

# Democratization of Intelligence in Romania

## Musa Khan Jalalzai

(Writer, journalist and, a research contributor in Research Institute for European and American Studies (RIEAS) Greece, and London. He has been contributing articles and research papers in Global Security Review USA, Journal of European and American Intelligence Studies, Daily Times, The Nation, Telegraph, Times of London, Daily Outlook Afghanistan, The New Nation Bangladesh, New Yorker, and Journal (Fautline) of the Institute for Conflict Management Delhi India since 1994. His intellectual experience is up to 30 years extensive research in political analysis, Pakistan, Afghanistan, terrorism, Taliban, the ISIS, nuclear and biological terrorism, and intelligence analysis. His skills cover counterterrorism, the EU and UK law enforcement analysis, and intelligence and security crisis in Asia and Europe. From 1992-1994, he worked as a research scholar in Pakistan's Institute of National Affairs (PINA), and authored two books on the war in Persian Gulf in 1993. He has been helping the UK law firms, and courts in demonstrating fear of persecution of asylum seeker by expert opinion reports since 2009. He completed MA in English Literatures, Diploma in Geospatial Intelligence, University of Maryland Washington DC. He can speak, and write English, Pashto, Persian, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Dari, and Saraiki languages. His all books are available at amazon.com, amazon.co.uk, and Google)

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Intelligence and security sector reform has been a critical element of bringing intelligence under democratic control. Intelligence agencies perform an important role in protecting national security, and national critical infrastructure. Growing threats of extremism, and radicalization has rendered more urgent their efforts to protect state security. But, in majority states of European Union, the lack of expertise in dealing with secrecy and with technical matters has been a disturbing issue since years. On EU law enforcement level, intelligence information is shared among security agencies to make internal and external security of the project consolidated and secure. Information sharing is now being facilitated by centralised databases and various formal and informal networks. Policing agencies often keep information of criminal cases, and keep their strategies secret, but intelligence agencies build their work and strategies upon secrecy. The Paris, London and Brussels terrorist attacks forced national governments to introduce security and intelligence reforms to make intelligence and policing forces competent in the war against

terrorism and radicalization, but security regime of some Central European states still remains largely unreformed.

The Romanian revolution that saw the seeds of self-government in December 1989 was the main starting point of the country's independence from the former Soviet Union. Communist leader, Nicolai Ceausescu was executed and the National Salvation Front (FSN) took power to lead the nation towards the establishment of a new and modern democratic state. The new government managed economic reforms but also designed national security measures to end dictatorship and introduce democratic culture of governance. Political and security sector reforms were an irksome state due to the strong networks of former communist administration, internal opposition and bureaucratic stakeholderism. There was a political and bureaucratic stakeholder's culture that deeply influenced foreign and domestic policies of the state. These stakeholders did not allow democratization and modernization of state institutions. New constitution was introduced in December 1991. After 9/11, Romania ultimately joined the US camp, and sent troops to Afghanistan for fighting war against terrorism, while in 2004; NATO gave full membership to Romania. The country after three years of negotiation joined the EU project in 2007.

Romanian intelligence faced numerous challenges under the Soviet rule after it was established under the Decree No. 221 on 30 August 1948, as one of the Directorates of the Ministry of Home Affairs (DMIA). In 1952, under the decree No 324, intelligence was separated from the Ministry of Interior to work independently and design its own operational strategies, gather intelligence information, and lead policy makers in the right direction. Later, on 07 September 1953, the State Security Ministry was merged with the Internal Affairs Ministry, and on 10 July 1956, Home Ministry was reorganized into the Department of Interior and Department of Security to meet the challenges of domestic security. Romanian intelligence Services and its management still needed to reform the undemocratic way of intelligence operation as there has been a long fight among different stakeholders to control the command of the agency. Analyst Elena Dragomir has noted these and other flawed strategies in her report:

“One of the most important problems that Romania had to address once communism collapsed in 1989 was how to deal with the legacy of its infamous Securitate- the all-pervasive Department of State Security. Although much of that legacy has been dealt with since then, the discussion and debate over security sector reform in general continues today. While numerous politicians, journalists, scholars, Romanian and non-Romanian alike, stress that Romania would need to confront many obstacles in order to bring the reform of the secret services to the desired end, relevant legislation remains under consideration and no final solutions have been reached”.

There has been confusion about how to provide a safe environment to the Intelligence and Interior Ministry, but it was a difficult time for stakeholders to adopt reformed strategies. Separation of intelligence networks from the Home Office and reemerging times and again caused misunderstanding between the government and political stakeholders. There was a weak perception of intelligence operations within the government circles and bureaucratic stakeholders, but tenacious resistance from old intelligence and policing infrastructure blocked

the door to modernization and reforms. On 19 April 1972, there were proposals that the emerging Council of State Security with the Home Office of the country can help law and order management and fight against anti-states elements, but later on, the intelligence council was reorganized into six directorates. Counterintelligence and counterespionage departments were of great importance in the whole process of reorganization, but these departments were also hijacked by different stakeholders. In March 1978, Mihai Pacepa, the former Chief of Foreign Intelligence service defected to the United States with a huge pack of secrets. His defection caused turmoil within the intelligence infrastructure, which forced the management to expel several secret agents due to their irksome loyalties. Analyst Elena Dragomir in her research report reviewed the evolutionary process of Romanian intelligence:

“On 26 December 1989, the National Salvation Front decided on the termination of the Securitate, and subordination of the Department of State Security to the Ministry of National Defense, where it remained until the end of 1990. On March 26, 1990, Decree No-181 had created the Romanian Intelligence Service (SRI; in Romanian, Serviciul Român de Informații), the main secret service in Romania today. Many feared that the SRI inherited the personnel, the methods, and the faults of the former Securitate. Today, it is unlikely that few if any officers from the Communist period remain there, however. According to the law, the secret service is responsible to the Romanian Parliament”.

In 1990, Communist intelligence infrastructure of Romania was again reorganized and transformed into the Foreign Intelligence Service. The General Directorate for Intelligence and Internal Protection was another strong and well-established agency-subordinated to the Home Ministry. The newly established secret agency was named in 1992 as a Special Telecommunications Service. The General Directorate of Defence Ministry was a military intelligence agency-specializing in gathering, processing, checking, intelligence and data related to internal and external security. There has been a long fight between print and electronic media and the intelligence agencies for several reasons. However, one reason the agencies were criticized was their political role in making political alliances and creating challenges for governments in power. Policing and intelligence agencies were supporting different political camps. Transfer and posting were totally on political bases. In December 2009, Vasile Blaga criticized the DGPII committee, and in April 2010, while became Minister, he criticised his precursor.

Florina Cristiana Matei in her research paper (Reconciling Intelligence Effectiveness and Transparency: The Case of Romania, Strategic Insights, Volume VI, Issue 3, May 2007) has highlighted some aspects of professionalization of intelligence and replacement of old cadres with young agents. She also noted some technological developments that helped intelligence professionals in collecting intelligence information. Florina Cristiana Matei also described Romanian National Intelligence Agency and the High National Security College (HNSC) where specialized training units and other intelligence agencies retrieve training:

“To finish with the Securitate legacy, Romania has been undertaking major efforts to professionalize the IC (to foster expertise, corporateness, and responsibility), to replace, thus,

the old generations of intelligence agents with young open-minded intelligence professionals, with a true sense of responsibility to democracy. To do this, it has institutionalized a new personnel management system, with modern recruiting, promotion, education, and training techniques. By 2007, the average age in the intelligence agencies came down to 35. These personnel graduated after 1989 and have no relation with Romania's past political police. As well, the personnel of the IC antiterrorist units are professional, selected from champions of various NATO/PfP special operations exercises. It is also worth mentioning president Traian Basescu's commitment to promote young personnel and most important to curb political appointments. President Basescu appointed George Cristian Maior, a member of one of the opposition party, as head of SRI, in October 2006; Maior is a law graduate from the University Babes-Bolyai, Cluj-Napoca (1991), and the College of International and Comparative Law of George Washington University, in Washington D.C. He was deputy defense minister (2000-2004) and president of one of the Parliament intelligence oversight committees from 2004 to October 2006. The post communist IC personnel have benefited from modern, democratic intelligence and security education and training, both in Romania and abroad, which contributed greatly to increasing the IC professionalism. At the national level, Romania has the National Intelligence Agency (ANI), the High National Security College (HNSC), as well as specialized training units within other intelligence agencies, whose programs rely heavily on NATO/Western curricula and teaching expertise, and reflect the new security features. The HNSC was established following the Citizen's Academy within the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), while the SPP agents train together with the U.S. Secret Service agents".

Romania's new intelligence infrastructure and its stakeholders faced backbreaking and laborious resistance from its communist precursors' who wanted to push the reform convoy of democratic forces to the brink. The intelligence and security sector reforms received mixed messages from the international community. The persisting complications in Romanian intelligence are corruption, stakeholderism, and the operational mood of former Securitate agents. Democratization of secret services and the policing forces in Romania has been a complicated issue since the dissolution of the Soviet Union when old communist intelligence infrastructure refused to allow democratic reforms. The agency was also accused in the press of illegally investigating journalists, media agencies, and politicians. Often, the political struggle between parties or within parties to obtain the leadership of ministries that control the spy agencies is acute. Elena Dragomir has also noted cases of malpractices within the security system:

"In 2009, for instance, the Council identified 298 alleged former Securitate officers. Another mission of the Council is to verify if different persons holding or standing for different public offices had collaborated with the communist secret services. In 2009, the Council looked into the backgrounds of over 7,000 such persons and identified 29 former Securitate officers as currently holding public offices..... The accusation of having collaborated with the Securitate is one of the most important political tools in electoral campaigns or within the political struggle for power in general. Even Romania's President, Traian Basescu, has come under the suspicion of having been a high-level Securitate officer during the communist regime, and of having maintained its mandate and political power with the direct support of the secret services".

Reforming agencies was a difficult task for Romanian government and its secret agencies, media, and the international community. Corruption was in peak and internal divisions were also disturbing that were causing weaknesses of operational intelligence mechanism. Dr. Diva Patang Wardak in her research paper on Romanian intelligence (Democratization and the Intelligence Service: A Comparative Reflection on Afghanistan and Romania-2018) has highlighted security sector reforms, and corruption of intelligence agency of Romania:

“The recent move against the culture of corruption and antigovernment political developments in Romania raised irksome questions about the fairness of the Security Sector Reforms process and democratic transformation. The issue of Security Sector Reforms and political transition in the country has been of great importance during the last two decades. Romania’s problem with corruption became transparent while European Commission accepted its membership, but created natural selection, and oversight of Security Sector Reforms. On 18 January 2017, Intellnews reported the resignation of the deputy head of Romanian intelligence, Florian Coldea. Mr. Florian was forced to resign on 17 January 2017, while the head of anti-corruption came under pressure to explain his position about the revelations of businessman Sebastian Ghita who claimed that the security service was involved in shaping the DNA in partnership with the State Intelligence Agency (SRI) (Ernst, 2017). Security picture in Romania presents an entirely different shape. Romania is a peaceful state where the reforms process is underway in a smooth way, but currently, its secret agencies came under media scrutiny, and have been criticized for a number of reasons, though much remains unclear due to a lack of accurate information”.

Romanian National Defence Strategy 2015-2019 has also outlined its national security and defence perceptions with new zeal and resolve. This strategy links with Constitutional Provisions that assert Romania as a national, sovereign state. Constitutional Provisions of Romania No-473/2004 explain the country national defence strategy and defence planning, also stresses the need to multifaced national security strategy for stabilising the country. In chapter-2 paragraph 33 and 34, and 35, the National Defence Strategy explained international security environment:

“Romania's position on the Eastern flank of the North-Atlantic Alliance and of the European Union, as well as at the crossroads of some areas with a high security shows that defense and security surpass the area of responsibility of a single state. It is necessary to revisit some concepts and establish new measures to ensure predictability and consensus in handling national instruments both independently, as well as in allied and community context, OSCE being, in this regard, an important element within the European security system. The main warranty provider when it comes to Romania's security is The North Atlantic Alliance, the transatlantic relationship representing the strategic binder which awards coherence and consistency to NATO actions. The solidity of the transatlantic relationship depends on the United States' maintaining their commitment in Europe, as well as the way allies and European partners will allot financial assistance to develop their own defense capabilities. An important factor in the European and Euro Atlantic environment is the Russian Federation. Its actions in the Black Sea Region, infringing upon international law, questioning international order, preserving frozen conflicts and the annexation of Crimea have raised again the NATO awareness upon fulfilling its fundamental

mission that is collective defense, as well as the validity of the security arrangements agreed upon with Russia at the end of the xxth century”.

Security and stability of the EU, as mentioned in Romanian National Defence Strategy for 2015-2019, is under threat from homegrown extremist and radicalized forces that recruit young fighters and participate in the ISIS wars in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan. In Eastern Europe, when governments fail to stabilise their societies, they accuse Russia of its interference in their internal affairs. Normally, EU governments are worried about the consternating picture of changing national security threats. Analysts and researchers, Susi Dennison, Ulrike Esther Franke, & Paweł Zerka, (The European Council of Foreign Relations, July 2018) noted aspects of this fear of internal division and looming threat:

“The conventional wisdom is that the EU’s internal divisions are particularly sharp on security and defence issues, with the east mainly concerned about Russia and the south predominantly worried about terrorism. But the results of ECFR’s survey suggest that the picture is more complex than this. Divergences in European threat perceptions are less apparent than the prevailing narrative would suggest, with terrorism and migration having to some extent made the southern neighbourhood a pan-EU preoccupation, and with cyber-attacks and information warfare having increased concern about Russia in member states outside central and eastern Europe. Nonetheless, disagreements over how to address threats could become the most significant obstacle to the creation of independent European defence capabilities.....Unsurprisingly; eastern and southern Europeans were particularly concerned about uncontrolled migration into their countries. Indeed, Slovenia, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, Greece, Malta, and Italy saw this as the most significant threat they face. Concern about international crime is a southern story, with Greece, Malta, Spain, and Portugal (but also Slovakia and Austria) considering it a high-priority threat. Fear of terrorism is particularly evident in larger countries and those that have recently experienced terrorist attacks (the UK, France, Spain, Germany, Denmark, and Belgium). Concern about Russia is strongest in the east (Estonia, Romania, Lithuania, Poland, and Finland), although Germany and the UK also perceive it as a major threat. Estonia and Lithuania are especially worried about Russian meddling in domestic politics”.

There are clefs, political and strategic differences within the EU while every state is following its own national agenda. They do not wholeheartedly share intelligence information on law enforcement level with each other. Some states are not interested in the EU international war against terrorism and their interference in Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq and Syria. These differences have painted an ambiguous picture of their intelligence and military cooperation. Analysts and researchers, Susi Dennison, Ulrike Esther Franke, & Paweł Zerka, (The European Council of Foreign Relations, July 2018) have noted aspects of weaknesses, divisions and narratives of the EU member states:

“These divisions initially appear to confirm the narrative on a divided EU. But there are few actual contradictions among Europeans even when their top priorities diverge: threats that are a top priority for some EU countries are generally a significant threat for the rest, while issues that

many view as benign are at most “somehow a threat” for others. Such broad alignments will ease the search for common responses. There are only two exceptions to this rule. The first is Turkey, which ten countries consider to be no threat but two others (Greece and Cyprus) see as their top threat. The most problematic division is in European states’ perceptions of Russia, which seven countries regard as the most important to their security and six others as a significant threat, but which five, predominantly southern, countries (Greece, Italy, Portugal, Hungary, and Cyprus) view as no threat at all”.

Figuring out security and intelligence sector reforms in newly independent Eastern and Central European countries have been complicated issues due to their weak response to conflicting security paradigms. Prominent scholar and intelligence expert Larry L. Watts, a former Rand consultant and adviser on military reform to the Romanian Defense Ministry, in his well-written paper (Intelligence Reform in Europe’s Emerging Democracy, *Studies in Intelligence*, Vol 48, No 1) has highlighted the crisis of democratization, post communist transition in Central and Eastern Europe, and institutional reforms after NATO opened its doors to new members in 1993:

“Intelligence reform is a critical element of democratization, but it is frequently relegated to the back burner in the early days of post-authoritarian regime transitions. This is due, in part, to a reflexive aversion to what was commonly the most brutal legacy of the former regimes. Transition populations tend to favor the destruction of intelligence apparatuses, not their reform. In the post-communist transitions in central and Eastern Europe, competing priorities also distracted attention from intelligence reform as political, economic, and other security institutions simultaneously underwent changes. Given recurrent intelligence and “political policing” problems in the transition states, it was inevitable that reform in those domains would eventually become a western priority, particularly after NATO opened its doors to new members in 1993. Unbridled political competition within the post-communist states, where the rules of the game were still in contention and abuses of executive power common, heightened concerns regarding the impact of partly reformed or unreformed intelligence services on an enlarged western alliance. Unfortunately, the West’s attempts to evaluate the intelligence reform process in the various states of the region were handicapped by the differences among the new democracies, which limited comparative analysis; by the inappropriateness of western models developed under different political, social, and economic circumstances; and by the failure of western analysts to recognize that the post-Cold War revolution in intelligence affairs conflicts in many respects with the classic model of intelligence reform”.

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