Moreover,

⁹⁰ G. Von Potobsky, *Protection of trade union rights: twenty years' work by the Committee on Freedom of Association*, in "International Labour Review", vol. 105, no. 1, January 1972.

⁹¹ David A. Wirth, *Trade Union Rights in the Workers' State: Poland and the ILO*, in "Denver Journal of International Law and Policy", vol. 13, 1984, p. 269-282.

⁹² International Labor Office, *Case No. 1066 (Romania): Complaint presented by the World Confederation of Labour against the Government of Romania*, p. 26.

⁹³ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 27.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

⁹⁶ Harold Karan Jacobson, *The USSR and ILO*, in "International Organization", vol. 14, no. 3, summer 1960, p. 418.

⁹⁷ International Labor Office, *Case No. 1066 (Romania): Complaint presented by the World Confederation of Labour against the Government of Romania*.

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 33.

concerning the ability of workers to freely set up organizations of their own choosing, the CFA stressed that there were certain provisions in the Romanian law that appeared to be restrictive. In this sense, while art. 164 of the Labor Code stated that trade unions operated by virtue of the rules of the General Trade Union Confederation, art. 26 of the Romanian Constitution and art. 165 of the Labor Code highlighted that the trade union had to mobilize the work force towards the accomplishment of Romanian's Communist Party program of building a new society,⁹⁹ which led CFA to indicate "a de facto monopoly" of UGSR.¹⁰⁰

The named report ends with the recommendations of the committee, which expressed the firm hope that the new trade union legislation, whose preparation had been mentioned by the Romanian government, would take into account the Committee's comments and that it would give "full effect" of the Convention no. 87.¹⁰¹ Although SLOMR was seen by the ILO as a trade union, the Romanian government considered it "merely a committee for the defense of human rights". At the same time, the ILO recommendations could only have succeeded with the cooperation of governments¹⁰² and whatever international legitimacy SLOMR might have had, it still had to follow the Romanian law.

International support and its limits

As Carl Gibson argues, in a totalitarian system, any opposition attempt depended on organizations from abroad with a specific interest in the issues. In his view, RFE facilitated the communication between individuals that did not know each other prior to RFE airings about SLOMR, giving the example of Nicolae Dascălu and himself.¹⁰³ Moreover, RFE played a crucial role in informing their listeners about the development of international agreements concerning human rights (Helsinki Final Act), but also about the formation of various movements across Eastern Europe demanding human rights recognition (Charter 77) or the institutionalization of the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR). On top of this, the precarious nature of consumption and the issue of poor social care always formed one of the cornerstones of the station's broadcast critique. Even though RFE was simply highlighting known "facts", they were all were meticulously selected by the guiding agents for their capacity to highlight a poignant discrepancy between discourse and practice in the affected countries.¹⁰⁴

Thus, as Ioana Macrea-Toma argues, ideas do not simply circulate from a center to a periphery that one expects to undergo a gradual change, but instead are constantly reframed by all actors involved through an interactive process of adaptation, but also of

⁹⁹ *Codul Muncii 1972* [1972 Romanian Labor Code], 165, <http://lege5.ro/Gratuit/gyytanzt/codul-muncii-din-1972> [last accessed August 1st 2018].

¹⁰⁰ International Labor Office, *Case No. 1066 (Romania): Complaint presented by the World Confederation of Labour against the Government of Romania*, p. 33.

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

¹⁰² International Labor Organization, *Special procedures for the examination in the International Labour Organization of complaints alleging violations of freedom of association*, art. 12, http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:62:697875547273406::NO:62:P62_LIST_ENTRIE_ID:2565060:NO#E5 [last accessed August 1st 2018].

¹⁰³ *În fața microfonului* (I) [In front of the microphone (part one)], in "Dialog", no. 72, Feb. 1987, p. 12.

¹⁰⁴ Ioana Macrea-Toma, *The intricacies of a (Cold) War of Ideas: Radio Free Europe from Above and from Below*, in Anna Bischof (ed.), *Voices of Freedom – Western Interference? 60 Years of Radio Free Europe*, 1, Munchen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015, p. 122.

autonomous self-production.¹⁰⁵ Just like in Goma's case,¹⁰⁶ RFE contributed to the national and international visibility of SLOMR's endeavors, by conceptualizing and mediating the attitudes towards its supporters, but in a more limited way. In contrast with Vladimir Socor's assessment that all known dissent figures and groups emphasized values that related to the individual, SLOMR was aiming at the community.¹⁰⁷

Nevertheless, while the disastrous economic situation was interpreted by Romanian RFE editors as the degeneration of the "moral fiber of Romanian society", culture was still seen as the milieu of salvation. Most of the times however, with Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca as prime examples, Marxism and communism were perceived as belonging to the same matrix.¹⁰⁸ Following Ioana Macrea Toma's inquiry, Monica Lovinescu's own inputs were elitist, culturally oriented and devoid of social insight, even though they were voiced from a microphone designed to appeal to mass awakening.¹⁰⁹ As a result, the rhetoric around SLOMR only gravitated around procedural criticism in relation to legal matters, with the most prominent example in this sense being Vlad Georgescu, who repeatedly pledged SLOMR's compliance with Romanian legislation,¹¹⁰ as well as international agreements.¹¹¹

The limits of RFE's support for SLOMR is further revealed in an interview between Dinu Zamfirescu and Mihnea Berindei, as they recall a discussion with Noel Bernard, head of the Romanian RFE department, on the topic of SLOMR. As an institution financed by the U.S. State Department, they had to comply with political trends. In this sense, it was concluded that if SLOMR only existed because of RFE, then they could not support it any longer. As a result, the adherents names were to be made public, but without their contact details.¹¹² In Carl Gibson's view, this had an important impact on the movement's development, as this decision prevented possible sympathizers from contacting other members and sustaining the collective effort.¹¹³ Nevertheless, this decision could also be interpreted as an attempt to limit authorities' repression against SLOMR's sympathizers, who could have previously use the details aired by RFE to locate the individuals and investigate them.

The most noticeable support for SLOMR from abroad came from France, where, according to Samuel Moyn, it was the metamorphosis of the political left that determined the advances in terms of human rights, which emerged from the internal competition within the left as a substitution of utopias.¹¹⁴ Immediately after the news about SLOMR

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 112.

¹⁰⁶ For an in depth analysis of RFE's role in popularizing Paul Goma's case see: Ioana Macrea-Toma, *Între politică și morală. Percepția drepturilor omului la Radio Europa Liberă prin cazul lui Paul Goma* [Between politics and morality. The perception of human rights at Radio Free Europe through the case of Paul Goma], in Otniel-Larean Vereș, Liliana Corobea (eds.), *Paul Goma și exilul etern* [Paul Goma and the eternal exile], Oradea, Editura Ratio et Revelatio, 2016.

¹⁰⁷ Ioana Macrea-Toma, *Radio Free Europe in Paris: the paradoxes of an ethereal opposition*, MA thesis, Central European University, 2008, p. 65.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 83.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 108.

¹¹⁰ "Domestic Bloc", no. 19, 19 March 1979, D.C. HU OSA 300-60-1: 419: Labor/TU: Free trade unions 1979-1987; RFE/RL Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Records Relating to Romanian Opposition and Protest Movement; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

¹¹¹ "Domestic bloc" (unspecified number), 12 April 1979, ANIC, fund Anneli Ute Gabanyi, file no. 156, f. 32-35.

¹¹² *În fața microfonului* (I), p. 12.

¹¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁴ Samuel Moyn, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

was broadcasted by RFE, French trade unions, such as the French Democratic Confederation of Labor, General Labor Confederation, National Education Federation expressed their support for SLOMR by addressing multiple letters to Nicolae Ceaușescu, and the General Union of Romanian Trade Unions.¹¹⁵

These gestures added up to the efforts of the French Committee for the Defense of Human Rights in Romania for SLOMR's exposure in the Western media. Established in 1977 in support of *Goma movement*, the committee was initially formed of 10 members, Romanian and French individuals specialized in Romanian issues, which had previously visited Romania for sociological or historical studies. The committee later transformed into The League for the Defense of Human Rights in Romania [in Romanian: *Liga pentru apărarea drepturilor omului în România*] accounting around 70 members by 1986¹¹⁶ and affiliated to the Fédération Internationale des Droits de l'Homme. In this respect, they were creating press releases for Agencie France Presse (AFP) and sought to establish contacts with journalists from the main daily newspapers in France. As they were creating files based on RFE materials, letters from Romania and discussions with individuals, the members of the organization were at pains to acquire their own credibility. The first articles about human rights cases were published in leftist journals "Liberation", "Le Rouge", "L'information ouvriere" and later, in more centrist paper "Le Monde".¹¹⁷

The French Committee for the Defense of Human Rights in Romania held various press conferences in Paris on the issue and organized demonstrations in support of SLOMR's cause and condemned the repression faced by its adherents. Aside from the translation of incoming texts from Romania, they tried to establish telephone contacts with SLOMR sympathizers, and sent people to visit Vasile Paraschiv as well as the adherents of the local SLOMR committee from Timișoara.¹¹⁸ Attention was paid to an important share of the mass-media represented by French trade unions' press. Many of the materials concerning SLOMR were published in papers affiliated with the socialist CFDT and "Force Ouvriere", as well as some factions from within *Confederation Generale de Travail*, a trade union with an anarcho-sindicalist tradition, who actively demonstrated in support of Vasile Paraschiv and later SLOMR.¹¹⁹

In a different account, the British-Romanian Association contacted L. Murray (the general secretary of British Trade Union Congress) and drew the attention to the SLOMR's case depicted in the Amnesty International report and appealed TUC representatives to request the Romanian authorities to release the imprisoned the people who sought to create an independent trade union, and in the spirit of Helsinki, to show leniency towards other dissenters.¹²⁰ In the framework of the bilateral relations previously established between Romanian and British trade union national center, TUC enquired on the matter, but no official reply was provided by UGSR representatives.¹²¹

¹¹⁵ "Domestic bloc" (unspecified number), (undated), ANIC, fund Anneli Ute Gabanyi, file no. 156, f. 46-64.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Mihnea Berindei, Radu Chiriac, Carl Gibson and Dinu Zamfirescu, transcription by Ion Solacolu, in *În fața microfonului* (I), p. 11.

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem.*

¹¹⁹ Interview with Mihnea Berindei, Radu Chiriac, Carl Gibson and Dinu Zamfirescu, transcription by Ion Solacolu, in *În fața microfonului* (III) [In front of the microphone (part three)], in "Dialog", no. 74, Apr. 1987, p. 20.

¹²⁰ British-Romanian Association to L. Murray, July 3, 1980, Trades Union Congress collection, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick (MSS.292D/949.8/3).

¹²¹ L. Murray to Emil Bobu, April 23, 1979. Trades Union Congress collection, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick (MSS.292D/949.8/3).

SLOMR's cause was also popularized by the League for Industrial Democracy in their comparison study of workers' rights between East and West in 1980. The declared purpose of the study was to elevate the issue of worker rights to a more prominent place in the broad human rights debate.¹²² Concomitantly, Amnesty International popularized SLOMR's cause in their reports¹²³ and International briefings¹²⁴ by integrating their case in the wider discussion of Romania's human rights violations. Later, in 1983, the French journal, "L'Alternative", devoted a special issue to the repression in Romania, illustrating not only a chronology of SLOMR's existence, but also a series of demonstrations that took place in Paris in support of the imprisoned members or adherents of the trade union.¹²⁵

Epilogue

In response to the criticism concerning human rights violations and religious rights in Romania, the *Securitate* orchestrated in October 1980 the publishing of a report about SLOMR.¹²⁶ Originally published in English, the book was translated into French shortly after and excerpts were disseminated through the mass media in Western Europe.¹²⁷ With a special focus on the priest Calciu-Dumitreasa, the report was signed by Constantin Michael-Titus and it represents an inquiry into the personal background of SLOMR's initiators, aiming at discrediting them, by allegedly highlighting the priests' former connection with the Iron Guard, the physician's delusions and the economist's religious fanaticism.

The author of the report explained his alleged path to meeting the initiators by obtaining permission to see the persons in question and by receiving access to files from the Office of the General Prosecutor.¹²⁸ According to Ionel Cană's memoirs, Michael-Titus visited him and Brașoveanu and posed as a foreign journalist interested in promoting their cause.¹²⁹ But the final report, rather than reflecting their position, shared a similar tone with the authorities discourse: The lists of names were considered fabricated,¹³⁰ Radio Free Europe was blamed for falling into subversion and into a type of militancy which was far from being political, but more akin to espionage, infiltration and terrorism.¹³¹ In sum, the actions of SLOMR's initiators were portrayed as foreign infiltrations into a country that was now paying the price for its' independent foreign policy.¹³²

In the following years, RFE would again give voice to SLOMR's initiators on several occasions. In 1981 it was the turn of Nicolae Dascălu to inform the listeners about his emigration to the USA and about the efforts of submitting an official complaint against the Romanian government.¹³³ Later in 1987, Ionel Cană left Romania

¹²² League for Industrial Democracy, *Workers' rights, East and West: A comparative study of trade union and workers' rights in Western Democracies and Eastern Europe*, New Brunswick, London, Transaction Publishers, 1980.

¹²³ *Amnesty International Report 1980*, Amnesty International Publications, London, 1980, p. 290-295.

¹²⁴ *Amnesty International Briefing: Romania*, January 1, 1980, p. 6-7, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur39/005/1980/en/> [last accessed August 1st 2018].

¹²⁵ *Roumanie, crise et repression*, in „L'Alternative: pour les droits et les libertés démocratiques en Europe de l'Est”, Maspéro, Paris, janvier 1983, p. 18-32.

¹²⁶ ACNSAS, fund Documentar, file no. 8852, vol. 6, f. 403-422.

¹²⁷ *Megafonul Securității* [The megaphone of Romanian secret police], in “Dialog”, no. 61, Mar. 1986, p. 7.

¹²⁸ Constantin Michael-Titus, *Romania under pressure*, vol. II, London, Panopticum Press, 1981, p. 5.

¹²⁹ Ionel Cană, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

¹³⁰ Constantin Michael-Titus, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

¹³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

¹³² *Ibidem*, p. 17.

¹³³ ACNSAS, fund Informativ, file no. I 258979, vol. 3, f. 41-42.

and gave several interviews for the New York branch of RFE¹³⁴ and the BBC¹³⁵ about his efforts to organize an independent trade union in 1979.¹³⁶ Moreover, in 1988 RFE announced that Ionel Cană along with 6 other members of SLOMR established an organization in the USA with the aim of promoting and supporting Romanian workers according to the principles and the statutes of the free international labor organizations.¹³⁷ Once again, Romanians from abroad were all invited to join the organization and support the cause of Romanian workers.¹³⁸ Despite its idealistic aim, my research did not identify any noticeable activities of the organization.

Nevertheless, the biggest uncertainty regarding SLOMR is the number of its followers, as my analysis shares similar concerns already expressed by the Presidential Commission for the Study of the Romanian Communist Dictatorship.¹³⁹ In this respect, while Ionel Cană overbids the membership to around 2400 members,¹⁴⁰ Gh. Calciu Dumitreasa's accounts¹⁴¹ indicate that there were around 2000 people who joined the trade union. At the same time, the Secret Police files only mention a number of adherents ranging from 157 to 200 people.¹⁴² However, the files from the secret police archive consist of traces that mark the attempts to challenge the reality presented by the regime's propaganda. As categories used by the state institutions are self-referential, it is important to note that the investigations of *Securitate* did not always associate people's discontent with the SLOMR movement. A prime example is the case of Carl Gibson, whose secret police file does not give any indication on his efforts to organize a local SLOMR committee, being simply investigated as an individual interested in leaving the country.¹⁴³

Further uncertainties are raised by the case of the named 15 workers from SLOMR's founding document. Although Ionel Cană claims to have met them on several accounts in 1978,¹⁴⁴ their names did not find any correlation with real persons during the Secret Police investigations.¹⁴⁵ Following secret police interceptions of Cană and Calciu's discussion from early 1979, these names could have been fictitious ones, for the purpose of building a cohesive image of their endeavor that could stir people's interest.¹⁴⁶ Further-

¹³⁴ Ionel Cană, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

¹³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 95.

¹³⁶ ACNSAS, fund Informativ, file no. I 258979, vol. 4, f. 220-232.

¹³⁷ "Articles of incorporation of The Free Trade Union of the Romanian Workers (SLOMR)", 1 July 1988, Washington D.C. HU OSA 300-5-190: 38; RFE/RL Research Institute; Analytics Research Department; Records of Vlad Socor; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

¹³⁸ "Apelul SLOMR către poporul român din România și exil". HU OSA 300-5-190: 38; RFE/RL Research Institute; Analytics Research Department; Records of Vlad Socor; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

¹³⁹ The Commission estimates that the total number of SLOMR's members could range anywhere between 200 and 2,000. For more, please see: Vladimir Tismăneanu, Dorin Dobrinu, Cristian Vasile (eds.), *Comisia prezidențială pentru analiza dictaturii comuniste din România. Raport Final* [The Presidential Commission for the Study of the Romanian Communist dictatorship: Final Report], București, Humanitas, 2007, p. 704.

¹⁴⁰ Ionel Cană, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

¹⁴¹ "Interview: Rev. G. Calciu-Dumitreasa – Dr. Vlad Georgescu" ["Domestic Bloc", no. 685], 28 August 1985. HU OSA 300-60-1: 130/Culture-Dissidents: Intellectuals, writers 1975- 1987; RFE/RL Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Subject Files; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

¹⁴² ACNSAS, fund Documentar, file no. 14945, vol. 7, f. 335-337.

¹⁴³ *Idem*, fund Informativ, file no. I 257993, vol. 1, f. 1-39.

¹⁴⁴ Ionel Cană, *op. cit.*, p. 15, 135.

¹⁴⁵ ACNSAS, fund Penal, file no. 766, vol. 2, f. 2-120.

¹⁴⁶ *Idem*, fund Informativ, file no. I 258979, vol. 1, f. 46-48.

more, The Unofficial Trade Union of Workers (an organization with a claimed number of 1487 members that declared its affiliation with SLOMR) did not have any membership lists and this research did not identify any archival material that could support the supposition. Nevertheless, the person claiming to represent it, Virgil Chender, prior to his interest in SLOMR, was intercepted by the *Securitate* in 1976, when he went on a hunger strike in a protest gesture against the poor management and wastefulness at his workplace,¹⁴⁷ but also in 1977, when he expressed his interest in Paul Goma's action.¹⁴⁸

Conclusions

We have seen thus, that the international dimension of SLOMR's initiators and supporters is marked by a history of continuities and discontinuities. While RFE gave a voice to SLOMR's promoters, thus providing an important channel of communication between the initiators and the population, it concomitantly conceptualized and mediated their attitudes. Although the human rights idiom was invoked to support their struggle concerning labor relations, there was no institutional support that could be offered from abroad in these terms, as the Principle VII of the Helsinki Final Act was not a matter of inter-state relations and its provisions were not legally-binding, but merely moral and political commitments.

In terms of labor disputes, Carl Gibson's efforts in obtaining an official complaint against the Romanian government at the International Labor Organization represent a breakthrough in the history of Romanian workers' actions against the authorities under state-socialism. While ILO's case no. 1066 stands as the very first complaint submitted against the Romanian government on matters of freedom of association, the inquiries and the support coming from the French and British trade unions reveal the limitations of international trade-unionism and the national character of trade union activity.

Concomitantly, the ILO's pursuit for SLOMR's legitimacy proves once more the Romanian authorities' unwillingness to engage in a real dialogue with the workers, as they attempted to negate their existence, discredit them and ultimately concealed the nature of SLOMR's endeavors.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND INDEPENDENT TRADE UNIONISM IN LATE 1970'S ROMANIA: THE CASE OF SLOMR (Summary)

Keywords: human rights, labor relations, Romania, SLOMR, cold war, trade unions.

In the context of the Cold War, Helsinki Accords brought new resources for disenfranchised Eastern European citizens in formulating their endeavors. Although a failed project, the analysis of SLOMR case is a necessary element in understanding the reasons behind the scarcity of Romanian workers actions under the Communist regime. Drawing from a diversified array of archival documents, reports and memoirs of those involved in the initiative, the current paper analyzes how human rights discourses sought to be appropriated and instrumentalized in matters concerning labor relations in state-socialist Romania. By incorporating the transnational connections and the international actors of the period, this paper brings a new perspective on the way in which Romanian workers addressed their grievances, while simultaneously highlighting the opportunities and the limitations of the human rights discourses in the 1970's.

¹⁴⁷ *Idem*, fund Documentar, file no. 14945, vol. 11, f. 113.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, f. 1-4.