

Cosmin BUDEANĂ, Dalia BÁTHORY
(editors)

Histories (Un)Spoken.
Survival and Social-Professional Integration Strategies in
Communist Political Prisoners' families in Central and
Eastern Europe in the '50s and '60s

LIT Verlag
2017

A Priest's Destiny in Transylvania during the Communist Regime. János Dobri (1914-1990)

JÁNOSI Csongor

Overviews, monographs, specialized historical papers, archival source publications and studies on the history of the Romanian Reformed church in the period between 1945 and 1989 attest the submission of the church to the central power. The adaptation on the part of the Cluj and Oradea church districts to the roles defined by the one-party state led to the transformation of traditional church roles, which also influenced the governmental principles: the synodal-presbyterial principle was replaced by the authoritarian episcopal governing method that also outlived the regime change.¹

Apart from ideological differences, the study of the relationship between the Reformed church and the single-party state existing at the time shows that the ethnical aspect was one of the decisive factors which led to the church being included in the category of high-risk institutions threatening the state order. Although by the early 1960s the control of the church leadership had been taken over by state security services, thus ensuring the possibility to exert direct influence on the church policy of the time (which was then put to good political use both in domestic and foreign affairs), on the level of party politics or state security this did not bring about any favourable changes in the judgment of either the Hungarian Reformed church members or the Hungarian minority in Romania. The Hungarian ethnicity and the “enemy” image successfully built upon it usually proved to be enough for a certain person to be suspected of being involved in nationalist-irredentist activities and for “self-evident” counter-measures on the part of state security.²

¹ See István Tökés, *A romániai magyar református egyház élete 1945-1989 [Life of the Hungarian Reformed Church in Romania between 1945-1989]* (Budapest: Magyarságkutató Intézet, 1990; Kolozsvár: 2014); János Molnár, *A Nagyvárad (Királyhágómelléki) Református Egyházkerület története: 1944-1989 [The History of the Oradea (Near Piatra Craiului) Reformed Church District: 1944-1989]* (Nagyvárad: Királyhágómelléki Református Egyházkerület nyomdája, 2001); János Molnár, *Szigorúan ellenőrzött evangélium, I-IV [Strictly censored Gospel, I-IV]* (Nagyvárad - Kolozsvár: Partium - Kriterion, 2009-2014); Dezső Buzogány, Csongor Jánosi, *A református egyház Romániában a kommunista rendszer első felében: Tanulmányok és dokumentumok [The Romanian Reformed Church During the First Half of the Communist Regime: Studies and Documents]* (Budapest: L'Harmattan Kiadó, 2011); Dezső Buzogány, “56-os események Erdélyben és az Erdélyi Református Egyház” [“The Events of '56 in Transylvania and the Transylvanian Reformed Church”], *Református Szemle*, 5 (2006), 574-592; Dezső Buzogány, “A román Állambiztonsági Szolgálat jövőképe, avagy ember tervez, Isten végez” [“The Future Concept of the Romanian State Security System, or Man Proposes, God Disposes.”] *Református Szemle*, 4 (2012), 433-439; Dezső Buzogány, „A református egyház vendégeinek és külföldi teológiai hallgatóinak megfigyelése Romániában, a 20. század második felében. 1. Rész” [“The Observance of Reformed Church Guests and Foreign Theology Students in Romania in the Second Half of the 20th Century, Part 1,”] *Református Szemle*, 2 (2013), 208-218; Part 2, *Református Szemle*, (3)2013, 308-319.

² This can be concluded from the state security archival records of Reformed, Unitarian and Catholic priests, as well as beyond the context of the church, from files of Hungarian writers or aristocrats from Transylvania. The momentary improvement in the international relations between Hungary and Romania did not prove to be of much help in changing the Romanian perception of the Hungarian minority of Transylvania in the studied period. The 1960-1963 “heyday” of relations between the Hungarian and Romanian home secretaries and state security services – a case-supported cooperation primarily in the field of counter-espionage – coincided with the Romanian retribution that succeeded the revolution of 1956 as well as with certain assimilative measures, which, on the one hand, led to the decrease in the number

The study into the conduct of the Reformed church elite revealed that there are shockingly few cases when an individual stood up for his/her beliefs, subordinating everyday contacts with the government to moral principles, and this was not compromised by the existence of a large family, respectively, by the vulnerabilities resulting from it. Beyond the self-justifying answers provided in the name of “survival”, we mainly consider it as constructive to present biographies that were undeservingly neglected in the past decade and which could convey a positive message even for today’s generation of priests.

The life of János Dobri is a classic example of the battered existence as a Hungarian minority in 20th century Transylvania. His state security archival material comprising more than 2000 pages – whose contents are debateable³ – offers insight primarily into the mechanism of the state security system (especially in the case of Cluj), and, from a broader perspective, it presents the history of the Transylvanian Reformed church district and, indirectly, the everyday hardships faced by the Hungarian minority.

Biographical Data. Completed Studies. Involvement with the Scout Movement

János Dobri was born on November 23, 1914 in Brasov as the youngest of seven children. His father was a train conductor and his mother was a housewife.⁴ He completed his early studies in the Reformed primary school of Braşov. In 1925 he was enrolled in the Catholic Secondary School of Braşov. In 1934 he was admitted as a student in Cluj, reading Reformed Theology. In 1939 he was a candidate for a scholarship abroad; however, the outbreak of the Second World War prevented him from leaving the country and he was recruited by the army.⁵ After that, between 1940 and 1941, he served as an assistant priest in Zalău.⁶ He represented the Reformed church in the committee for the support of the Vornicenii Mari (Suceava County) refugees.⁷

His involvement with the scout movement marked a decisive part of his life. The first Transylvanian scout teams prior to World War I came into being at the initiative of the Reformed

of Hungarian schools, on the other hand, due to the re-structuring of the Hungarian Autonomous Region, resulted in unfavorable changes in ethnical proportions, territorial fragmentation and a much weaker representation.

³ Katherine Verdery, *Secrets and Truths: Ethnography in the Archive of Romania's Secret Police* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014), 72-73.

⁴ Arhiva Consiliului Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității (The Archive of the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archive - ANCSSA), Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 3, 1 (backside too).

⁵ ANCSSA), Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 4, 15. See the biography of János Dobri dated May 12th, 1949.

⁶ ANCSSA), Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 4, 142.

⁷ In 1941 the inhabitants of the village that burned down in 1939 – with the exception of a few mixed families – were moved into the empty houses of the dobrovoljac in the reattached Bačka/Bácska (former Yugoslavia). In the summer of 1944 they were forced to flee and settled down in Transdanubia, Hungary. See Kálmán Németh, *Százezer szív sikolt. Hazatért és hazavágyó magyarok verőfényes Golgotája [The Cry of Hundred Thousand Hearts. The Sunny Golgota of Returned and Homesick Hungarians]* (Bácsjózseffalva: Zenélő kút, 1943); ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 3, 15.

church.⁸ Following the Change of Empires, the Transylvanian scout troops were reorganized relatively late, beginning with the school year of 1922/1923. In the period between 1924 and 1929, scouting activities took place in the framework of the Prince Charles Foundation (Fundăția Principelui Carol). Scouting in Transylvania was not a homogeneous/unitary movement. The Reformed and Catholic scout teams were functioning separately. The scout movements of both denominations had their centre in Cluj, their youth magazines featured also a scouts' column. The Reformed scouts pursued their activities in parallel with the IKE (Transylvanian YMCA), and had their headquarters at the Faculty of Reformed Theology, whereas the Catholic scouts were guided by Lajos Puskás, the team leader of the Piarist High School.⁹

Dobri got acquainted with the movement during his school years. From 1930, he was a member of the Romanian Scout Association up to its dissolution in 1938. In 1936, a Romanian national Jamboree was organized in Poiana Braşov where scout troops from the neighbouring countries were also invited. This is where Dobri came into contact with the Hungarian scout movement. In 1937 he took part in the camp organized by the Training Staff of Honvéd (Hungarian Military) Scout Troop Leaders (Honvédcserkész Őrsvezetők Kiképző Kara, hereinafter HÖKK) where he gained insight into the organization and goals of the movement. Upon returning home he became engaged in the education of youth, using Sunday school preparatory sessions as a pretext. He informed the young members of his scout group about the problems faced by the Hungarian society (single-child family, land reform, negative German influence), drew their attention to folk writers (Imre Kovács, Dezső Szabó, Gyula Illyés), encouraging his scouts to read the works of these authors.

On January 24th, 1937, the scout movement was abolished and replaced by the youth organization known as Straja Țării (The Sentinel of the Motherland). Nevertheless, the scout sessions continued in secret. Dobri organized trips, initiated the creation of a folk dance group and folk song courses began to be organized. In 1939, the local government banned Hungarian students from sports facilities. Dobri purchased an empty lot in Cluj where he also supervised the construction of a sports field. After the Second Vienna Award, from October 1940 until March 1944, he was a member of the Hungarian Scout Association, and as the second-in-command of the 9th Transylvanian Scout District¹⁰, he led a section of group leaders known as The Circle of Patrol Leaders from Hárshegy

⁸ József Z. Sebess, a teacher of the Reformed High School in Odorheiu-Secuiesc was the first to organize a scout team in 1911. Afterwards, further troops were formed within the Reformed High School of Cluj, in the main secondary-school of Odorheiu-Secuiesc, in the Reformed High School of Țirgu-Mureş, and later in the Roman-Catholic Secondary School of Alba Iulia. See <http://konyvtar.szmcs.sk/kiadvanyaink/egyeb-magyar-kiadvanyok/2011/cserkesztortenelem-iii-az-erdelyi-cserkeszet-tortenete> (accessed on 14.11.2016).

⁹ <http://konyvtar.szmcs.sk/kiadvanyaink/egyeb-magyar-kiadvanyok/2011/cserkesztortenelem-iii-az-erdelyi-cserkeszet-tortenete> (accessed on 14.11.2016).

¹⁰ In a questioning protocol dated August 11, 1951 Dobri described the structure of the Transylvanian scout district. The scout district was divided into scout sectors. The Transylvanian centuria consisted of the squadrons of Ciuc, Trei Scaune, Mureş, Odorhei, Bistriţa, Dej, Zalău, Oradea, Satu Mare and Cluj. The scout squadron was divided into scout groups,

(Hárshegyi Őrsvezetők Köre). In 1941, he attended a 5-week retraining course at the 9th post hospital in Cluj. On January 1st, 1942 he was appointed military chaplain.¹¹ In the period between 1941 and 1943 he was the training consultant of Levente group leaders aged 14-16, but he was also entrusted with the training of young theology student leaders in Cluj. It was under his supervision that a scout park was established on Lombi Hill in Cluj, funded by civil organizations and associations based in Cluj. This park was used for purposes of scout leader training and camping. In the summer of 1943, when the scout movement began to display signs of adherence to the Nazi ideology, he ceased to be active in scouting, with some help from reformed bishop János Vásárhelyi.¹²

The Years of Russian Captivity (1944-1948)

In February 1944, he was recruited into the army. Beginning with April, as the head Protestant priest of the divisional brigade of the Royal Hungarian 27th Szekler Light Division of Tîrgu-Mureş, he held the rank of first lieutenant serving first on the Galician, and then on the Northern Transylvanian front. In recognition of his bravery, displayed in the battles of the Kosow area, he was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Hungarian Order of Merit, with swords and war ribbon.¹³ On April 29, 1944, it was he who buried Károly Tözsér, the platoon commander of infantry battalion no. 57/III in the heroes' cemetery of Tudiov, then on July 12 he also buried Miklós András, the reserve infantry ensign of the bicycle squadron within the 27th explorer battalion in the heroes' cemetery of Horod.¹⁴ On October 17th, 1944, in Baia Mare, Dobri was taken prisoner by the Soviets along with Captain Gábor Bükkhely and his adjutant, valiant Gábor Csík, reserve first lieutenant in the artillery.¹⁵

In Transylvania, unlike in the case of war prisoners, deportation to Soviet captivity was a more common phenomenon among civilians. This was mainly aimed at maintaining a full headcount, took on the appearance of ethnic cleansing and worked in compliance with the principle of collective culpability. In accordance, the deportation of Hungarian civilians, which began in September 1944, affected about 20.000 people, with a death rate of approx. 30%. The subject-matter, especially the

troops and patrols. The leaders of the centuria maintained contact with the Levente organizations of the counties and also took part in their training. ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 3, 119-124.

¹¹ Árpád-Róbert Berekméri, *Fegyver alatt: A marosvásárhelyi magyar királyi 27. székely honvéd könnyű hadosztály tisztikara 1940-1945* [*Under the Weaponry. The Officer Corps of the Royal Hungarian 27th Szekler Light Division of Tîrgu-Mureş 1940-1945*] (Marosvásárhely: Mentor Kiadó, 2008), 93.

¹² ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 3, 4. Not even the later years of imprisonment could suppress his feeling of dedication to scouting. In 1990, after the change of regime, he was able to witness the first sprouts of the revived scout movement.

¹³ Árpád-Róbert Berekméri, *“Lesz még kikelet!” - A marosvásárhelyi magyar királyi 27. székely honvéd könnyű hadosztály a második világháborúban (1940-1945)* [*“Spring is Yet to Arrive!” - The Royal Hungarian 27th Szekler Light Division of Tîrgu-Mureş during the Second World War (1940-1945)*] (Marosvásárhely - Kolozsvár, Lector Kiadó - Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2015), 132, 289; Árpád-Róbert Berekméri, *Fegyver alatt*, 93.

¹⁴ Árpád-Róbert Berekméri, *Fegyver alatt*, 44, 264.

¹⁵ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 3, 4; Berekméri, *“Lesz még kikelet!”*, 222; Árpád-Róbert Berekméri, *Fegyver alatt*, 284.

deportation of the Cluj- and Turda-based civilians was discussed in more detail by Kristóf János Murádin. His nominal list of 730 persons made it possible to identify 3 other Reformed priests who were held captive and died in prison. Among them we mention the names of József Bartalis (†Magnitogorsk) and János Bodroghi (†Lemberg/Lviv), professors at the Reformed High School of Cluj, as well as assistant priest József Petri (†).¹⁶

In 1945, Dobri was recruited by the newly established anti-fascist regiment Lajos Kossuth; however, since the war had ended, the unit sent to the front was transformed into a labor squadron. For almost two years Dobri worked in the tram garage of Ivanovo¹⁷, and later in the workshop of the local drama theatre. In September, 1946 he was transferred to the officer camp near Riga. Here he attended Russian language courses and took an active part in the cultural programs.¹⁸ He returned home on June 23rd, 1948.¹⁹

His Relationship with Theology (1949-1957)

Following his release from Russian detention until April 1949 he served as an assistant priest in the Cluj–Oraşul de Jos parish.²⁰ He became a registered member of the Hungarian People's Union (Uniunea Populară Maghiară), and also became a member of the Romanian Association for Strengthening Relations with the Soviet Union (ARLUS) as well as of the Russian-Romanian translators' group. In September-November of 1948, he performed translations from Russian for the Cluj left-wing daily newspaper called *Világosság*.²¹ As of May 1st, 1949 he was invited to teach at the department of "Russian Language and History of the Eastern Church" at the Protestant Theological Institute of Cluj.²² Until May 15, 1955, he worked as a substitute teacher, then, between May 16, 1955 and March 30, 1957 he functioned as a visiting regular lecturer. He obtained his PhD

¹⁶ Several teachers of the Reformed School in Cluj were taken to prison: Gyula Fazekas (†), Miklós Fejér (Caucasus), Zoltán Finta (†), Zoltán Kovács, Ernő Maklári and János Máthé (†Magnitogorsk). Dezső László, private docent of theology, priest of the Cluj Central parish and András Nagy, professor of Old Testament at the Theology of Cluj were released from the Cluj Court prison upon "consideration of their occupations". On this subject see Kristóf János Murádin, "Erdélyi magyarok a Szovjetunió kényszermunkatáborában" ["Transylvanian Hungarians in the Soviet Forced Labor Camps,"] *CERTAMEN III. Előadások a Magyar Tudomány Napján az Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület I. Szakosztályában [Lectures on the Day of Hungarian Science in the 1st Section of the Transylvanian Museum Society]*, Emese Egyed, László Pakó eds. (Kolozsvár: EME, 2015), 413-426.; Kristóf János Murádin, "Valóság és propaganda. Erdélyi magyar civilek a Szovjetunió hadifogoly- és munkatáborában (1944-1949)" ["Reality and Propaganda. Transylvanian Hungarian Civilians in the Soviet War Prisoner- and Labor Camps (1944-1949)"] (the volume of the VERITAS Institute of Historical Research, awaiting publication).

¹⁷ Ivanovo (Russia), the centre of the Ivanovo Region, 319 km north of Moscow.

¹⁸ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 3, 15 (backside too).

¹⁹ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 2, 25.

²⁰ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 3, 142.

²¹ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 3, 15 (backside).

²² The Integrated Protestant Theological Institute for University Level Studies of Cluj, which came into being in 1948, ensured the training of priests in the four historical Protestant churches. The Reformed Department functioned in the building of the former Faculty of Reformed Theology as the latter's legal successor. See Dezső Buzogány, Csongor Jánosi, *A református egyház Romániában...*, 61-63.

on December 29, 1949. His literary activities include the translation into Hungarian of Russian literary works, shorter studies and papers.²³

He was forced to interrupt his activity as a teacher on several occasions due to short periods of arrest. Already from November, 1948 the Securitate was monitoring former scout leaders because of their previous activity within the scout movement.²⁴ The Cluj Regional Directorate of the Ministry of Interior began to conduct serious investigations into the so-called HÖKK-case in March, 1951. In April they arrested Endre Bustya. In parallel, in the Mureş region, Zoltán Szabó and Zoltán Sándor Nagy were detained.²⁵ Dobri was arrested on July 3, 1951. Since the Tîrgu-Mureş authorities played a major role in the investigation of the case, the priest was transferred in the custody of the Mureş region authorities as ordered from Bucharest.²⁶ On December 7, 1951 the Cluj Military Court passed a sentence in the case of the team that counted 4 members. The third party defendant, János Dobri was sentenced to 6 months of correctional prison as well as a fine in the amount of 2000 lei on charges of public instigation (intention to reorganize the scout movement).²⁷ He was released from the Cluj Court prison on December 29th, 1951.²⁸

On April 1, 1952 Dobri was restored to his position held at the Protestant Theological Institute of Cluj. However, on April 8, 1952 the HÖKK-case was reopened as members of the 8th Directorate of Criminal Investigations, namely, major Nicolae Dumitrescu²⁹ and first lieutenant Nicolae Constantin³⁰ considered that the sentence passed in this case was not in conformity with the severity of the crime, and this opinion was expressed in a written report sent to the Chief Prosecutor's Office RPR.³¹ However, the reasons behind the new investigations are not so unambiguous. In April, 1951 András Székely was also arrested. Upon providing a witness statement he was removed from this

²³ According to his autobiography dating from May 12, 1949 Dobri performed translations for the Bolyai University, for ex. Esipov - Gončarov's work entitled *Pedagogy*, but he also rendered translation services for the National Publishing House (Editura de Stat). ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 3, 11, 15 (backside).

²⁴ ANCSSA, Penal Fund (hereinafter fond P), file no. 217, vol. 7, 1-5.

²⁵ Ibid. fond I, file no. 211500, vol. 2, 92-97.

²⁶ Ibid. fond P, file no. 217, vol. 7, 29.

²⁷ Ibid. 44, 241-245.; fond I, file no. 211500, vol. 3, 130.

²⁸ The Archive of The National Administration of Penitentiaries - ANAP, Penal Registration Forms - PRF, data sheets of János Dobri.

²⁹ Nicolae Dumitrescu (1911-1985), served at the 8th Directorate of Criminal Investigations first between 1952-1963, then later between 1967 and 1969. On August 31, 1969 he was transferred to the reserves holding the rank of colonel. See http://www.cnsas.ro/documente/cadrede_securitatii/DUMITRESCU%20NICOLAE.pdf (accessed on 15.11.2016).

³⁰ Nicolae Constantin (1908-1989), served at the 8th Directorate of Criminal Investigations between 1952-1956. He joined the reserve forces as a captain on February 29, 1956. See http://www.cnsas.ro/documente/cadrede_securitatii/CONSTANTIN%20NICOLAE.pdf (accessed on 15.11.2016).

³¹ ANCSSA, Penal Fund, file no. 217, vol. 7, 234-238.

case and used in the cases of Edgár Balogh³², Lajos Csögör³³, János Demeter³⁴ and Lajos Jordáky, who were imprisoned in Bucharest without being tried. This is indicated by the hearing protocols of the above-named persons drawn-up in Bucharest between September, 1952 - March 1953, as well as the fact that in March of 1953, the newly arrested Endre Bustya and Zoltán Szabó were also interrogated. Moreover, in the beginning of 1954 they were forced to give witness evidence.³⁵

On January 30, 1953 Dobri was arrested again. By virtue of the court sentence passed on October 23, 1953 Military Court of Oraşul Stalin (Braşov) sentenced him to 1 year and 2 months of correctional prison and the payment of legal expenses in the amount of 100 lei on charges of public instigation. However, since a period of 11 months and 29 days – the duration of sentence no. 982/1951 plus the time spent in pre-trial detention – was subtracted from his sentence, his order for release was issued relatively early, on January 27, 1954. He served time as a prisoner in the Gherla and Jilava jails, the Cluj courthouse prison, but he was also used as labour force in Oneşti and Borzeşti.³⁶

Although an appeal was not filed before February 11, 1954³⁷, Dobri could resume his activity as a professor already as of February 1. Following his third arrest on March 21, 1957, his photos were removed, on higher order, from 3 boards of merit featuring theology graduates between 1950 and 1953. His photos were replaced by patterns.³⁸ In 2009, upon the request of the congregation of Cluj - Dâmbul Rotund, the 3 photos were restored to their original place.³⁹

³² Edgár Balogh (1906-1996), initially based in Slovakia, later moved to Romania, was a Hungarian publicist, editor-in-chief, university professor and rector. His first, “615-day” arrest occurred in the fall of 1949. On August 30, 1952 he got arrested again; on April 26, 1954 the Bucharest Military Tribunal sentenced him to 7 years of forced labor on charges of capital treason. He served his sentence in the prisons of Piteşti, Jilava, the Oradea and Cluj court prisons as well as in the Văcăreşti jail. He was released from his “1000-day” confinement on May 27, 1955. ANAP, PRF Fund, Edgár Balogh’s data sheets.

³³ Lajos Csögör (1904-2003), dentist, rector, medical writer. He was arrested on November 3, 1949. By virtue of Sentence no. 502/1954 he was sentenced to 6 years of forced labor on charges of treason. He was a prisoner in Jilava, Ocnele Mari, the Oradea Court prison, Piteşti, Văcăreşti. He was released on May 27, 1955. ANAP, PRF Fund, Lajos Csögör’s data sheets.

³⁴ János Demeter (1908-1988), jurist, legal author, politician, university professor. He was arrested on August 30, 1952. By virtue of Sentence no. 502/1954 he was sentenced to 5 years of forced labor on charges of treason. He served his time in the Oradea Court prison, Jilava, Piteşti, Văcăreşti. He was released on May 27, 1955. ANAP, PRF Fund, János Demeter’s data sheets.

³⁵ Since according to the indictment from October 31, during the Paris conference, the detainees collected materials in Cluj with the purpose to achieve the reattachment of Northern Transylvania to Hungary, in November 1953 the Bucharest authorities transferred the case to the Oradea Military Tribunal, the charges being treason and espionage. The bill of indictment dated December 15, 1953 which had already been drawn-up by the Oradea prosecutor’s office was introduced at the hearing of the Oradea Military Tribunal on January 7, 1954, but, due to the lack of witnesses, adjudication was postponed to January 21st. At this time it was ordered that Endre Bustya and Zoltán Szabó be summoned as witnesses. Bustya gave a witness statement on February 27, 1954 and he was forced to provide evidence against András Székely. On March 11, 1954 the newly released Zoltán Szabó, in consideration of his forced lodgings, financial problems and health issues asked the Oradea authorities for permission to give evidence at the People’s Tribunal from Tîrgu Secuiesc. ANCSSA, Penal Fund, file no. 217, vol. 2, 155, 170-173, 192-192v, 216-217, 251-255, 275.

³⁶ ANCSSA, Penal Fund, file no. 217, vol. 2, 199-203 (backside). See the full text of Sentence no. 521; ANAP, PRF Fund, János Dobri’s data sheets.

³⁷ ANCSSA, Penal Fund, file no. 217, vol. 2, 261.

³⁸ Dezső Buzogány, “Dobri János, a teológiai tanár,” [“János Dobri, the Theology Professor,”] in *Emlékezés Dr. Dobri Jánosra születésének 100. évfordulóján* [Remembering Dr. János Dobri on the 100th Anniversary of His Birth], András Dobri ed. (Kolozsvár: 2014), 28-31.

³⁹ Buzogány, “Dobri János”, 9.

The Dobai Trial and the Years of Imprisonment (1957-1963)

The Hungarian revolution of 1956 generated a wave of sympathy among Hungarians in Transylvania and this foreshadowed the later retribution from the Romanian authorities. Between 1956 and 1966, a number of 26.501 persons were arrested, out of whom 6.223 people were acquitted during remand or by virtue of court sentences; but even so, as many as 20.278 persons were imprisoned. Administrative punishments were also applied; the number of those taken to labour units between 1958 and 1966 was 3.663. At this point, the designation of a forced abode must be mentioned. Between 1956 and 1966, as many as 1.948 people were forced to change their places of residence. Beginning with 1967, this punishment was no longer applied as a measure of precaution. By the early months of 1968, the dispositions on forced dwelling assignment were abolished in case of the last 7 persons.⁴⁰ Approximately 10% of the Hungarians living in Romania were affected by the retribution.

Basically, the term “Transylvanian ’56” does not necessarily denote the people’s anti-regime manifestations in the October-November of 1956, but rather the retribution process between 1956 and 1966, concentrated mainly on the so-called group trials.⁴¹ Among these, the most significant were those cases of high treason which also raised the issue of Transylvania’s adherence. Such was the case János Dobri became involved in.

In the unfolding show-trial, the charges were based on the plan elaborated by István Dobai, a jurist, aimed at solving the Transylvanian problem – the issue of territorial affiliation –, which was transmitted by Dobai to several people in Hungary during the revolution, and he was intending to forward it to the UN as well. This draft was later referred to in the court records and in specialized literature as the “UN-memorandum”.⁴² Two of its members, István Dobai and László Varga, were arrested on March 20 and 21, 1957, though later this occurred also in case of András Bereczki, Gábor Kertész, József Komáromy, Ferenc Gazda, József Nagy, János Dobri, Anna Bányai, Lajos Jordáky, Dezső Molnár and Endre Sipos.⁴³ Dezső László was arrested on July 25,

⁴⁰ ANCSSA, Documentary Fund, file no. 80, vol. 3, 33-36.

⁴¹ On the typologization of trials between 1956 and 1966 see Stefano Bottoni ed., *Az 1956-os magyar forradalom és a romániai magyarság (1956-1959)* [*The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and the Hungarians in Romania (1956-1959)*] (Csíkszereda: Pro-Print Könyvkiadó, 2006), 31-35; Csongor Jánosi, “Procesul membrilor mișcării de reînnoire spirituală «Bethania»,” [“The Trial of the Members of the “Bethania” Movement for Spiritual Rebirth”] in *Forme de reprimare în regimurile comuniste* [*Forms of Repression in the Communist Regimes*], Cosmin Budeancă, Florentin Olteanu eds. (Iași: Polirom, 2008), 331-337.

⁴² ANCSSA, Penal Fund, file no. 104, vol. 3, 32-46. See the original wording of the 15-page memorandum. On the court case history see Zoltán Tófalvi, *1956 erdélyi mártírjai, III, A Dobai-csoport* [*The Transylvanian Martyrs of 1956, III, The Dobai Group*] (Marosvásárhely: Mentor Kiadó, 2009).

⁴³ Information supplied by László Varga (born on March 17, 1928 in Zaláu. Nationality: Hungarian; religion: Reformed; education: Integrated Protestant Theological Institute for University Level Studies of Cluj; retired. The interview was made by the author in Tîrgu-Mureș on June 21, 2008) and József Komáromy (born on December 20, 1924 in Carei. Nationality: Hungarian; religion: Reformed; studies: “Bolyai” University of Cluj, Faculty of Mathematics and Physics;

1957, as the last one among the members of the group involved in the trial. By virtue of the Court Decision passed on November 5, 1957, Dobai and Varga faced life imprisonment, Kertész and Komáromy were sentenced to 25 years in prison each, Bereczki was convicted to 15 years, Gazda to 10 years, Dobri to 6 years, Nagy and László were sentenced to 5 years in prison each.⁴⁴

Dobri, arrested on March 29, 1957, was sentenced, beside correctional prison, to an additional 3 years of forfeiture of rights and confiscation of total assets on charges of offense against the social order (he instigated by typing and distributing poems).⁴⁵ He served his sentence in the Cluj Court prison, in the Gherla penitentiary, in the Danube Delta and the settlements pertaining to the Danube channel – Grind, Salcia, Luciu-Giurgeni, Grădina, Ostrov, Periprava, Fetești –, respectively, on the prison hulks known as Ileni Levendi and Jirond. By virtue of Gov. Decree no. 5/1963 he was pardoned on January 28, 1963.⁴⁶

Family, Children, Earning a Living

In 1943, Dobri married Klára Czira, a district nurse who came from a priest's family herself. The family raised six children (Ágnes, July 9, 1944; Anna, June 25, 1949; Klára, October 17, 1950; Enikő, January 25, 1952; András, June 23, 1954; István, April 15, 1956).⁴⁷ The children's births were determined by the sequence of detentions and arrests. Dobri never spoke to his family about the time he spent in prison. During his imprisonment after the Dobai-trial, he saw his wife and two sons on one single occasion from the window of the Gherla penitentiary; according to a previous agreement, his family visited a certain grave in the neighbouring Armenian graveyard where they could wave to the prisoners.⁴⁸

The status of political prisoner stigmatized and unfavourably affected all members of the family. In the case of the children, discrimination can be traced primarily in the way they were treated at school. They were not accepted in the pioneer organization of the school. Whenever inspectors visited the school, they were sent home. Instead of the photo of one of the children who was the best pupil in the class, they placed the photo of the second best student on the board of merits. They were supposed to be rejected at entrance examinations and final exams, but their teachers proved to be very

retired. The interview was made in Cluj-Napoca on May 24, 2008). See also Ferenc László, "A 'harmadik út' áldozata - László Dezső állambiztonsági ügyiratai," ["The Victim of the 'Third Road' - László Dezső's State Security Files,"] in *László Dezső emlékezete 1904-2004* [*Remembering László Dezső 1904-2004*], Péter Cseke ed. (Kolozsvár: Polis Könyvkiadó, 2004), 147-177. On the files pertaining to the Dobai trial see ANCSSA, Penal Fund, file no. 104, vol. 1-7.

⁴⁴ *1956 Erdélyben - Politikai elítéltek életrajzi adattára 1956-1965*, Gyula Dávid ed., [*1956 in Transylvania - The Biographical Inventory of Political Convicts 1956-1965*] (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület - Polis Könyvkiadó, 2006), 35.

⁴⁵ ANCSSA, Penal Fund, file no. 104, vol. 5, 6-9. See the contents of sentence abstract no. 1795.

⁴⁶ ANAP, PRF Fund, János Dobri's data sheets; Gyula, *1956 in Transylvania*, 136.

⁴⁷ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 3, 1.

⁴⁸ Information provided by András Dobri. Born in Cluj on June 23, 1954. Nationality: Hungarian; religion: Reformed; Education: Integrated Protestant Theological Institute for University Level Studies of Cluj; priest of the Cluj - Dâmbul Rotund parish. The interview was made by the author on June 6, 2016 in Cluj.

understanding. The eldest daughter first completed technical college, then worked for a year or two, and only then could she enrol in a university. Although they were considered class enemies, their achievements at school allowed them to obtain academic degrees. There was tacit understanding, acquiescence on the part of the teaching staff, occasional support offered in key moments. Similarly, in case of the mother, a family-supporting nurse, there was a flexibility displayed by the district physician, also facilitated by the freedom of movement implied by the area of work. As for the financial situation, the support received from caring relatives meant a lot. The relatives, especially the 8 siblings on the mother's side, were those who helped support the 6 children and the two ill grandparents living with them. Apart from the food and the in-kind support from the country it also meant a lot that the children could spend their holidays in the countryside.

The Reformed church also played a crucial role in the family's financial situation. Although from time to time it didn't appear to be true because of the politically adaptable attitudes of the ecclesiastical elite, the preserving, family-aiding role of the church is indisputable. The Dobri family lived in Cluj in the building of the church district (Kogălniceanu 29), exempt from payment of rent. The vicinity of theology professors made it possible for these professors to offer occasional help for the family. When the head of the family was taken away, Professor András Nagy organized charity actions. Help was also received from Saxon theology professors. However, after the good intentions displayed at the beginning, these Samaritans gradually disappeared and started to avoid them for fear of negative consequences, and this filled the family with bitterness.⁴⁹

A Fresh Start and New Stages (1963-1985)

As so many times before, on February 2, 1963, János Dobri returned home to find altered circumstances. This time he had to adapt to the changed elite within the Cluj church district. The governing policy of the former leaders, namely, bishops János Vásárhelyi (1936-1960) and Aladár Arday (1948-1961) was determined by the representation of the interests of their church under the given political and ideological circumstances. Their deaths meant the end of this governing principle. In the early '60s, the elections of bishops within the Oradea and Cluj Reformed church districts were already controlled by the one-party state; in both cases, the persons who were assigned to the highest position within the clergy – Sándor Búthi and Gyula Nagy – were safe enough to be a guarantee for a party-controlled church government.⁵⁰

Dobri's social reintegration was made difficult by the 3 year-long forfeiture of rights imposed upon him by virtue of the Sentence from November 1957. Although he had even submitted a written

⁴⁹ Dobri, *Emlékezés Dr. Dobri Jánosra*, 20-22, 44-59; Information provided by András Dobri.

⁵⁰ Csongor Jánosi, "Püspökválasztások a Kolozsvári és a Nagyvárad Református Egyházkerületekben az 1960-as években," ["Bishop Elections in the Cluj and Oradea Reformed Church Districts during the 1960's"] *Pro Minoritate*, Winter 2014, 187-210.

request to the Faculty of Theology asking to be restored to his formerly held position as a theology professor, his request was rejected on grounds that he could not fill any position as a public official due to his former indictment.⁵¹ His public records disappeared from the Theology archives.⁵² It was quite obvious that he did not enjoy any support from the bishopric, so from then on Dobri never set foot in the Faculty of Theology. Following his release, he worked for a few days at the national post office and then he was employed by the Chimica factory as a worker in the bakelite department. The scarce financial means made it necessary for him to undertake upholstery as well. In September 1964 – as his indictment was suspended – the church district advisory board informed him that he had been temporarily appointed priest of Bața (Bistrița-Năsăud County) and that his appointment was also approved by the Department for Religious Denomination (Departamentul Cultelor). However, it soon turned out that someone else had also been assigned to the Bața parish.⁵³ He was then offered the position of assistant priest of the Cluj - Orașul de Jos parish, but this was rendered impossible due to the opposition from priest György Valádi.⁵⁴ As of February 1, 1965 he became a part-time clerk in the deanery of the Cluj Reformed Church District.⁵⁵

His activity as a priest reached fulfilment in the Cluj - Dâmbul Rotund parish, where he served from April 1, 1969 until October 30, 1985. As the parish of Dâmbul Rotund⁵⁶ formed in 1960, he considered the building of a church as his primary mission, as the barrack serving as a house of prayer could only welcome about 120 persons out of a congregation counting 2500-2800 members.⁵⁷ In 1970 he began to organize the construction of a church, after having been promised 50.000 DM especially for this purpose by Gustav Adolf Werk Foundation.⁵⁸

As of June, 1971 the construction stages of the church can also be followed in the reports submitted by agents. On March 5, 1971 bishop Gyula Nagy was notified in an official letter by the West-German sponsor – via Dieter Knall, a priest and head clerk – about the amount set aside for the building of the Dâmbul Rotund church. In the same letter, the sponsor asked the addressee to accept the donation on behalf of the Cluj church district. The positive reply arrived after the approval of the

⁵¹ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 1, 16. See the report issued by “Dénes János” on April 15, 1964.

⁵² ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 1, 59. See the report issued by “Szabó Béla” on April 29, 1966.

⁵³ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 1, 26. See the report drawn up by “Galos István” dated September 14, 1965.

⁵⁴ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 1, 32. See the report of “Dénes János” dated December 18, 1964.

⁵⁵ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 1, 43. See the report by “Péter” dated June 2, 1965.

⁵⁶ In addition to the existing parishes of Cluj - Centru, Cluj - Orașul de Jos, Cluj - Hídelve, Cluj - Orașul de Sus, Iris-premises, in January 1960 they founded the Dâmbul Rotund parish. As of 1968, after Someșeni had been attached to Cluj, the number of parishes was increased by the addition of Someșeni congregation. Later further parishes were founded in Cluj: the parish from Pata street (1971), the Bulgaria-area and Între Lacuri parishes (1977), the parish of Tăietura Turcului (1980), the Cluj - Mănăștur parish in 1991.

⁵⁷ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 5, 164-166. See the report drawn up by “Imre Ioan” on November 16, 1973.

⁵⁸ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 5, 124.

Department for Religious Denomination had been obtained.⁵⁹ The layout plan was drawn-up by Pál Farkas, a Transylvania-born architect living in Debrecen.⁶⁰ In the summer of 1972 Dobri travelled to Bucharest where he met with János Fazekas, vice president of the Council of Ministers. Dumitru Dogaru, head of the Department for Religious Denomination was also invited to attend the discussion.⁶¹ Nonetheless, theoretical approval was not followed by measures of implementation. The Department for Religious Denomination set the changing of the layout plans and annexes as preconditions for issuing the permit. Then another impediment arose: the zonal urban plan of the “Dâmbul Rotund district” had not been drawn-up yet, consequently, patience was required since a building permit could not be obtained before such a plan was issued.⁶² Moreover, an employee of the People’s Council of Cluj told architect László Nagy, who was in charge of the construction, that the leaders of the Reformed church did not consider the building of the church as a priority, either.⁶³

It took 7 years for the building permit to arrive – the approval of projects lasted for 5 years⁶⁴ –, nevertheless, the new church was eventually built between 1977 and 1980. In the fall of 1979, Dobri suffered a minor stroke and Lajos Bóné, priest of Mera (Cluj County), took over the coordination of construction works during his convalescence.⁶⁵

Similarly, the building of the new parsonage was also marked by difficulties. Although they had obtained the building permit, the actual works could not be commenced on time due to lack of money, so the permit eventually expired. In May of 1982, Dobri already took steps to obtain a new license⁶⁶; construction works started in 1985 and Dobri was able to witness the entire process until its completion.⁶⁷

In the Focus of the Securitate (1963-1989)

According to his records on file, the mapping of János Dobri’s activity as a priest by the state security was performed along two paths: 1. primarily they focused on his everyday activity as a priest, respectively, on the impacts of his activity within the church 2. on the other hand, they were trying to uncover his international connections which involved the monitoring of agents who had travelled abroad for various reasons (international theological conferences, family visits, etc.) as well as the

⁵⁹ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 4, 147. See the report of “Szabó József” dated June 18, 1971.

⁶⁰ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 5, 1-2. See the report drawn-up by “Szász Levente” dated January 13, 1972.

⁶¹ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 5, 152-153. See the report drawn up by “Drăgan Valer” on October 9, 1973.

⁶² ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 5, 122. See the report drawn up by “Arthur” on April 9, 1973.

⁶³ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 5, 123-125. See the report drawn up by “Drăgan Valer” dated April 23, 1973.

⁶⁴ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 6, 7. See the report of “Péter András” dated April 28, 1978.

⁶⁵ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 5, 89-90. See the report of “Kis István” dated December 7, 1979.

⁶⁶ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 5, 197. See the report drawn up by “Péter András” dated May 25, 1982.

⁶⁷ Dobri, *Emlékezés Dr. Dobri Jánosra*, 9-10.

methodical observation of the priests' family guests from abroad.

Following his release from prison, due to his anti-regime and "Hungarian nationalist" remarks, he was observed by the Securitate with the help of the network of agents existing within the clergy – "Hunyadi Ioan", "Szabó Béla", "János", "Galos István". In the course of 1964 there was an exchange of records between the Mureş - Hungarian Autonomous Region and the Cluj Region of the Ministry of Interior. The colleagues from Mureş were led to Dobri through the observation of Márton Börzsei, a Catholic priest who maintained contact with the former. Therefore he was required to provide information on him.⁶⁸

On October 13, 1965 the Cluj Regional Directorate approved of captain Ioan Onac's⁶⁹ proposal to end observation based on preliminary control protocol and include Dobri, who was already working as a deanery clerk, in the category of hostile persons within the Reformed community. Furthermore, according to the same proposal, he was to be treated as an "active" suspect and his observation was to be continued in the framework of file no. 148.⁷⁰

On June 3, 1967 a verification file was opened in the case. Beside mail interception and investigation efforts, on April 25, 1968 they also opened an observation file on his name, primarily due to his "nationalist" manifestations mentioned in the informant reports. His position as a deanery clerk allowed him to gain direct insight and he was not afraid to comment on leaders of the Reformed church and theology professors who proved willing to make compromises to please the system, nor was he hesitant to express his views regarding the situation of Transylvanian Hungarians treated as second-hand citizens and the relations between the Romanian and Hungarian states.⁷¹ His views did not represent an impediment in obtaining a passport and spending time in Hungary between December 5 and 23, 1968, on the occasion of a death in the family.⁷² As it was normal, his international contacts with the charity organizations Palatinus and Caritas proved to be "justifiable" and it became clear that he had not been involved in subversive activities, and the actual reasons behind his "interpretable" statements were his personal and professional dissatisfactions. On March 18, 1969 – at Onac's proposal – they approved the closing of the observation file with the cover-name of "Dunca Ioan".⁷³

⁶⁸ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 1, 164-165.

⁶⁹ Onac Ioan (1935-2006), cadre of the MI Cluj Regional Directorate and later of the Cluj County Inspectorate. He was the professional of the 3rd Department of Domestic Intelligence, then, following its reorganization in September, 1967 he collaborated with the 1st Department having a similar scope of duties until 1975. In 1976 he was transferred to Department I/B in charge of "Hungarian nationalists". He was one of the experts on matters of the Reformed church at the time. He joined the reserve as a lieutenant-colonel on May 14, 1988. See http://www.cnsas.ro/documente/cadrede_securitatii/ONAC%20IOAN.pdf (accessed on 28.02.2016).

⁷⁰ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 1, 174-175.

⁷¹ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 1, 1-5.

⁷² ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 1, 124-127. See the report of "Kovács Gyula" dated December 12, 1968 and of "Péter András" dated January 13, 1969.

⁷³ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 1, 177-178.

Nevertheless, Dobri remained under close observation. He obtained a tourist passport for Hungary and Czechoslovakia. He and his wife returned home from the trip abroad in December, 1969. In a report dated February 28, 1970, the Hungarian state security services informed the State Security General Council about the Dobris' activity in Hungary. In terms of the Romanian-Hungarian state security relations, as far as the second phase of the period 1965-1975 is concerned, this report can be considered a rarity, since despite the fact that bilateral cooperation was regulated in detail in several protocols and conventions signed by the counterparts, the present state of research does not allow us to attach cases – and content – to the contractual stipulations of the period.⁷⁴ We are not in possession of the original report issued by the Hungarian state security services; nevertheless, the above note offers a comprehensive presentation. According to the note, Dobri and his wife had engaged in behaviours and attitudes that were considered illegal. The priest supplied information to his Hungarian contact regarding the situation of the Reformed church in Romania, implying that he did not share the official views of the leaders of his church. He provided details about the Romanian retribution following the revolution of 1956. He complained that he and several others were under continuous pressure from the church. Travelling abroad, i.e. to The Netherlands, was possible only for persons who had been previously “worked”, that is, were trusted by both the church and the state. He was disappointed to learn that he could not count on any support from Western church-aiding organizations and made mention to his contact about the need to support the Reformed priests from Romania, especially those who had been imprisoned. In this respect he offered to provide detailed information and a list of those in need of help. He suggested names of priests whose participation on international conferences would be justified by both their knowledge of languages and their reliability. Mention was also made of the need to draw up authentic scientific works on the Reformed church in Romania, respectively, the publishing of such works abroad. In addition to this, Dobri's wife described their situation as a permanent obligation to comply with the rules of conspiracy.⁷⁵

As a result of the note, on March 11, 1970, the 1st Directorate issued an order for cooperation in the Dobri case between the Cluj and the Bucharest competent authorities and for the procession of

⁷⁴ The second phase of bilateral relations is linked to the Bucharest visit in October 1965 of the Hungarian Ministry of Interior's delegation, where issues such as a closer cooperation and work relations were raised. Following the negotiations held in Budapest in May, 1966, respectively, in Bucharest in May, 1967 a state security cooperation protocol was signed. The stipulations of the protocol were acknowledged again in May 1969 and in November of that same year another convention was signed by the Ministries of Interior in Bucharest with reference to intergovernmental agreements. In April 1972 another state security cooperation agreement was signed in Budapest; however, due to changes in party policy on the Romanian part, the relations were yet again reduced to a minimum and formal cooperation did not undergo changes until the Helsinki Accords of 1975 which marked the beginning of a third phase. See the records kept in the Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történelmi Levéltára (Historical Archives of State Security Services, hereinafter ÁBTL). ÁBTL 1.11.12. Conventions (Romania 1967-1972), box 552, 41-11-R-32/16-68, 1-8.; 41-11-R-32/1-1969, 1-3.; 41-11-R-32/1-a/1969, 1-6.; 41-11-R-70/4-a/1972, 1-15; as well as Stefano Bottoni, “«Baráti együttműködés»: a magyar-román állambiztonsági kapcsolatok (1945-1982)” [“«Friendly Cooperation»: Hungarian-Romanian State Security Relations (1945-1982)”] *Történelmi Szemle*, 2 (2011), 235-257.

⁷⁵ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 4, 77-81.

the pertaining material in a 90-day work dossier. On June 12, 1970, they extended the duration of mutual cooperation until September 30.⁷⁶

In parallel with the above, on April 1, 1970, then again on December 18, Dobri was contacted by the informant of the Suceava County Inspectorate, known under the cover name of “Zamfirescu”, who was a former student of the Bethlen High School from Aiud. Their first encounter occurred by accident, at the funeral of Balázs Zoltán, Reformed priest of Tureni (Cluj County). The second discussion in private took place at the parsonage of Dâmbu Rotund. In truth their meeting occurred at the express initiative of the Cluj county state security services after they, together with their Suceava counterparts, had previously planned and facilitated “Zamfirescu’s” provocative visit to Cluj. During the discussions, Dobri described the everyday difficulties faced by the Transylvanian Reformed priest, mentioned the discrimination in the rows of minorities regarding fundamental rights, brought up the Romanianization of family names as well as the situation of the Bacău Csangos who did not enjoy a Hungarian institutional background. Dobri also touched upon the issue of mixed marriages that he had consistently opposed and he expressed his views concerning the ever diminishing Hungarian-language education. At the same time Dobri expressed his opinion regarding the administrative reform of 1968 which altered the ethnical proportions/division within the counties in a manner that was beneficial to the Romanian side.⁷⁷

As a result of the above described events and of the frequent informant reports, on March 11, 1971 they ordered the opening of another observation file on Dobri. Due to his antecedents, there was no need for much explanation. As a direct cause they mention the “training” of religious dissidence as well as his contacts with the “reactionary” Hungarian emigrants that had been deemed negative.⁷⁸ They considered it highly suspicious that on the occasion of visits paid to him by Reformed priests from Hungary, Dobri sometimes accompanied his guest across the country, on other occasions he made suggestions as to the program of the visit, so that his guest could compare and draw conclusions regarding the situation of Reformed church members living in Hungary, and Romania.⁷⁹

Beginning with August, 1972, his case received special attention also from the Cluj department for Counterespionage led by colonel Sándor Peres.⁸⁰ There were two cases that brought

⁷⁶ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 3, 156. See the dispositions of major Alexandru Pop and Cpt. Dumitru Tudor who were in charge of the case at central level.

⁷⁷ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 4, 88-90 (backside), 115-124. See the reports of “Zamfirescu” dated April 16, respectively, December 28, 1970.

⁷⁸ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 6, 357.

⁷⁹ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 5, 102.

⁸⁰ Sándor Peres (1931 -), head of the MI Cluj Regional Directorate, Department for Counterespionage between 1959 and 1967. After the division into counties until the mid-eighties he was the most important figure of the Cluj counterespionage services. Between 1972 and 1973, for almost two years, he was the chief commander of state security in Cluj, later he replaced Ioana Constantin as the second-in-command of the Cluj County Inspectorate. On December 12, 1985 he was transferred to the reserve as a colonel. See http://www.cnsas.ro/documente/cadrele_securitatii/PERES%20ALEXANDRU.pdf (accessed on 18.12.2016).

the priest of Dâmbul Rotund to the foreground of interest. At the end of 1972 András Hess, a Basel theology graduate based in Bern, at the proposal of an anonymous Hungarian priest agreed to donate a passenger car of the model Dacia 1300 to Dobri in order to make it easier for the priest to distribute foreign aid. Hess turned to a relative of the Dobri family living in Vienna, who was an informant of the Securitate operating under the cover-name of “Gaby”. The transaction completed in 1973 was monitored in its entirety by the Cluj counterespionage services.⁸¹

The second case was linked to the funding of the construction of the Dâmbul Rotund church. After the Securitate had learned that a considerable sum had been allocated by the Gustav Adolf Werk Foundation for this particular purpose, Peres suggested that in order to enter into possession of the money they “ought to speak to the cult commissioner, studying the possible modes of coordination”. This comment is significant especially in the light of a later declaration of Țepeș Hoinărescu, according to which no Hungarian churches or chapels were to be built in Cluj as long as he was holding that position in that city.⁸²

The name of János Dobri was – presumably due to his foreign contacts – involved also in the national action plan known under the cover of “Antidote”, which developed in October, 1972. At the request of the party leaders, the Ministry of Interior (via the Secretarial Directorate) alerted its competent organs of power, that is, the Securitate and the Militia, to cooperate in taking measures against the anti-regime, “religious-mystic” and pornographic literature imported primarily from abroad – under the pretext of aiding the victims of the flood in 1970. They mapped the artisanal workshops and persons who manufactured ecclesiastical relics, confiscated the final products and imposed penalties aimed at the restriction of this kind of activity. A nominal list was drawn-up of those foreign citizens who were well known to have smuggled illegal religious items in the country. In this regard, in the context of the Reformed church we can mention the names of János Szőke (Switzerland), Katherina von Drimmelen (Austria), Hebe Kohlbrugge and István Tüski (The Netherlands). The “Antidote” was complemented by the action operating under the cover-name “Epilogue”, aimed primarily at screening the materials stocked in libraries, museums, archives and antique shops, listing the “reactionary” literary products of the capitalist-manorial past as well as eliminating irredentist/anti-Communist works.

During their controls, the police forces relied on the county public archives, the county committee for education and culture and the members of the teaching staff. In the case of church libraries – i.e., the library of the Protestant Theological Institute – the respective state security officer was aided along by the regional representative of the Department for Religious Denomination. In Cluj

⁸¹ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 5, 118-121. See the synthesis report of Sándor Peres dated April 5, 1973.

⁸² ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 5, 152-153. See the informative letter drawn up by “Drăgan Valer” dated October 9, 1973.

County, the person in charge of listing anti-regime documents and directing such documents to the county archives was major Florian Oprea⁸³ by virtue of his commission expiring on March 31, 1973.⁸⁴

On February 8, 1973, in the “Dunca Ioan” observation case the 4th Bureau of the 1st Department of Domestic Intelligence within the MI’s Cluj County Inspectorate drew up the action plan which, though subsequently completed at intervals of 3-6 months, determined the operation of the Department and set the operation guidelines until February 1989, according to archival records. The action plan concerned set forth the monitoring of Dobri’s activity as a priest, the mapping of his contacts both in and outside the country as well as the acquisition of evidence to support the allegations. Taking into consideration the weakness of the informant network, they demanded the involvement of colleagues, presbyters, students from Dâmbul Rotund attending catechism courses, but also resorted to scheduled meetings, agent-provocateurs as well as “presents” meant to facilitate interceptions. The observation was extended to the priest’s sons and daughters who were also entered into the register. Taking into account potential travels abroad, they took steps in order to ensure a strict customs control. They also ordered a full monitoring of the family’s correspondence. According to a statement written by lieutenant col. Gheorghe Mușuroia⁸⁵ on July 7, 1973, Dobri’s was the most important case at the moment which called for the most complex measures. The Lt.-col. took charge of the case and demanded a situation analysis by the 28th day of each month.⁸⁶

Beside his extensive foreign contacts it was soon discovered that Dobri did everything he could to ensure the religious education of the underage members of his parish and took a series of steps in order to stimulate attendance on catechism courses. According to major Onac in charge of his monitoring, the fact that Dobri had purchased at his own initiative a Ping-Pong table which he put at young people’s disposal in the parsonage yard, was a sign of his negative influence on them and Dobri’s gesture was in fact an indirect attack against the freedom of conscience guaranteed by the constitution. Onac was of the opinion that the trip to Ileanda, Sălaj county, organized on May 1st, 1973 and attended by 32 people, was aimed at winning the sympathy of the youth. By organizing statutory church feasts for young and old parish members separately Dobri had also exceeded the legal limit, as did his frequent appeals from the pulpit addressing parents to send their children to catechism lessons and services, and contribute to actively involving children in church holiday

⁸³ Florian Oprea (1936-1999), served between 1959 and 1989 at the MI Cluj Regional Directorate, then at its successor, the MI Cluj County Inspectorate. Between 1976 and 1989 he was the head of Department 1/B responsible for “Hungarian nationalists”, holding the rank of colonel as of 1984. He was one of the “experts” on Hungarian intellectuals from Cluj. See http://www.cnsas.ro/documente/cadrele_securitatii/OPRE%20FLORIAN.pdf (accessed on 20.12.2016).

⁸⁴ For details pertaining to the actions that were run in Cluj county under the covers of “Antidote” and “Epilogue” see ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 5, 23-33, 36-97.

⁸⁵ Mușuroia Gheorghe (1933-), served between 1954-1976 at the MI Cluj Regional Directorate, respectively, at the Cluj County Inspectorate; later he was transferred to the Bistrița-Năsăud County Inspectorate where he was the head of the Inspectorate in the rank of colonel between 1977 and 1989. See http://www.cnsas.ro/documente/cadrele_securitatii/MUSUROIA%20GHEORGHE.pdf (accessed on 20.12.2016).

⁸⁶ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 4, 1-8 (backside).

festivities. He doubled the number of religious services and allotted considerable time to family visits. It serves as a brilliant example for Dobri's efficiency that at the Christmas of 1973 a number of 62 children recited religious poems in the church. Moreover, the priest of Dâmbul Rotund disregarded Decree no. 18 of the Ministerial Council which had stipulated his obligation to immediately report to his church superiors whenever Western aid was received and contacts with foreign citizens were established.⁸⁷

On April 21, 1974 col. Nicolae Dumitrașcu⁸⁸ approved of the proposal made by operational officer Onac and lt.-col. Mușuroia, which suggested warning the target known as "Dunca Ioan" in the presence of Țepeș Hoinărescu, the cult representative of the Department for Religious Denomination in Cluj. The warning occurred on April 24, 1974.⁸⁹

An examination of measures taken by state security between November, 1976 and February, 1989 does not reveal much new information. Dobri's activity as a priest was monitored primarily through the members of the informant network existing in the church of Cluj, such as "Arthur", "Nagy Géza", "Csoma", "Péter András", "Kis István", "Barta", "Ürmösi", "Kozma", "Bibliotecarul", "Imre Ioan" and others. Whatever new results were yielded by the measures taken by state security, these consisted primarily in the assignment of a more experienced agent to the case. However, these measures were for the most part limited to the repetition of "permanent" tasks such as decreasing personal influence both among priests in the country and among his foreign contacts.⁹⁰

On February 15, 1977, they authorized the monitoring of János Dobri's foreign correspondence and mail until May 1. The Securitate presented an interest in the priest's Swiss, Austrian, West-German, Dutch and American contacts. Furthermore, they were interested to learn about potential propaganda materials sent to him, financial support, and prior notifications regarding the visit of a Western church representative or of one of the Hungarian emigrants. A few days later a similar disposition was issued regarding the mails of Dobri's wife, Klára.⁹¹ At that time Dobri's case was already coordinated by Department I/B responsible for "Hungarian nationalists". Major Onac was still in charge of the priest's case for a short time; later his role was taken over by Major József Ungváry⁹² who was transferred from Dej to Cluj in 1977. After that and up until the change of regime

⁸⁷ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 5, 191-192.

⁸⁸ Nicolae Dumitrașcu (1924-2003), assistant commissioner of the Cluj Regional Directorate between 1961 and 1968. After the division into counties had been introduced he led the Bistrița Năsăud County Inspectorate for a few years. Later he returned to Cluj where, following a brief period as an assistant, he was the commander of the county inspectorate between 1974 and 1981, holding the rank of colonel. He was placed in the reserve on September 21, 1981. See http://www.cnsas.ro/documente/cadrede_securitatii/DUMITRASCU%20NECULAI.pdf (accessed on 20.12.2016).

⁸⁹ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 5, 181 (backside too).

⁹⁰ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 4, 9-24 (backside).

⁹¹ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 5, 299-300.

⁹² Onac's replacement by Ungváry meant more than just this role. The observation of the Reformed elite of Cluj and of professors and theology students of the Protestant Theological Institute was also included in his competence. See Csongor János, "Cariera unui ofițer de securitate. Ungváry József în documentele de arhivă și în memoria colectivă," ["The Career of a Securitate Officer. Ungváry József in the Archival Records and in Collective Memory"], *Sfârșitul regimurilor*

Ungváry and the head of department, major Florian Oprea were the two state security officers supervising the Dobri case.

The interception of phone calls was an indispensable part of a thorough observation. After they had installed the bug in the home from Kogălniceanu Street, a series of measures aimed at interception began to be taken. According to written records, Ungváry managed at least twice: in 1979, respectively, in 1985 to have the heads of the inspectorate – majors-general Ioana Constantin and Ioan Șerbănoiu⁹³ – authorize the operative-technical services initially for 3 months and then again for a year.⁹⁴

In the 1970s, the Securitate attempted in the first place to contain and positively influence the priest of Dâmbul Rotund. However, from 1980 the aim was to isolate him within the church.⁹⁵ A newly emerged case proved to serve as an excellent pretext in this respect. In the summer of 1980 Dobri offered to help Tamás Jenei, Reformed priest of Bacău, to obtain his driver's license in Cluj. As in February and March of 1980 Jenei did not pass the test due to chauvinism⁹⁶, he turned to Dobri for help. The latter issued a certificate confirming that his colleague was a priest in the Dâmbul Rotund parish. Jenei then submitted a written request to be allowed to take the test in Cluj since he was working and temporarily residing there. The irregularity – the address and place of work provided by Jenei did not match those in the register – was not discovered until after he had passed the test. The case immediately attracted the attention of the Securitate. Following a consultation between Commanders Nicolae Dumitrașcu and Ioan Lazăr⁹⁷, the Cluj and Bacău county inspectorates, under cover of a militia intervention, took public action against the two priests on charges of forgery and unlawful financial gain. An intervention by lt.-col. Florian Oprea of Cluj, respectively colonel Ioan Burlacu from Bacău⁹⁸ would have taken place only if the simultaneously conducted home searches had yielded evidence pointing to an irredentist activity.⁹⁹

On December 30, 1980 the Cluj Law Court, by virtue of Sentence no. 2076/1980 sentenced Tamás Jenei to 10 months of public work to be served on a construction site, and János Dobri to 6

comuniste. Cauze, desfășurare și consecințe [The End of Communist Regimes. Causes, Course of Events and Consequences], Cosmin Budeancă, Florentin Olteanu eds. (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2011), 280-316.

⁹³ Ioan Șerbănoiu (1933-2007), General of the Securitate, between 1984 and 1989 commandant of the Cluj County Inspectorate. See http://www.cnsas.ro/documente/cadrele_securitatii/SERBANOIU%20IOAN.pdf (accessed on 30.12.2016).

⁹⁴ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 7, 32, 48.

⁹⁵ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 4, 12.

⁹⁶ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 6, 142. See the report drawn up by “Kis István” dated March 10, 1981.

⁹⁷ Ioan Lazăr (1931-2004), commander of the Bacău County Inspectorate first as lt.-col., later as colonel between 1973 and 1985. See http://www.cnsas.ro/documente/cadrele_securitatii/LAZAR%20IOAN.pdf (accessed on 30.12.2016).

⁹⁸ Ioan Burlacu (1932-), official staff member of the Bacău County Inspectorate, between 1978 and 1987 head of the 1st Department of Domestic Intelligence. See http://www.cnsas.ro/documente/cadrele_securitatii/BURLACU%20ION.pdf (accessed on 30.12.2016).

⁹⁹ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 4, 13-14.

months of suspended prison with payment of legal charges.¹⁰⁰ Although, as a consequence of this case the Securitate expected a loss of credibility regarding Dobri's person both among the members of his parish and his fellow priests, this did not happen. According to a report issued by "Kiss István" on January 9, 1981 the members of the clergy were generally of the opinion that Dobri was a victim of a scheme, innocently held under pressure and it was everyone's duty to help him clear his name. The court asked of the priest of Dâmbul Rotund to submit a self-characterization at his place of work which was supposed to include the willingness to improve his attitude. At the proposal of Dean Csaba Csutak the request was forwarded to the presbyters of Dâmbul Rotund who readily stood up for their priest.¹⁰¹

Following Dobri's retirement on November 1, 1985 the Securitate tried to turn the priest and the Tókés family against each other. They intended to do this by keeping Dobri under special surveillance within the church with the help of Bishop Nagy Gyula. Beside the place of residence he was offered the possibility to preach the Gospel, his opinion was asked for in disciplinary matters and his son, newly assigned to the Dâmbul Rotund parish was promised the maximum wage category.¹⁰² This may have been the reason why the Dobris were granted a passport to Switzerland for the period between September 1 and October 31, 1986.¹⁰³

On 12 August, 1988 col. Florian Oprea approved of lt.-col. József Ungváry's proposal from the day before, which suggested that the dean of Cluj – who was also responsible for containing and positively influencing the priest – should warn Dobri with a view to "preventing nationalist-irredentist activities from taking place". This measure was considered necessary because in the course of 1988, Dobri publicly voiced his sympathy with the "anti-Romanian" actions taken by Hungary. All this coincided with the revival of his foreign contacts: he was visited again by former fellow scouts living in emigration, by members of the HEKS charity organization and by Dutch priests. Besides, Dobri welcomed guests from Hungary on a regular basis as well. He still received numerous letters and packages by mail, and he continued to consistently transmit aid packages and medicine deliveries to priests based in the Cluj area.¹⁰⁴

In the fall of 1988 Dobri, suffered a brain haemorrhage and was left with hemiparesis (unilateral weakness of the body). After this, his health was continuously failing, he began to face difficulties speaking and moving, which led to limited contacts with "elements displaying hostile conduct". At the age of 75, half paralyzed, he was no longer considered as a threat to public order therefore on June 1, 1989 József Ungváry suggested the closing of his observation file set up in 1973.

¹⁰⁰ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 6, 136-137 (backside too).

¹⁰¹ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 6, 138.

¹⁰² ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 6, 19-23.

¹⁰³ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 6, 281.

¹⁰⁴ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 6, 335 (backside too), 352.

The lieutenant-colonel summarized the results of the 18 year-long monitoring. In Dobri's case they resorted to the informant network, mail interception, street shadowing, he was a target of interceptions, investigations, he was warned, respectively, positively influenced. In quite a few cases he was declared *persona non grata* among his contacts. In the second half of the 1980s they tried to annihilate his foreign contacts as well: 4 foreign delegates were warned through the passport department, two were declared *persona non grata*, whereas others had interrupted their stay in Romania. Among his palpable accomplishments Ungváry mentioned the warnings issued in 1974, respectively, 1988, beside the suspended prison sentence issued in 1980. The proposal was approved "on order" by Department I/B that same day and the closed file was handed over to the Bureau of Information and Documentation (B.I.D.) according to protocol.¹⁰⁵

Conclusions

Dobri János died on October 1, 1990. His life story, tailored to the framework of this study, besides featuring almost the full set of accessories used by Communist repression, serves also as a role model for maintaining one's dignity as a member of national minority during the totalitarian regime. During his activity as a scout leader, as a priest and a teacher he acquired the refinement necessary for dealing with people and especially, young people, which he was able to put to good use when organizing the community and building a network of contacts. The experiences gained as a military chaplain, detainee, and prisoner strengthened his self-discipline. He always subordinated his relationships with representatives of the government to moral principles that he consistently complied with. Due to his relentlessness, he had to confront the authorities more frequently than his fellow priests did on average, but on the other hand, beginning with the '70s, he became an authentic figure with a "martyr's aura" in foreign public opinion. He became the permanent target of official visits from the West, the continual addressee of package- and medicine deliveries, who supervised and facilitated the support of Transylvanian Reformed priests for decades. His authenticity and endurance in the eye of the Western communities can also be linked to his most significant achievement as a priest, the construction of the Church of Hope, which in the context of the Reformed church represents a unique accomplishment during the last two decades of the regime.

He spent a total of 12 years in detention and this was a constant source of suffering for his family, too. These were the times when the members of his family were the most vulnerable as indirect victims of the system. Torn apart, facing financial hardships in the absence of the head of the

¹⁰⁵ ANCSSA, Informative Fund, file no. 211500, vol. 6, 357-358. B.I.D., that is, the Bureau of Information and Documentation, the equivalent of the former Centre of Information and Documentation (Centru de Informatică și Documentare, C.I.D.). They were created on the level of county inspectorates. Regarding their scope of duties they completed the record-keeping system of the Securitate. See Dorin Tudoran, *Eu, fiul lor. Dosar de securitate [I, their son. A Securitate file]* (Iași: Polirom, 2010), 574.

family, the family lived in partial social isolation. Up to the mid '60s, we see a discriminative tendency of the system, especially evident in the case of the children's school activity and career building. Despite all this, the Dobris' story is by no means a sad one, as the family members managed to find survival strategies that secured the way out, their personal development as well as professional and social (re)integration.

At the community level, Dobri's example provides an alternative in a world where cooperation with the Securitate was a tacitly accepted part of everyday life, which infiltrated into the life of families and became one of the decisive factors of career building. In the light of the wryness displayed by the church elite of the time, his attitude is even more prominent, securing him a place also among the members of Transylvanian Hungarian dissidents, monitored beginning with the 1970s. His story is an example of successful survival that disproves and opposes the argumentation according to which the individual is a victim of the system, forced to resort to compromises in order to survive.