

“Workers of Romania, unite?” The struggle for an independent trade union in 1979

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Abstract

This thesis aims at analyzing how human rights discourses sought to be appropriated and instrumentalized in matters concerning labor relations in state-socialist Romania. By incorporating an analysis of transnational connections and the international actors of the period, this thesis offers a new perspective on the way in which Romanian workers addressed their grievances whilst simultaneously highlighting the opportunities and the limitations of the human rights discourses of the 1970s.

Focusing on the interdependence between media and social movements, my research focuses on the emergence and the dissolution of the Free Trade Union of Romanian Workers (SLOMR) (in Romanian: *Sindicatul liber al oamenilor muncii din România*) as an independent trade union from February to June 1979. This research argues that SLOMR exemplifies the diversity of human rights discourses and that it was one of the most salient collective action attempts to create a nation-wide independent organization aimed at defending workers' rights in state socialist Romania. Although a failed project, the SLOMR case is of vital importance to understanding the reasons behind the scarcity of Romanian workers actions in the period. The thesis uses relative deprivation theory to reveal the mechanisms and tools that could be used to support the workers' demands both nationally and internationally.

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List of Abbreviations

CFA Committee on Freedom of Association (ILO)

CSCE Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe

ICFTU International Confederation of Free Trade Unions

ILO International Labor Organization

KOR Workers` Defense Committee (*in Polish: Komitet Obrony Robotników*)

RCP Romanian Communist Party

RFE Radio Free Europe

SLOMR The Free Trade Union of Romanian Workers (*in Romanian: Sindicatul liber al oamenilor muncii din România*)

UDHR Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UGSR The General Union of Romanian Trade Unions (*in Romanian: Uniunea Generală a Sindicatelor din România*)

WCL World Confederation of Labor

Introduction

In his assessment of the historiography dealing with the Cold War, Robert Brier conveys the idea that human rights drew heavily on the imagery of a `court of world opinion`, a place where victims of repression could accuse their perpetrators and spur the international community to punish this violation of their common humanity.¹ Within this context, victims of repression and non-governmental actors gave new meaning to existing human rights documents and, as Padraic Kenney argues, the `radio waves` of human rights ultimately emanated from the activism of Soviet and Eastern European citizens.²

Broadly, this thesis will analyze the way in which human rights discourses were appropriated, enriched and instrumentalized in the onset of protest in Eastern European state-socialist regimes. It will explore the way in which seemingly local events were entangled in larger networks of interconnections and in broader processes. By going beyond the teleological analysis of dissent and the fall of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, this analysis reveals the opportunities and the limitations of the post-1975 human rights discourses for effecting change or reform.

More specifically, while questioning the way in which Romanian workers sought to address their dissatisfaction in matters concerning labor relations in the late 1970s, my research focuses on the emergence and the dissolution of the Free Trade Union of Romanian Workers (SLOMR) (in Romanian: *Sindicatul liber al oamenilor muncii din România*) as an independent trade union from February to June 1979. I argue that SLOMR exemplifies the diversity of human rights

¹ Robert Brier, "Entangled Protest: Dissent and the Transnational History of the 1970s and 1980s," in *Entangled Protest: Transnational Approaches to the History of Dissent in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, ed. Brier, Robert (Gottingen: Fibre, 2013), 29.

² Padraic Kenney, "Electromagnetic Forces and Radio Waves or Does Transnational History Actually Happen?," in *Entangled Protest: Transnational Approaches to the History of Dissent in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, ed. Robert Brier (Gottingen: Fibre, 2013), 51.

discourses and that it was one of the most salient collective action attempts to create a nation-wide independent organization aimed at defending workers' rights in state socialist Romania.

To date, the research on the Romanian workers' activities has brought to attention the scarcity of collective workers actions, with only a few examples going beyond "negative workers' control".³ The scholarly works by Dragoș and Cristina Petrescu,⁴ Monica Ciobanu,⁵ all indicate the Jiu Valley miners' strike in 1977 and Brașov strike in 1987 as the most prominent examples of joint actions of disgruntled workers. Although the Jiu Valley miners' strike is today perceived as a very well organized protest that involved around 35000 workers, the analysis of the Presidential Commission for the Study of the Romanian Communist Dictatorship indicates that the demands that were formulated by the miners were targeted at local issues.⁶ In a different instance, Vasile Paraschiv's case of an individual's struggle for independent trade unions since 1971 has gained coverage through his published memoirs⁷ and was included in various works on the topic of Romanian dissent activities, with Dennis Deletant's work⁸ being only one example among many others.

A small corpus of literature, including these works, has incorporated the case of SLOMR in their analysis, often within the larger discussion of the repression of Romanian dissent during state-socialism. In these instances, SLOMR is depicted as an intellectuals' initiative aimed at

³ Term proposed by Bob Arnot referring to workers' appropriation of a certain amount of the labor time, determining the work pace, avoiding compliance with tasks and norms, requesting to be paid on time basis instead of on piece basis.

⁴ Cristina Petrescu and Dragoș Petrescu, "Resistance and Dissent under Communism: The Case of Romania," *Totalitarismus und Demokratie* 2 (2005): 323–346.

⁵ Monica Ciobanu, "Reconstructing the Role of the Working Class in Communist and Postcommunist Romania," *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 22, no. 3 (September 2009): 315–335.

⁶ Vladimir Tismăneanu, Dorin Dobrinu, and Cristian Vasile, eds., *Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România: Raport Final [The Presidential Commission for the Study of the Romanian Communist dictatorship: Final Report]* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007), 703.

⁷ Vasile Paraschiv, *Lupta mea pentru sindicate libere în România: terorismul politic organizat de statul comunist [Vasile Paraschiv: My struggle for free trade unions in Romania]*, ed. Marius Oprea, Oana Ionel, and Dragoș Marcu (Iași: Polirom, 2005).

⁸ Dennis Deletant, *Ceaușescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965-1989* (London: C. Hurst, 1995).

workers and not as a workers` movement *per se*.⁹ Moreover, the recent study by Ana Maria Cătănuș¹⁰ on Romanian dissent provides several empirical contributions to the chronology and the repression of the SLOMR movement. However, a systematic analysis of the national development and the external critical reception and support of SLOMR`s endeavor is yet to be undertaken.

In this sense, the adoption of a new approach based on social movements theory, media theory and transnational history will allow me to explore this topic beyond a quantitative analysis of SLOMR`s impact in creating an oppositional movement.¹¹ The usage of relative deprivation theory¹² allows me to shift the scope from the usual focus on individuals and state relations to a three level analysis, by incorporating international accords and actors, represented by individuals and organizations. Moreover, by building on the relative deprivation theory`s critique regarding the importance of forces that led to collective action, I argue that Radio Free Europe (RFE) played multiple roles in creating general awareness about international developments. It also informed disgruntled individuals, both workers and intellectuals, about the internal situation of the country, in promoting their organization and in creating a channel of communication between people across the country.

⁹ Vladimir Tismăneanu, Dorin Dobrinu, and Cristian Vasile, eds., *Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România: Raport Final [The Presidential Commission for the Study of the Romanian Communist dictatorship: Final Report]* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007), 704.

¹⁰ Ana-Maria Cătănuș, *Vocația libertății. Forme de disidență în România anilor 1970-1980 [The vocation of Freedom. Dissidence forms in 1970-1980 Romania]* (București: Institutul național pentru studiul totalitarismului, 2014).

¹¹ When referring to `opposition` I turn again to Jan Wielgohs and Detlef Pollack`s interpretation of the term, denoting `opposition` in regard to groups that sought, via various forms of organized collective action, not only to extend personal freedoms under the existing regime, but in addition to question publicly the legitimacy of this regime. The term `opposition` describes the political formations that emerged from the dissident milieu in the late 1980s to challenge the regimes, and press them to give up, through organized actions – most visibly through demonstrations and the demands for round table negotiations. For more on this see: Jan Wielgohs and Detlef Pollack, “Introduction,” in *Dissent and Opposition in Communist Eastern Europe: Origins of Civil Society and Democratic Transition*, ed. Detlef Pollack and Jan Wielgohs (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), xi.

¹² The key idea of relative deprivation is the notion of expectations, that is, what people think they deserve and want in life. If people compare themselves to their reference groups and find that they have less, they will experience relative deprivation. I provide further explanations on this concept in Chapter I.

In the first chapter, I clarify the theoretical and methodological considerations which inform my subsequent analysis. Building on Charles Tilly's definition of social movements, I pinpoint the way in which human rights documents and discourses, as well as RFE contributed to SLOMR initiators' sense of relative deprivation and ultimately served as a legitimizing discourse for their movement. The last part of the chapter is devoted to methodological considerations when approaching sources, with a special focus on the archives of the Romanian secret police (*In Romanian: Securitate*) and Radio Free Europe records.

The members and sympathizers of SLOMR are introduced in the second chapter, which discusses the social movement and its subsequent four stages: Emergence, Coalescence, Bureaucratization, and Decline. Based mainly on Secret police archives and Radio Free Europe records and focused on the intellectual and practical elements that contributed to its emergence and development, the second chapter analyses the initial members' endeavor to create an independent organization to defend workers' rights.

The third chapter analyzes the attempts by SLOMR to convince the Romanian authorities to legitimize SLOMR as a trade union. Both the struggle for wider international exposure (via Radio Free Europe, support from the French Committee for the Defense of Human rights in Europe) as well as the way in which SLOMR's discourse was instrumentalised by international actors (International Labor Organization, French trade unions, Amnesty International) are the key elements of this analysis.

The original elements of my study are multifold: besides providing factual information about a movement which has previously only partially been researched, it will apply a series of theoretical methodologies drawing from the field of sociology and uses a transnational historical approach in order to reveal the underpinnings of one of the most salient attempts to create an independent organization that would offer workers social support in state-socialist Romania.

Aside from the creation of the premise for wider comparison on a larger Eastern European scale, my analysis of SLOMR as a social movement challenges the current historiographical assessment of the scarcity of collective Romanian workers actions in this period. In doing so, the thesis will aim to contribute to a seemingly separate Romanian historiography on workers actions on the one side, and human rights movement on the other.

Finally, this analysis also seeks to enrich the historiography of transnational dissent interactions in Eastern Europe¹³ by focusing on the national and international reverberations of SLOMR's initiators' attempt to create an independent organization that aimed to defend workers' rights. In doing so, it uses Jan Wielgohs and Detlef Pollack's definition of 'dissidence', which refers to "all discourses and activities that were critical of the regime and that constituted, or wished to constitute, an autonomous sphere of public, political and cultural communication outside of the official institutions of the party state and which in so doing openly denied the claim of the regime to full control of public life."¹⁴

¹³ Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989* (Princeton University Press, 2003), Barbara J. Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe: Citizen Intellectuals and Philosopher Kings* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2002), Friederike Kind-Kovacs and Jessie Labov, *Samizdat, Tamizdat, and Beyond: Transnational Media During and After Socialism* (Berghahn Books, 2013), Robert Brier, ed., *Entangled Protest: Transnational Approaches to the History of Dissent in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (Fibre, 2013).

¹⁴ Jan Wielgohs and Detlef Pollack, "Introduction," xi.

Chapter I: Emplacing a Methodology

In this first chapter, I will clarify the theoretical and methodological considerations which inform my subsequent analysis. In doing so, I turn to Charles Tilly's definition of social movements on which I will build upon by applying the four-stage framework of interpreting social movements on SLOMR's case. While setting the analysis on the interdependence between media and social movements, I argue that human rights contributed to the SLOMR initiators' sense of relative deprivation¹⁵ and ultimately served as a discourse in their endeavor to establish an independent labor union in socialist Romania. The last part of this chapter is devoted to methodological considerations when approaching sources, with a special focus on the archives of the Romanian secret police (*In Romanian: Securitate*) and Radio Free Europe records.

For the purpose of this thesis Charles Tilly's all-encompassing definition of social movements will be used as "a sustained series of interactions between national power holders and persons successfully claiming to speak on behalf of a constituency lacking formal representation, in the course of which those persons make publicly-visible demands for changes in the distribution or exercise of power, and back those demands with public demonstrations of support."¹⁶

In analyzing the elements that contribute to the onset of social movements, the theory of relative deprivation focuses on the notion of expectations, that is, what people think they deserve and want in life. If people compare themselves to their reference groups and find that they have less, they will experience relative deprivation. If individuals cannot meet their self-perceived

¹⁵ Historically speaking, the idea of relative deprivation is not new, but with respect to sociology, Robert Merton gave the notion its academic form. In his book *Social Theory and Social Structure*, he tried to define relative deprivation in sociological terms, as a discrepancy between aspiration and reality. Later on, specialists of social movements enriched the notion by associating it with political opportunity structures. For more details please see: Samuel Andrew Stouffer, *The American Soldier* (Princeton University Press, 1949).

¹⁶ Charles Tilly, "Social Movements and National Politics" (presented at the CRSO Working Paper no. 197, Ann Arbor, MI., 1979), 12.

legitimate goals through conventional means, this leads to their discontent and frustration, thus they are more likely to take action in improving their situation.¹⁷ In this respect, Denton Morrison also identifies a set of structural conditions that increase the probability of the emergence of social movements, such as: a high degree of interaction and communication between people experiencing relative deprivation; a rigidly stratified society where differences between classes are obvious; large numbers of voluntary associations to give people a sense that collective activity can make a difference and actually produce beneficial change.¹⁸

When applied to the SLOMR case, the timing of this movement reveals the workers' disenchantment with the regime's policies, reflecting their belief that the official institution responsible for their protection, the General Union of Romanian Trade Union [UGSR], was falling short of their expectations and did not listen to their grievances. Moreover, as they considered the Romanian law to have had a restrictive character, I will argue that SLOMR initiators perceived the idea of human rights and the international conventions on this matter, which emerged with prominence after the Helsinki Accords of 1975, as a legitimate basis for their claims.¹⁹

1.1 Social movements resources

a. Human rights discourses

The predominating concept of human rights in the 1970s was different to that of 1948. In this period, human rights have been defined and redefined according to political needs, moral imperatives and local contexts. Thus any analysis of the history of human rights needs to take

¹⁷ David A. Locher, *Collective Behavior* (NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002).

¹⁸ Denton E. Morrison, "Some Notes toward Theory on Relative Deprivation, Social Movements, and Social Change," *The American Behavioral Scientist* 14, no. 5 (1971): 686.

¹⁹ "Free trade union formed in Romania", Munich, 7 March 1979. HU OSA 300-60-1: 419; RFE/RL Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Subject Files; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

into account a series of political contestations and negotiations at international level. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* constituted a large compromise which encompassed various ideologies. It contained three main categories of rights: civil liberties, political rights and socio-economic, cultural rights. In the 1970s the Western countries focused on the human rights gravitating around the former two categories, testing the socialist countries` abilities to implement them.²⁰

At the same time, the parameters of the human rights debate shifted from the international arena of intergovernmental agencies to the level of national and transnational activism, fostering the institutionalization of organizations with the main scope of defending human rights at a global level in compliance with principle VII of the Helsinki Final Act. As a new concept, human rights led to the emergence of new systems of knowledge as people tried to come to grips with it. The most prominent of these was Amnesty International, founded by Peter Benenson in 1961, an organization focused on a multitude of individual cases.²¹ Other examples in this sense were the Helsinki Watch Group and The American Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe.²²

In different parts of the world, various groups were organized in the mid-1970s in order to promote or to monitor the implementation of principle VII, leading to the crystallization of a human rights consciousness in the international arena. The most prominent example in this sense were the Moscow Helsinki Group formed by Yuri Orlov in May 1976, the Committee for the workers` defense (KOR) in Poland and Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, all of them making direct appeals to the international instruments for the defense of human rights.²³

²⁰ Wiktor Osiatyński, *Human Rights and Their Limits* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 168.

²¹ Petra Goedde, "Global Cultures," in *Global Interdependence: The World after 1945*, ed. Akira Iriye and Jürgen Osterhammel, vol. 6, *A History of the World* (Cambridge: MA Belknap Press, 2013), 544.

²² For more information on the Commission`s activity see: Victor-Yves Ghébalí, *La diplomatie de la détente: la CSCE, d`Helsinki à Vienne (1973-1989)* (Bruxelles: É. Bruylant, 1989), 64.

²³ Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 161.

At this point, a vital clarification regarding the human rights provisions of the Helsinki Final Act is needed; particular clarity is required for the understanding of Principle VII and the *Basket Three* which were the Act's most important aspects. Following Rachel Brett's analysis, principle VII was concerned with the individual's position within the state as it was one of the few provisions of the Helsinki Final Act that did not have an inter-state character.²⁴ Through this principle, the signatories committed to promote and encourage the exercise of civic, political, economic, social and cultural rights irrespective of race, language, sex or religion. On the other hand, *Basket Three* was integrated in the inter-state framework of CSCE, concerning humanitarian relations between states and was focused mainly on family relations and reunifications.²⁵

After the Helsinki Final Act, various human rights advocates, promoters of religious freedom and condemners of ethnic discrimination tried to formulate their grievances. Romanian state officials took the chance to put into practice their own approach to human rights and took actions they perceived to be in Romania's own national interest. In this sense, the Romanian orientation towards an improvement of the state of human rights under the conditions of the existing system was encouraged by significant changes in the international context.²⁶

Romania's take on human rights was a reflection of the multiple interpretations of the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act.²⁷ Thus, the Romanian government was advocating the nations' right for self-emancipation and the case-by-case implementation of human rights, based

²⁴ Rachel Brett, *The Development of the Human Dimension Mechanism of the Conference on Security and Co-Operation in Europe (CSCE)*, Papers in theory and practice of human rights 1 (Colchester: University of Essex. Human Rights Centre, 1992), 14.

²⁵ Geoffrey Edwards, "Human Rights and Basket III Issues: Areas of Change and Continuity," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 61, no. 4 (1985): 634.

²⁶ Jan Wielgohs and Detlef Pollack, "Comparative Perspectives on Dissent and Opposition to Communist Rule," in *Dissent and Opposition in Communist Eastern Europe: Origins of Civil Society and Democratic Transition*, ed. Detlef Pollack and Jan Wielgohs (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 47.

²⁷ For more information on the multiple interpretations of CSCE provisions see: Rasmus Mariager, Karl Molin, and Kjersti Brathagen, *Human Rights in Europe During the Cold War* (Routledge, 2014), 140.

on the level of economic and social development of each state.²⁸ The conception of the Romanian political regime on human rights was based on the necessity of assuring full equality between people and the realization of fair economic and social relations by providing full access to education, culture and science.²⁹ Thus, the Romanian leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu insisted that each nation`s right to independence, peace and life was frequently neglected by the international community when dealing with human rights.³⁰ While acknowledging the diversity of human rights, Nicolae Ceaușescu stressed the importance of the right to work, and the right of not being exploited.³¹ This approach to human rights was frequently disseminated and `clarified` through academic debates on human rights³² and through various radio programs aired on national radio.³³

At the same time, human rights advocates in Romania were considered betrayers of the country or individuals manipulated by international reactionary forces,³⁴ elements that refused to understand the inseparable link between the rights and the duties of Romanian citizens. Thus, liberties and rights needed to be understood in a certain social context based on order, legality, discipline and responsibility.³⁵

Within CSCE, the Follow-up meetings in Belgrade (1977-1978) and Madrid (1980-1983) brought new challenges for Romania and its` compliance with the provisions of the Helsinki

²⁸ Nicolae Ecobescu et al., eds., *Drepturile omului în lumea contemporană. Culegere selectivă de documente [Human rights in the contemporary world. Collection of documents]* (București: Editura Politică, 1983), 39.

²⁹ Ibid., 40.

³⁰ Ibid., 25.

³¹ Ibid., 35.

³² `Drepturile omului în lumea contemporană` [Era Socialista no.8], 25 April 1984. HU OSA 300-60-1: 130; RFE/RL Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Subject Files; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

³³ `Glasul Patriei`, Romanian Monitoring, 8 Dec 1980. HU OSA 300-60-1: 129; RFE/RL Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Subject Files; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

³⁴ Romanian situation report/7: 9, 9 April 1979. HU OSA 300-60-1: 130; RFE/RL Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Subject Files; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

³⁵ Emanuel Copilaș, "Ideologie și politică. Helsinki 1975 și problematica drepturilor omului în România socialistă [Ideology and politics. Helsinki 1975 and the issue of human rights in state-socialist Romania]," *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie „George Barițiu”-Series Historica L* (2011): 241.

Final Acts. In spite of some progress in terms of the third basket and its subsequent humanitarian provisions, Romania received a lot of criticism regarding its compliance with principle VII, and the restrictive character of the Penal Code.³⁶ But the Romanian delegation constantly dismissed³⁷ the allegation by invoking principle VI (non-interference in internal affairs).³⁸

Despite numerous accusations regarding the violations of principle VII of the Helsinki Final Act, Romania was willing to undertake various bilateral negotiations on the matter. Between the Follow-up meetings at Belgrade and Madrid, there had been meetings between Romanian representatives and the Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe and representatives of the US state department.³⁹ Moreover, in August 1980, Romania was the only country of the Warsaw Pact states that accepted the visit of an Amnesty International delegation to its territory.⁴⁰ The meeting, organized at Romania's behest from May 1979, brought to the same table specialists from the US state department, representatives of the Romanian Ministry of Internal Affairs, representatives of the General Union of Labor Unions, members of the academia and representatives of minorities and various religions.⁴¹

³⁶ Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Briefing: Romania*, January 1, 1980, 8, accessed December 15, 2015, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur39/005/1980/en/>.

³⁷ "Situation Report: Romania", 17 March 1983, p. 11, HU OSA 300-8-47:45; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Publications Department: Situation Reports; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

³⁸ Valentin Lipatti, *Conferința pentru securitate și cooperare în Europa: însemnări despre o negociere și urmările ei [The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe: notes on negotiations and their impact]* (Editura Politică, 1985), 137.

³⁹ Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *The Helsinki Process and East West Relations: Progress in Perspective: A Report on the Positive Aspects of the Implementation of the Helsinki Final Act, 1975-1984* (Washington, D.C.: Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 1985), 9.

⁴⁰ ACNSAS, *Fond Documentar*, dos. nr. 14945, vol. 12, f: 42-46.

⁴¹ Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *Implementation of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe: Findings and Recommendations Five Years After Helsinki: Report* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1980), 48.

b. Media and social movements

The notion of relative deprivation alone cannot fully explain the onset of social movements and thus there is a need to consider the elements that lead to action. Rapid changes which generate relative deprivation include socioeconomic changes, industrialization, urbanization, political modernization and increased exposure to education and mass media.⁴² In the case of SLOMR, Radio Free Europe not only played a crucial role in informing their listeners about the development of international agreements concerning human rights (Helsinki Final Act), but also about the formation of various movements across Eastern Europe demanding human rights recognition (Charter 77) and the institutionalization of the Workers` Defense Committee (KOR).

According to John Downing, the Soviet system relied on its channeling and strict control of communication and media, and their use as a transmission belt for the party's view of reality.⁴³ In a similar approach, in the 1970-1980s, the Romanian political regime achieved the establishment of what Karol Jakubowicz called a "monocentric system of uniformizing communications",⁴⁴ with the press Law of 1974 outlining everything from the socio-political function of the media to its organization and relationship with the state, public organizations and citizens, as well as the duties and rights of journalists. Thus, the Romanian journalist had to be a "communist fighter", and a "party activist" in the media sphere.⁴⁵

Set against this background, the radical alternative media, played in this case by Radio Free Europe, should be placed within the larger context of state power, hegemony, and

⁴² Aldon Morris and Cedric Herring, "Theory and Research in Social Movements: A Critical Review" (January 1984): 25.

⁴³ John Downing, *Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements* (Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 2001), 355.

⁴⁴ Peter Gross, *Mass Media in Revolution and National Development: The Romanian Laboratory* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1996), 11.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

insubordination⁴⁶ encased in dialectical interdependence with social movements.⁴⁷ As stated in 1973, RFE's main function was to promote the application of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). At the same time, the Romanian secret police declared that the activities of all Western stations broadcasting to Eastern Europe constituted "espionage and the promotion of anti-state activities".⁴⁸ In spite of this situation, the Romanian station of Radio Free Europe had for decades the largest audience of all international broadcasters, and, in most years, the highest percentage of listenership in all of its target countries.⁴⁹

The most popular programs were the *News*, *Political program*, *Romanian Actuality*, *Listeners' Mail*, *Romania and Human Rights*. The first two dealt mostly with the evolution of the international situation and press surveys. On the other hand, the latter three dealt with internal issues, comments on the latest letters received by RFE from Romania.⁵⁰ In addition to domestic and international politics, the broadcasts covered a variety of subjects of interest to the listeners, including culture, music, sports, and human-interest stories. A younger generation of listeners was attracted⁵¹ and from this point of view, Radio Free Europe played a critical role in spreading American youth culture to Eastern Europe.⁵²

Listeners' Mail, a weekly program anchored by Noel Bernard, became one of the most popular programs, attracting a high percentage of the audience.⁵³ The programme included letters describing the situation in the country or personal letters exposing human rights abuses,

⁴⁶ Downing, *Radical Media*, 19.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁸ Germina Nagat, "Ceaușescu's War against Our Ears," in *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: A Collection of Studies and Documents*, ed. A. Ross Johnson and R. Eugene Parta (Budapest ; New York: Central European University Press, 2010), 230.

⁴⁹ Nestor Ratesh, "Radio Free Europe's Impact in Romania During the Cold War," in *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: A Collection of Studies and Documents*, ed. A. Ross Johnson and R. Eugene Parta (Budapest ; New York: Central European University Press, 2010), 207.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁵² Arch Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* (Lexington, Ky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 135.

⁵³ Ratesh, "Radio Free Europe's Impact in Romania During the Cold War," 210.

economic hardships and other troubles.⁵⁴ Thus, according to Alf Ludtke, the action of listening to RFE led to the construction, at a mental level, of an autonomous frame of thought,⁵⁵ while stimulating fantasy and feeding hope.⁵⁶

When compared to the earlier examples of people`s discontent, the repertoire deployed by SLOMR initiators reveals a further diversification, with RFE playing a crucial role in the dissemination of the information regarding the level of success and the methods approached for the formulation of grievances. In this sense, at the moment of RFE`s broadcast about SLOMR, the cases of the Jiu Valley miners` strike in 1977, the case of Vasile Paraschiv`s individual struggle for independent labor unions since 1971 and Goma movement`s demand for human rights in 1977 were all known to the Romanian listeners of RFE. Moreover, RFE constantly announced to its` listeners the human rights violations and various forms of discontent within the Eastern bloc.

c. SLOMR as a social movement

Scholars studying social movement processes, such as Herbert Blumer or Charles Tilly, have identified four stages in their lifecycles: “social ferment,” “popular excitement,” “formalization,” and “institutionalization”.⁵⁷ Since these early works, scholars have refined and renamed these stages but the underlying themes have remained relatively constant. Today, the

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Manuela Marin, “Ascultând Radio Europa Liberă în România lui Nicolae Ceaușescu [Listening to RFE in Romania during Nicolae Ceaușescu`s regime],” in *Între transformare și adaptare. Aspecte ale cotidianului în regimul comunist din România [Between transformation and adaptation. Aspects from the everyday life of the Romanian Communist regime]*, ed. Luciana M. Jinga and Ștefan Bosomitu, vol. VIII, Anuarul Institutului de Investigare a Crimelor Comunismului și Memoria Exilului Românesc (București, Iași, 2013), 211.

⁵⁶ Istvan Rev, “Just Noise? Impact of Radio Free Europe in Hungary,” in *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe: A Collection of Studies and Documents*, ed. A. Ross Johnson and R. Eugene Parta (Budapest; New York: Central European University Press, 2010), 240.

⁵⁷ Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 150.

four social movement stages are known as: Emergence, Coalescence, Bureaucratization, and Decline.

According to Heather Smith and Thomas Pettigrew, fluctuations in felt deprivation result from rapid social changes that cause incongruences between what people expect and what the society delivers. For them, the individual relative deprivation is the product of comparisons between oneself as a unique person and a referent.⁵⁸ In the case of SLOMR, its initiators highlighted the precarious situation of the workers and their food services, comparing their standard of living with the one of party members and their privileges. Moreover, by resorting to various legislative references, the initiators demanded the implementation of existing law provisions.

Based on the four stages framework, I propose the idea that SLOMR unsuccessfully tried to bureaucratize, as this stage overlapped with the decline phase. In this sense, the structure of SLOMR is of a unique character, as the Coalescence stage started with the initial broadcast of the founding document at RFE in March 1979 followed by the people's adherence to the organization by sending letters, making phone calls and trying to contact the initial group. The Bureaucratization stage was unsuccessful, as the state intervened and deployed repression against the adherents. Even though there were attempts to create other working groups or local committees, they were quickly silenced. In this sense, the decline phase was accelerated and this in turn led to the demise of the endeavor at a national level by the summer of 1979. Nevertheless, while the analytic uses of the four stages may work to an extent, it is also crucial to consider that each movement responds to specific social conditions that affect the outcome and development of the social movement. In this sense, considering the political regime of the time, it is also

⁵⁸ Heather J. Smith and Thomas F. Pettigrew, "Advances in Relative Deprivation Theory and Research," *Social Justice Research* 28, no. 1 (March 2015): 2.

important to look at the changing nature of the repertoire of contention and the transnational connections.

Thus, while anticipating the repressive measures by the authorities, SLOMR initiators sought to address daily life problems emerging from labor conditions by framing their demands not only within the Romanian legislation, but also within the broader framework of human rights. They did this by referring to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, seeking not only international legitimation but also for support from abroad. But the success of their attempts to persuade the government to obey its own laws and international covenants⁵⁹ heavily depended not only on international support, but most importantly, on alternative structures to fill the gaps in society regarding education, information and social support, which were not allowed to exist by a state focused on maintaining only one way of understanding reality.⁶⁰ In SLOMR's case, the deficit of organizational resources of individual groups sought to be compensated by external support networks⁶¹ inevitably leading to a discrepancy between the perceived structural opportunity and the actual context within which they were situated.⁶²

We have seen that claimants assess the likelihood of different state responses based on their beliefs about the state repression costs. As McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly argue, the claimants and the state “read possibilities differently, because each has limited information concerning the other's resources, capabilities, and strategic plans”.⁶³ SLOMR's initiators sought to refrain from

⁵⁹ Benjamin Nathans, “The Dictatorship of Reason: Aleksandr Vol'Pin and the Idea of Rights under ‘Developed Socialism,’” *Slavic Review* 66, no. 4 (December 1, 2007): 631.

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

⁶¹ Jan Wielgohs and Detlef Pollack, “Comparative Perspectives on Dissent and Opposition to Communist Rule,” 45.

⁶² By political opportunity structure is to be understood the respective specific constellations of political and institutional contextual conditions structuring the chances of success for political actors. For more information see: *Ibid.*, 47.

⁶³ Doug McAdam, Sidney G. Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 139.

grievances of a political nature by focusing on work-related issues, confirming the Leninist principle that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness,⁶⁴ but since the trade union was held responsible at all times for implementing the party's program,⁶⁵ requiring further mobilization of labor, they challenged the Party's decisions as the vanguard of the proletariat, transforming it into a political claim.

1.2 Primary sources and their limitations

The primary sources that form the backbone of this thesis are held in a number of different locations. The analysis is based on over 30 volumes of documents coming from the Romanian secret police (*Securitate*) files which are corroborated with materials consisting of press clippings, correspondence and Radio Free Europe Situation and Background reports located at the Open Society Archives (OSA). Another important stream of data comes from the reports issued by the American Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe, by the International Labor Organization, and Amnesty International Reports dealing with various dissident activities from Eastern Europe, including SLOMR.

Nevertheless, all these materials are subject to limitations and express their own idiosyncrasies. According to Michel-Rolph Trouillot, an archive is not only the sum of recorded documents, but also the sum of silences, in terms of what is not there, of what has been excluded and repressed and disregarded.⁶⁶ In this regard, it should be noted that the secret police was not only a form of control and suppression, but also a productive space, in the sense that the regime sought to define and protect its own version of reality and social order. The secret police

⁶⁴ Vladimir Lenin, *What Is to Be Done?*, 1902, 17, accessed December 20, 2015, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/download/what-itd.pdf>.

⁶⁵ Daniel N. Nelson, "The Worker & Political Alienation in Communist Europe," *Polity* 15, no. 2 (1982): 193.

⁶⁶ Florin Andrei Poenaru, "Contesting Illusions: History and Intellectual Class Struggle in Post-Communist Romania" (PhD diss, Central European University, 2013), 198.

contributed to the shaping of the new reality, subordinated to communist ideology. Therefore, the files from the secret police archive contain traces marking attempts at challenging the reality presented by the regime's propaganda, while the categories used by state institutions are "self-referential, reflective of the ideological commitment of the regime, not, however, of people's genuine mood."⁶⁷

One of the limitations of this analysis is that it cannot offer a definitive answer to the question of SLOMR's number of sympathizers, and this is mainly as a result of the nature of the archival resources used. In this sense, the materials from Open Society Archives and the Gabany Anneli Ute fund from the Historical National Archives of Romania are only partially revealing details about RFE's programs and corporate discussions of the Romanian RFE unit that took place in period. The picture could be enriched by consulting the RFE archival resources located in The Hoover Institute, USA. Secondly, the secret police files located at CNSAS Bucharest cannot fully reveal the spread of SLOMR movement, as the materials are thematically organized only in as far as they concern the initial group. Any research beyond this level requires a case by case investigation of the sympathizers. Moreover, as I will show later in text, individuals' involvement in the movement is often concealed or distorted, as the investigations did not follow the adherents' trajectory, but rather developed a narrative of their own, portraying people's interest in leaving the country, setting the stage for psychiatric investigations or by portraying the activities as a part of the common law defection.

While official and organizational accounts will enrich the understanding of the topic, they would be incomplete without personal accounts. As a result, material extracted from interviews conducted by publications published abroad in the period, as well as contemporary accounts of

⁶⁷ Jochen. Hellbeck, "Speaking Out: Languages of Affirmation and Dissent in Stalinist Russia," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1, no. 1 (2000): 79.

some of the key individuals involved, such as Carl Gibson, provide a much clearer picture of SLOMR`s members` assessment of their movement. In this respect, Ionel Cană and Carl Gibson`s published memoirs will further expand the depth of my analysis. For these reasons my analysis aims to critically assess and reconcile the pieces of information coming from multiple sources.

Chapter II: Demanding workers` rights through human rights: The unfolding of SLOMR

This chapter uses the relative deprivation hypotheses in explaining protest onset in state-socialist Romania, and explores the way in which seemingly local events are entangled in larger networks of interconnections and in broader processes. I argue that SLOMR (the Free Trade Union of Romanian Workers) (*in Romanian*: Sindicatul Liber al oamenilor muncii din România) exemplifies diversity of human rights discourses and one of the most salient collective action attempts to create a nation-wide independent organization aimed at defending workers` rights in state socialist Romania.

Starting from a brief introduction of the workers and trade unions in the wider Romanian Socialist system of late 1970s, the text discusses the social movement and its subsequent four stages: Emergence, Coalescence, Bureaucratization, and Decline. Based mainly on Secret police archives and Radio Free Europe records, it focuses on the intellectual and practical elements that contributed to the initial members` endeavor to organize in defending workers` rights.

2.1 Workers and trade unions in the Romanian socialist system

According to Murgescu, the Romanian socialist system of the 1970s was relatively adapted for industrial development inspired by the experience of the late 19th century and early 20th century, but did not manage to adapt to the new demands of the global economy in the phase of post-industrial development.⁶⁸ Following Kornai`s analysis, Romania`s economic growth in the period is seen as a `forced` one, rather than arising from an integral, self-propelled movement in society, it implied an acceleration of the tempo, compelled from above by the bureaucracy. This combination featured a very high investment and low consumption proportions, a specific set of

⁶⁸ Bogdan Murgescu, *România și Europa : acumularea decalajelor economice (1500-2010) [Romania and Europe: the accumulation of economic gap (1500-2010)]*, Historia (Iași: Polirom, 2010), 404–405.

priorities and an accelerated utilization of the obvious potentials for extensive development, focused on quantity at the expense of quality.⁶⁹

The period 1978-1981 marked the beginning of the Romanian economic collapse and the decline of the population's trust in the authorities, as they further intensified control in order to counteract the negative trends.⁷⁰ In the second part of the 1970's the decline of oil production combined with the increase of exports, which rose from 40.6 billion lei in 1978 to 59 billion lei in 1980. Concomitantly, the external debt rose from 5.2 billion dollars in 1978 to 9.5 billion dollars in 1980.⁷¹ In response to these situations, the regime decided to limit consumption, and the main sectors that were targeted were households and street lightning, even though their significance in the overall picture was only around 7% in 1980. According to Murgescu, the economic impact at the macro-level was very limited and these restrictions only contributed to the population's discomfort.⁷²

At the same time, in order to support the division of labor and justify its control of property and resources, the socialist state constantly emphasized labor in its official ideology and sought to make the workplace, whether factory, office, or collective farm, the main source of social effect in the individual's life. The cult of labor in Romania praised production to an end in itself and made work, especially manual labor, the key symbol and central activity of society.⁷³

The emphasis on the workplace as a social institution was reinforced by the control of worker housing, shopping centers, social clubs, and summer camps and health spas by state-dominated labor unions. As Kideckel argues, despite Romania's formal devotion to workplace

⁶⁹ János Kornai, *The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Communism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 197.

⁷⁰ Adam Burakowski, *Dictatura lui Nicolae Ceaușescu 1965-1989. Geniul Carpaților [Nicolae Ceaușescu's dictatorship 1965- 1989. The genius of the Carpathians]*, trans. Vasile Moga, epub., Historia (Iași: Polirom, 2011), 355.

⁷¹ Murgescu, *România și Europa*, 394.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 396.

⁷³ David A. Kideckel, *The Solitude of Collectivism: Romanian Villagers to the Revolution and beyond*, Anthropology of contemporary issues (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 61.

democracy (*in Romanian*: autoconducerea muncitorească), the organization and control of labor were specifically geared to assisting the centralized accumulative state. The structures of agricultural, industrial, and commercial organization were thus related to institutions of state power in ways that negated their formal democratic rules and decision-making powers.⁷⁴

According to Nelson, workers knew that they depended on trade-union membership for most benefits, often including an apartment at low rent, pension and sick leave, nursery for children, health care, and frequently transportation to the factory.⁷⁵ In this sense, The General Union of Romanian Trade Unions (*in Romanian*: Uniunea Generală a Sindicatelor din România) [UGSR] was the largest of the country's mass organizations, with a membership of 7.3 million in 1985. Headed by a Central Council, the UGSR consisted of 11 labor union federations and 41 area councils, one for each county and the city of Bucharest. In the late 1980s, there were an estimated 12,000 local union units. The Central Council had a chairman, appointed by the PCR Central Committee, eight vice chairmen, two secretaries, and an executive committee of 48 members.⁷⁶

The primary function of the labor unions was the transmission of party policies to the rank and file. The UGSR statutes specified that the organization conducted its activities under the political leadership of the PCR with a similar provision being included in the statutes of the UGSR counties' committees. In early 1971, the PCR made some attempts at reforming the labor union organization. By announcing a democratization of the UGSR and its component unions, Ceaușescu promised workers protection of their interests and a voice in the appointment of industrial management. According to Ceaușescu, democratization meant that the labor unions

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Nelson, "The Worker & Political Alienation in Communist Europe," 193.

⁷⁶ Global Investment Center, *Romania Country Study Guide*, vol. 1, Strategic Information and Developments (USA: International Business Publications, 2012), 109.

would no longer be `transmission belts`, but would serve the party as a framework for organizing consultations with the masses and as a forum where workers could debate the country's economic and social development.⁷⁷

The beginning of 1978 was marked by a series of economic reforms, announced at the Romanian Communist Party's Central Committee meeting, that aimed to improve the planning and administration processes of the economy. The first article referred to the betterment of financial ratios, highlighting the importance of information flow. In this respect, the enterprises were bound to present various reports concerning the efficiency of indicators dealing with working hours, the efficiency of total work force, production, raw materials index, as well as profit indicators. As Burakowski argues, these indicators were introduced for two main reasons: to reduce the falsified data from the enterprise level and to introduce a principle that directly connected income with work efficiency. In this sense, according to the Central Committee's decision, income was calculated at the enterprise and individual levels, with workers' wages depending not only on their work efficiency, but also on the general results of the enterprise.⁷⁸ Moreover, the workers could hope for increased benefits only in the case where the enterprise would have exceeded the production plan, which had been previously set to the maximum exploitation levels of the equipment and work force. As a result, the only way to exceed the plan was with the use of unpaid labor, and additional raw materials, previously set by the economic plan.⁷⁹

In this context, by mid-1978, corruption scandals erupted, involving the incorrect usage of funds and raw materials. One of these scandals is discussed by Burakowski: In the case of Piatra

⁷⁷ Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Rolul și atribuțiile sindicatelor din România [The role and the attributions of Romanian trade unions]* (București: Editura Politică, 1981), 34.

⁷⁸ Burakowski, *Dictatura lui Nicolae Ceaușescu 1965-1989. Geniul Carpaților [Nicolae Ceaușescu's dictatorship 1965- 1989. The genius of the Carpathians]*, 324.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 327.

Neamț city, following a superior control, it was revealed that local party activists and state functionaries were using state resources to build both residential homes and holiday homes. The regime used these cases in order to unveil corruption at a local level by sanctioning and providing media coverage on the topic in the official press, thus portraying the central administration's capacity of control and demonstrating its will to fight against wastefulness.⁸⁰

2.2 Workers' discontent and human rights

In terms of relative deprivation concerning labor relations, the SLOMR case reflects the workers' disenchantment with the regime's policies, reflecting their belief that the official institution responsible for their protection, UGSR, was falling short on expectations and did not listen to their grievances. As Nelson argues, one must not confuse workers' alienation from leaders and bureaucracy with anticommunism or non-socialist ideals. Workers might have thought that their government had failed to eliminate the class biases of capitalist systems, and had continued old inequalities under new names.⁸¹ This assumption is further revealed by Manolache's analysis of the citizens' complaint letters addressed to the Romanian Communist Party. These complaints mostly took issue with shortfalls in socialist social rights, especially concerning the state's promissory note of material provisioning befitting a "workers' and peasants' state." This practice was not singular to Romania, but had similar equivalents in the Soviet Union and other East European states.⁸²

On many occasions, those who were supposed to handle workers' grievances were accused of being corrupt, while the main topics for workers' discontent dealt with poor working conditions, low payments, unworthy promotions, damages to state assets, leading to a growing

⁸⁰ Ibid., 328.

⁸¹ Nelson, "The Worker & Political Alienation in Communist Europe," 186.

⁸² Paul Betts, "Socialism, Social Rights, and Human Rights: The Case of East Germany," *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 3, no. 3 (2012): 419.

dissatisfaction as no actions were previously taken.⁸³ In her analysis of complaint letters, Manolache highlights the solidarity between claimants in the name of the party and the society, acknowledging and legitimizing the leader and the state institutions,⁸⁴ with the leader being portrayed as the one to bring back the equilibrium, serve justice and protect the aggrieved ones.⁸⁵

It is difficult to comprehend whether the workers were devoted to the socialist cause or whether this was only a stylistic strategy in their approach towards the authorities by following the official discourse. Nevertheless, there was a thin line between having your grievance ignored and being investigated by the *Securitate*. In a discourse published in *Scânteia* [The Spark] on the 2nd of October 1968, Nicolae Ceaușescu, pointed out that only a crazy person would not see the benefits of socialism. Teodor Negulescu and Vasile Paraschiv`s cases are just two examples in this sense: the former, a worker at „Textila”- Buzău enterprise, following his complaints to the Party about the abuses and irregularities from his workplace, was investigated by the secret police, fired from his job and sent to Săpoca psychiatric hospital.⁸⁶ The latter received a similar treatment over the years for leaving the Communist Party and demanding independent free trade unions.⁸⁷

People also expressed their complaints through a different channel: Radio Free Europe. In a country like Romania, the authorities relied on its channeling and strict control of communication and media⁸⁸ into a "monocentric system of uniformizing communications",⁸⁹ RFE gradually

⁸³ Dana-Ioana Manolache, “Scrisori către PCR. Oamenii muncii și problemele lor în scrisorile către Nicolae Ceaușescu [Letters for RCP. The workers and their problems in the letters addressed to Nicolae Ceaușescu]” (PhD diss, University of Bucharest, 2014), 132.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 169.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 172.

⁸⁶ Silviu Alupei, *Cazul Negulescu. Un nebun pentru liniștea țării*, in *Tinerama*, 9-15 septembrie 1994, p. 11. cited in Mădălin Hodor, “Ce nu cuprinde un dosar de securitate [What you won’t find in a Secret Police file],” in *Totalitarism și rezistență, teroare și represiune în România comunistă [Totalitarianism and resistance, terror and repression in Communist Romania]*, ed. Gheorghe Onișoru, Studii 1 (București: C.N.S.A.S, 2001), 190.

⁸⁷ Paraschiv, *Lupta mea pentru sindicate libere în România*.

⁸⁸ Downing, *Radical Media*, 355.

⁸⁹ Gross, *Mass Media in Revolution and National Development*, 11.

gained popularity among the Romanian population, playing the role of a surrogate local radio, not only by informing about national and international affairs, but also by giving a voice to their grievances that were sent through letters.

In different regions of Eastern Europe, the language of the supplicants diversified with the signing of the Helsinki Accords in 1975. In East Germany, citizens more frequently used the language of human rights as a means to strengthen their cases by shaming the authorities into respecting their own claims of material betterment for all.⁹⁰ Although the available archival resources do not indicate a similar pattern for 1975, the Romanian case grievance letters reveal a similar trajectory of diversification starting with 1977.

Aside from the complaint letters addressed either directly to the Romanian Communist Party, or through Radio Free Europe, another source of SLOMR's discourse resources resides in the Romanian dissidents' human rights rhetoric, whose most prominent promoter was Paul Goma. In January 1977, the writer, Paul Goma, sent a solidarity letter to the members of Charter 77⁹¹ and one month later addressed a letter to the CSCE Follow-up Meeting in Belgrade, listing Romania's human rights violations, requesting the Romanian government comply with international conventions. The letter addressed to the CSCE Follow-up meeting in Belgrade protested against all forms of oppression 'physical, moral, intellectual' that were practiced in the totalitarian states, against the violation of human rights in total disrespect of internal laws and international conventions. According to the Amnesty International report, he was arrested in April 1977, and released from prison in May of the same year as a result of international pressure.⁹²

⁹⁰ Betts, "Socialism, Social Rights, and Human Rights," 419.

⁹¹ 'Open appeal for Human Rights in Romania', 15 Feb 1977. HU OSA 300-60-1: 317; RFE/RL Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Subject Files; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

⁹² Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Briefing: Romania*, 4.

Starting from the content of *The Open Letter addressed to the Conference from Belgrade*, but also including other texts (the letters of adherents to the movement, Paul Goma's letters to Nicolae Ceaușescu, interviews granted by him abroad, Paul Goma's notes written during his arrest at Rahova prison) Ana Maria Cătănuș considers that the Goma movement developed as a *movement for human rights*, similar to those in the USSR or in Eastern Europe countries. The ideas and principles were the same: they did not frame a political opposition, but requested the observance of the provisions of internal and international acts regarding human rights.⁹³

The French press stressed the originality of the *Goma Movement* which resided in the fact that a number of workers sympathized with his demands.⁹⁴ An important note here is that the worker, Vasile Paraschiv, an advocate for independent trade unions in Romania since the early 1970s, signed Goma's letter addressed to the members of Charter 77 on 20th of February 1977. In his adherence message, published in the French press, Paraschiv expressed his 'solidarity with the fight for respecting the laws and human rights in Romania' and highlighted: 'Your cause of intellectuals is also our cause, of workers'.⁹⁵

Furthermore, I argue a connection between Goma's movement and SLOMR's endeavors that were to originate two years later. This indirect connection relies on the people involved or at least declared sympathizers, as is the case of Ionel Cană, founder of SLOMR,⁹⁶ Carl Gibson, founder of a short-lived local SLOMR committee in Timișoara, and Virgil Chender, who allegedly created an unofficial trade union in late 1978, were all sympathizers of the *Goma*

⁹³ Ana-Maria Cătănuș, "A Case of Dissent in Romania in the 1970's: Paul Goma and the Movement for Human Rights," *Arhivele Totalitarismului*, no. 3-4 (2011): 200.

⁹⁴ Ioana Macrea-Toma, "Între politică și morală. Percepția drepturilor omului la Radio Europa Liberă prin cazul lui Paul Goma [Between politics and morality. The perception of human rights at Radio Free Europe through the case of Paul Goma]," in *Paul Goma și exilul etern [Paul Goma and the eternal exile]*, ed. Otniel-Larean Vereș and Liliana Corobea (Oradea: Editura Ratio et Revelatio, 2016), 45.

⁹⁵ Paraschiv, *Lupta mea pentru syndicate libere în România*.

⁹⁶ ACNSAS, *Fond Informativ*, dos. nr.105866, f.62.

movement, and later strived to integrate workers' rights within the larger discourse of human rights.

2.3 The national development of SLOMR

The origins of SLOMR seem to reside from the initiators' humanistic orientation of their professions. In this respect, the physician Ionel Cană was well aware of the worsening working conditions from „Industrii Socialiste” enterprise from Balș, where the risk increments were suspended in 1978.⁹⁷ In the months that followed, Ionel Cană approached priest G. Calciu-Dumitreasa, of whom he heard from RFE for his series of lectures `7 words for the youth` [*In Romanian*: „7 cuvinte către tineri”] which subsequently brought him to the *Securitate*'s attention.⁹⁸

In the early days of 1979, the physician Ionel Cană and the priest Gheorghe Calciu-Dumitreasa had the first discussions on the necessity to form an organization aimed at defending workers' rights. In the phase which I identify as the Emergence stage, the secret police interceptions indicate that Cană and Calciu met and discussed whether they should give their real names or not, and agreed that a founding group should be mentioned, not only a single person.⁹⁹ Furthermore, following Gh. Brașoveanu's expertise on economic matters, a founding document was drafted and plans were made to create files with individual cases, addresses and their problems.¹⁰⁰

On March 4th 1979, SLOMR entered the Coalescence phase, as the Romanian unit of Radio Free Europe announced the foundation of an independent trade union in Romania and

⁹⁷ Ionel Cană, *Sindicat liber și dictatură [Free trade union and Dictatorship]*, vol. 1 (Iași: Editura PIM, 2015), 14.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:36.

⁹⁹ ACNSAS, *Fond Informativ*, dos. nr. I 258979, vol.1, f.16.

¹⁰⁰ ACNSAS, *Fond Informativ*, dos. nr. I 258979, vol.1, f.19-22.

broadcasted the content of SLOMR`s establishing document.¹⁰¹ The declaration bore the signature of 20 people, of which 16 were allegedly workers from the city of Turnu Severin, while the rest of them were from Bucharest: Ionel Cană, physician, general practitioner, Gheorghe Braşoveanu, economist, Nicolae Gugu, veteran member of the Communist Party, and Gheorghe Frăţilă, cameraman.¹⁰²

One of the main characteristics of the SLOMR movement was its struggle for official recognition by the authorities. Although my research reveals that the organization aimed at responding to certain social issues, it also highlights once more the rigidity of the Romanian political system. In this sense, it is important to acknowledge that there were no other legal artifices that could sustain their cause, as it was the case for KOR in Poland, whose institutionalization largely benefited from a pre-War law concerning relief committees.¹⁰³ SLOMR`s founding document claimed that the trade union was in conformity with Romanian legislation; at the same time, their struggle for workers` rights was centered on the most important documents of the international community: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the U.N.`s International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ratified by Romania in 1974).¹⁰⁴ While declaring its affiliation to the ICFTU,¹⁰⁵ it highlighted that it did not focus on actions of a political nature, but rather on the rights deriving from labor relations. In this respect,

¹⁰¹ `Domestic Bloc` no.10, 4 March 1979, D.C. HU OSA 300-60-1: 419; Labor/TU: Free trade unions 1979-1987; RFE/RL Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Records Relating to Romanian Opposition and Protest Movement; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

¹⁰² "Free trade union formed in Romania", Munich, 7 March 1979. f. 525. HU OSA 300-60-1: 419; RFE/RL Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Subject Files; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

¹⁰³ Jan Józef Lipski, *KOR: A History of the Workers' Defense Committee in Poland, 1976-1981*, Studies in society and culture in East-Central Europe (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 45.

¹⁰⁴ `Buletinul oficial al Republicii Socialiste România` [the Official Bulletin of the Socialist Republic of Romania], 20 Nov 1974. HU OSA 300-60-1: 317; RFE/RL Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Subject Files; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

¹⁰⁵ In 1949, early in the Cold War, alleging Communist domination of the WFTU's central institutions, a large number of non-communist national trade union federations (including the U.S. AFL-CIO, the British TUC, the French FO, the Italian CISL and the Spanish UGT) seceded and created the rival ICFTU at a conference in London attended by representatives of nearly 48 million members in 53 countries.

their endeavor shares a similar approach with the movement of the so-called *pravozashchitniki* or *zakonniki* (defenders of rights) in the Soviet Union, with Alexandr Volpin described as "the first to understand that an effective method of opposition might be to demand that the authorities observe their own laws."¹⁰⁶

SLOMR's aims were the fight against abusive firings and pensioning, precarious hygiene, safety and working conditions. Moreover, it requested the revision of the law of pensions adopted in 1977 and a reduction of the weekly working hours. According to the document, people were invited to join the trade union by mail or phone call, with no membership fee being requested. While anticipating that repressive measures would follow, the signatories invited the sympathizers to form local committees and to keep the organization alive, despite the initiators' arrest.¹⁰⁷ Following the publication of SLOMR's founding declaration, in early March 1979, Virgil Chender, representing The Unofficial Trade Union of Workers, Peasants and Soldiers of Mureş county (an organization with a claimed number of 1487 members), met with Ionel Cană and declared his union's affiliation with SLOMR.¹⁰⁸

According to secret police interceptions, the RFE announcement stirred discussions among some people in Harghita County, in which people appreciated the support of French trade unions, and were assessing the importance of organizing a strike through the trade union.¹⁰⁹ In Hunedoara County, a few people joined the movement, hoping that the organization could facilitate their

¹⁰⁶ Nathans, "The Dictatorship of Reason," 630.

¹⁰⁷ "Domestic Bloc" no.10, 4 March 1979, D.C. HU OSA 300-60-1: 419: Labor/TU: Free trade unions 1979-1987; RFE/RL Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Records Relating to Romanian Opposition and Protest Movement; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

¹⁰⁸ "Political program" no.31, 23 March 1979, ANIC., *Fond Anneli Ute Gabanyi*, dos. nr. 156, f. 19-24.

¹⁰⁹ ACNSAS, *Fond Documentar*, dos. nr. 14945, vol.7, f.1-2.

departure from Romania.¹¹⁰ In a different case, the medic Pogan Emil signed up to the organization, requesting assistance in finding a job for his wife.¹¹¹

In Ialomița County, according to the interceptions, there were people who were skeptical of joining the organization, predicting that the attempt would be short-lived, despite the support from abroad.¹¹² In Iași County, people wrote to the Bucharest group requesting further information about the legal status of SLOMR and its connection with state institutions,¹¹³ and a similar approach was taken by individuals from Maramureș County.¹¹⁴ As for other identified individuals from Constanța, Dâmbovița, Ilfov counties, they joined SLOMR and requested assistance in obtaining the necessary documents for leaving the country.¹¹⁵

Adherence and complaints about working conditions came from Arad County,¹¹⁶ while people from Brașov requested assistance in solving abusive firings.¹¹⁷ Other demands dealt with assistance in obtaining the approval for receiving medical treatment abroad,¹¹⁸ complaints about various problems in the enterprise production process,¹¹⁹ as well as work-related litigations.¹²⁰ Moreover, legal suggestions were sent, in an attempt to further facilitate SLOMR's legality; apart from an updated SLOMR statute, it was proposed that the term `free` be replaced by `independent`, thus avoiding any claims that the official trade unions were not free.¹²¹

Immediately after Radio Free Europe announced the formation of SLOMR, its three leaders, physician Ionel Cană, Father Gheorge Calciu-Dumitreasa, and Gheorge Brașoveanu

¹¹⁰ ACNSAS, *Fond Documentar*, dos. nr. 14945, vol.7, f.5-8.

¹¹¹ ACNSAS, *Fond Documentar*, dos. nr. 14945, vol.7, f.25.

¹¹² ACNSAS, *Fond Documentar*, dos. nr. 14945, vol.7, f.30-31.

¹¹³ ACNSAS, *Fond Documentar*, dos. nr. 14945, vol.7, f.32.

¹¹⁴ ACNSAS, *Fond Documentar*, dos. nr. 14945, vol.7, f.46.

¹¹⁵ ACNSAS, *Fond Documentar*, dos. nr. 14945, vol.7, f.49-62.

¹¹⁶ ACNSAS, *Fond Documentar*, dos. nr. 8852, vol.6, f.229.

¹¹⁷ ACNSAS, *Fond Documentar*, dos. nr. 8852, vol.6, f.233.

¹¹⁸ ACNSAS, *Fond Documentar*, dos. nr. 8852, vol.6, f.234.

¹¹⁹ ACNSAS, *Fond Documentar*, dos. nr. 8852, vol.6, f.245.

¹²⁰ ACNSAS, *Fond Documentar*, dos. nr. 8852, vol.6, f.247.

¹²¹ ACNSAS, *Fond Informativ*, dos. nr. 423686, f.47.

were arrested on March 10, 1979¹²² for conspiracy against the socialist order.¹²³ Shortly after, Ilie Popovici and Alexandru Nagy sent abroad new lists with adherents¹²⁴ but in early April, RFE stopped airing the names and the addresses of the new adherents, as announcements about new lists of adherents continued to appear until late April 1979.¹²⁵ Concomitantly, there were people who tried to form a provisory committee; under the coordination of Nicolae Dascălu, a teacher from Bucharest, the members were demanding a survey by the International Federation of Trade Unions to assess whether Romanian workers would need another trade union. There was also the request for permission in promoting their program in Romanian media, and for the possibility of renting a place for a headquarters, enjoying the same rights as UGSR.¹²⁶

In another example, following their meeting in Bucharest with Nicolae Dascălu,¹²⁷ Carl Gibson and Erwin Ludwig, two ethnic Germans from Timișoara, formed a local SLOMR committee in a different region of the country, allegedly spurring the interest of around 150 sympathizers, but only gathering around 20 signatures.¹²⁸ Shortly after they convinced Fenelon Sacerdoțeanu to hold the presidency of the organization,¹²⁹ Gibson was convicted on the basis of organizing an anarchic group with hostile conceptions against the socialist ethics.¹³⁰ Although his attempt was short lived, as he was arrested on 4th of April, his activity in supporting SLOMR is of

¹²² “Romania’s Free trade union members arrested”, f.1. HU OSA 300-60-1: 419; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Subject Files; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

¹²³ Cană, *Sindicat liber și dictatură [Free trade union and Dictatorship]*, 1:53.

¹²⁴ “Remember: România 1979- membrii Sindicatului liber continuă acțiunea- [Remember: Romania 1979- the members of the free trade union continue their action],” *Dialog*, no. 63 (March 1989): 4.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ “Political program` no.45, 6 April 1979, ANIC., *Fond Anneli Ute Gabanyi*, dos. nr. 156, f. 25- 31.

¹²⁷ “Remember: România 1979- membrii Sindicatului liber continuă acțiunea- [Remember: Romania 1979- the members of the free trade union continue their action],” 4.

¹²⁸ ACNSAS, *Fond Informativ*, dos. nr.257993, vol. 1. f.26.

¹²⁹ Carl Gibson, *Symphonie der Freiheit - Widerstand gegen die Ceaușescu-Diktatur: Chronik und Testimonium einer tragischen Menschenrechtsbewegung, in literarischen Skizzen, Essays, Bekenntnissen und Reflexionen [The symphony of freedom. Opposition to the Ceaușescu dictatorship. Histories and Testimonies of a tragic human rights movement in literary sketches, essays, confessions and reflections]* (Dettelbach: J.H.Röll Verlag, 2008), 115.

¹³⁰ Interview with Carl Gibson. Transcription by Ion Solacolu in “Să nu regreti niciodată ce-ai făcut [Never regret what you have done],” *Dialog*, no. 62 (April 1986): 13.

great importance, as he later collaborated with other Romanians from abroad in addressing the World Confederation of Labor (WCL) about the repression SLOMR members faced. Later, in 1981, the International Labor Organization (ILO) opened a case investigating freedom of association violations by Romania in the case of SLOMR.

On the 18th of April 1979, RFE again aired pieces of information about SLOMR, whose sympathizers signed a collective letter to Ceaușescu, demanding the stoppage of repression.¹³¹ The sympathizers highlighted that their endeavor was following Ceausescu`s critique from March 1971 at the UGSR Congress, according to which workers needed to participate in the processes involving various measures for the development of Romanian society.¹³²

These attempts account for what could be described as the Bureaucratization stage of SLOMR, which immediately overlapped with the Decline phase, due to the secret police`s prompt interventions. Although Ionel Cană currently contests Nicolae Dascălu`s role as a president of the organization,¹³³ Carl Gibson`s accounts,¹³⁴ as well as the RFE materials, indicate that Nicolae Dascălu assumed the role of SLOMR`s spokesman following the initial group`s arrest and their subsequent surveillance by *Securitate*, by forming a provisory committee.¹³⁵

The biggest uncertainty regarding SLOMR is the number of its followers, as my analysis shares similar concerns already expressed by the Presidential Commission for the Study of the Romanian Communist Dictatorship.¹³⁶ In this respect, while Ionel Cană overbids the membership

¹³¹ `Domestic bloc` (unspecified number)`, (no date), ANIC, *Fond Anneli Ute Gabanyi*, dos. nr. 156, f. 46-64.

¹³² ACNSAS, *Fond Informativ*, dos. nr. 423686, f.47v.

¹³³ Cană, *Sindicat liber și dictatură [Free trade union and Dictatorship]*, 1:153.

¹³⁴ Gibson, *Symphonie der Freiheit - Widerstand gegen die Ceaușescu-Diktatur*, 84.

¹³⁵ ACNSAS, *Fond Informativ*, dos. nr. 257993, vol.2, f.12-15.

¹³⁶ The Commission estimates that the total number of SLOMR`s members could range anywhere between 200 and 2000. For more, please see: Tismăneanu, Dobrinu, and Vasile, *Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România: Raport Final [The Presidential Commission for the Study of the Romanian Communist dictatorship: Final Report]*, 704.

to around 2400 members,¹³⁷ Gh. Calciu Dumitreasa's accounts¹³⁸ indicate that there were around 2000 people who joined the trade union. At the same time, the Secret Police files only mention a number of adherents ranging from 157 to 200 people.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, the files from the secret police archive consist of traces that mark the attempts to challenge the reality presented by the regime's propaganda. As categories used by the state institutions are self-referential, it is important to note that the investigations of *Securitate* did not always associate people's discontent with the SLOMR movement. A prime example is the case of Carl Gibson, whose secret police file does not give any indication on his efforts to organize a local SLOMR committee, being simply investigated as an individual interested in leaving the country.¹⁴⁰

Further uncertainties are raised by the case of the named 15 workers from SLOMR's founding document. Although Ionel Cană claims to have met them on several accounts in 1978,¹⁴¹ their names did not find any correlation with real persons during the Secret Police investigations.¹⁴² Following secret police interceptions of Cană and Calciu's discussion from early 1979, these names could have been fictitious ones, for the purpose of building a cohesive image of their endeavor that could stir people's interest.¹⁴³ Furthermore, The Unofficial Trade Union of Workers (an organization with a claimed number of 1487 members that declared its affiliation with SLOMR) did not have any membership lists and this research did not identify any archival material that could support the claimed membership of the organization. Nevertheless, the person claiming to represent it, Virghil Chender, prior to his interest in SLOMR, was

¹³⁷ Cană, *Sindicat liber și dictatură [Free trade union and Dictatorship]*, 1:153.

¹³⁸ Interview: Rev. G. Calciu-Dumitreasa- Dr. Vlad Georgescu [Domestic Bloc no.685] 28 August 1985. HU OSA 300-60-1: 130/ Culture-Dissidents: Intellectuals, writers 1975- 1987; RFE/RL Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Subject Files; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

¹³⁹ ACNSAS, *Fond Documentar*, dos. nr. 14945, vol. 7, f: 335-337.

¹⁴⁰ ACNSAS, *Fond Informativ*, dos. nr. I 257993, vol.1, f.1- 39.

¹⁴¹ Cană, *Sindicat liber și dictatură [Free trade union and Dictatorship]*, 1:15, 135.

¹⁴² ACNSAS, *Fond Penal*, dos. nr.766, vol. 2, f.2-120.

¹⁴³ ACNSAS, *Fond Informativ*, dos. nr. I 258979, vol.1, f.46-48.

intercepted by the *Securitate* in 1976, when he went on a hunger strike in a protest gesture against the poor management and wastefulness at his workplace,¹⁴⁴ but also in 1977, when he expressed his interest in Paul Goma`s action.¹⁴⁵

Based on the four stages framework, I argue that SLOMR unsuccessfully tried to bureaucratize, as this stage overlapped with the decline phase. In this sense, the structure of SLOMR is of a unique character, as the Coalescence stage started with the initial broadcast of the founding document at RFE in March 1979 followed by people`s adherence to the organization by the sending of letters, phone calls and attempts to contact the initial group. The bureaucratization stage was unsuccessful, as the state intervened and deployed repression against the adherents. Even though there were attempts to create other working groups or local committees, they were quickly silenced. In this sense, the decline phase was accelerated, which led to the demise of the endeavor at national level by the summer of 1979.

In SLOMR`s case, the deficit of organizational resources of individual groups sought to be compensated by external support networks thus leading to a discrepancy between the perceived structural opportunity and the actual context within which they were situated. Although SLOMR`s actions did not lead to any official recognition of their endeavors, as was the case with the Gdansk Accords in Poland,¹⁴⁶ the topic of SLOMR`s discourse and its international reverberations, will play a central role in the following chapter. This research highlights SLOMR as one of the most salient example of a collective workers` stand against Romania`s political regime`s exploitation in the late 1970s by approaching human rights discourse as a strategy for legitimization and attracting international attention.

¹⁴⁴ ACNSAS, *Fond Documentar*, dos. nr. 14945, vol.11, f.113.

¹⁴⁵ ACNSAS, *Fond Documentar*, dos. nr. 14945, vol.11, f.1-4.

¹⁴⁶ David Ost, *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics: Opposition and Reform in Poland since 1968* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 75.

Chapter III: The afterlife of SLOMR: Comprehending its international reverberations

The four stages framework cannot fully explain the complexity of the SLOMR movement, as any analysis of social movements always needs to consider their specific political background. Therefore, the analysis of SLOMR would be incomplete without an assessment of the transnational connections that contributed to the movement's international exposure. All the elements introduced in this chapter brought their contribution to the international struggle for SLOMR's legitimization.

In doing so, in the first part of the chapter I reveal the interdependency between RFE and SLOMR supporters and proceed with the international promoters and the way in which they instrumentalized SLOMR's discourse. Before tracing the epilogue of SLOMR movement, the second part of the analysis is devoted to their biggest achievement, namely the submission of an official complaint against the Romanian authorities at the International Labor Organization.

3.1 More than just a voice: Radio Free Europe

The current analysis places Radio Free Europe within the larger context of state power, hegemony, and insubordination and explores the dialectical interdependence with social movements.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, the topic of distant communication also needs to be approached with an attention to the multilayered interactions between officials, personnel, and audiences.¹⁴⁸ In this sense, as Ioana Macrea-Toma argues, ideas do not simply circulate from a center to a periphery

¹⁴⁷ Downing, *Radical Media*, 23.

¹⁴⁸ Ioana Macrea-Toma, "The Intricacies of a (Cold) War of Ideas: Radio Free Europe from Above and from Below," in *Voices of Freedom - Western Interference?: 60 Years of Radio Free Europe*, ed. Anna Bischof, 1st ed. (Munich: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 110.

that one expects to undergo a gradual change, but instead are constantly reframed by all actors involved through an interactive process of adaptation, but also of autonomous self-production.¹⁴⁹

The 1970s brought new changes in RFE's rhetoric, when 'propaganda' became an outdated concept when confronted with the idea of 'free and unfettered access to information'.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, the internal policy guidelines from 1976, with their eradication of approximations, disclaimers and psychological terms, were aiming for a more 'objective perception' through rhetorical tempering: language was polished by removing particular nominations, 'extremist' adjectives or nouns, imperative modals, and 'negative approach'.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, the main aims of RFE were promoted as revealing the truth, exposing lies and informing the audience.¹⁵²

As stated previously, *Listeners' Mail* was one of the most popular shows aired by the Romanian RFE Department; as it attracted a high percentage of the audience¹⁵³ it now represents one of the main sources for the analysis of Romanian people's discontent. Most of the letters were describing the situation in the country and the economic hardships. From this perspective, *Listeners' Mail* was portrayed as aiming at establishing a means of communication between citizens, and between citizens and rulers, dealing with broader topics of the Romanian society.¹⁵⁴ An example in this sense would be a group letter coming from peasants and workers, who wrote

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 112.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 123.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 125.

¹⁵² 'Listeners mail' no. 44, 5 December 1982. HU OSA 300-60-3: 13/ Letters & appeals from Romania 1982 [3 of 3]; RFE/RL Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Records Relating to Romanian Opposition and Protest Movement; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

¹⁵³ Ratesh, "Radio Free Europe's Impact in Romania During the Cold War," 210.

¹⁵⁴ 'Listeners mail' no. 100, 23 May 1982. HU OSA 300-60-3: 13/ Letters & appeals from Romania 1982 [1 of 3]; RFE/RL Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Records Relating to Romanian Opposition and Protest Movement; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

to RFE with the hope of popularizing their precarious situation in world opinion and international forums, on how people were living their lives under Ceaușescu`s rule.¹⁵⁵

More personal letters exposing human rights abuses were redirected to the show *Romania and Human Rights*. The input of RFE editors` is revealed when the anchorman would create a direct link between the reduction of the *Listeners` mail* show`s length and the fact that most of the letters received were referring to small, individual problems, some of them containing denunciations.¹⁵⁶ Thus, the show *Romania and Human rights*, was mostly devoted to cases subscribed to the *Basket Three* of the Helsinki Final Act, on problems concerning family reunification.¹⁵⁷ From this perspective, the `human rights` idiom was appropriated by RFE through the filter of an individualistic liberal philosophy and through the spiritualist drive of an interwar intellectualism, condemning politics with no regard for socio-economic issues.¹⁵⁸ In this sense, Monica Lovinescu`s take on the topic is revealing: “people from Eastern Europe have transformed the Helsinki Final Act into a `poor man`s Kalashnikov`”.¹⁵⁹

According to Manuela Marin`s analysis of the secret police files, the letters addressed to RFE did not find their way through the regular mail service. The letters were usually passed to trusted individuals, either Romanian citizens traveling abroad, or foreign students and tourists,

¹⁵⁵ `Listeners mail` no. 30, 29 August 1982. HU OSA 300-60-3: 13/ Letters & appeals from Romania 1982 [2 of 3]; RFE/RL Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Records Relating to Romanian Opposition and Protest Movement; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

¹⁵⁶ `Listeners mail` no. 21 , 5 June 1983. HU OSA 300-60-3: 14/ Letters & appeals from Romania 1983 [2 of 3]; RFE/RL Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Records Relating to Romanian Opposition and Protest Movement; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

¹⁵⁷ `Human rights program` no. 9 , 12 March 1983. HU OSA 300-60-3: 13/ Letters & appeals from Romania 1983 [1 of 3]; RFE/RL Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Records Relating to Romanian Opposition and Protest Movement; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

¹⁵⁸ Macrea-Toma, “The Intricacies of a (Cold) War of Ideas: Radio Free Europe from Above and from Below,” 138.

¹⁵⁹ Monica Lovinescu, *La apa Vavilonului/2. 1960-1980*, București, Humanitas, 2001, p. 220 cited in Matei Cazacu, “Paul Goma și unitatea exilului românesc (1977-1989) [Paul Goma and the unity of the Romanian Exile (1977-1989)],” in *Paul Goma și exilul etern [Paul Goma and the eternal exile (1977- 1989)]*, ed. Otniel-Larean Vereș and Liliana Corobea (Oradea: Editura Ratio et Revelatio, 2016), 28.

truck drivers that would later deliver them via mail after they crossed the border.¹⁶⁰ SLOMR's case is no exception in this case, as the instating document was initially sent through Calciu-Dumitreasa's acquaintance, John W. Crossley, an American religious activist.¹⁶¹

As Carl Gibson argues, in a totalitarian system, any opposition attempt depended on organizations from abroad with a specific interest in the issues. In his view, RFE facilitated the communication between individuals that did not know each other prior to RFE airings about SLOMR, giving the example of Nicolae Dascălu and himself.¹⁶² Moreover, RFE played a crucial role in informing their listeners about the development of international agreements concerning human rights (Helsinki Final Act), but also about the formation of various movements across Eastern Europe demanding human rights recognition (Charter 77) or the institutionalization of the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR). On top of this, the precarious nature of consumption and the issue of poor social care always formed one of the cornerstones of the station's broadcast critique. Even though RFE was simply highlighting known 'facts', they were all were meticulously selected by the guiding agents for their capacity to highlight a poignant discrepancy between discourse and practice in the affected countries.¹⁶³

Just like in Goma's case,¹⁶⁴ RFE contributed to the national and international visibility of SLOMR's endeavors, by conceptualizing and mediating the attitudes towards its supporters, but in a more limited way. In contrast with Vladimir Socor's assessment that all known dissent figures and groups emphasized values that related to the individual, SLOMR was aiming at the

¹⁶⁰ Marin, "Ascultând Radio Europa Liberă în România lui Nicolae Ceaușescu [Listening to RFE in Romania during Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime]," 226.

¹⁶¹ Naomi Kaplan, "He Is Singing for Freedom," *The Tracker* 2, no. 1 (Winter 1983), accessed April 12, 2016, <http://www.trackertrail.com/publications/thetrackermagazine/v2-1/thetrackerv2-1pg17.html>.

¹⁶² "În fața microfonului (I) [In front of the microphone (part one)]," *Dialog*, no. 72 (February 1987): 12.

¹⁶³ Macrea-Toma, "The Intricacies of a (Cold) War of Ideas: Radio Free Europe from Above and from Below," 122.

¹⁶⁴ For an in depth analysis of RFE's role in popularizing Paul Goma's case see: Macrea-Toma, "Între politică și morală. Percepția drepturilor omului la Radio Europa Liberă prin cazul lui Paul Goma [Between politics and morality. The perception of human rights at Radio Free Europe through the case of Paul Goma]."

community.¹⁶⁵ Nevertheless, while the disastrous economic situation was interpreted by Romanian editors as the degeneration of the “moral fiber of Romanian society”, culture was still seen as the milieu of salvation. Most of the times however, with Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca as prime examples, Marxism and communism were perceived as belonging to the same matrix.¹⁶⁶ And as Ioana Macrea Toma argues, Monica Lovinescu’s own inputs were elitist, culturally oriented and devoid of social insight, even though they were voiced from a microphone designed to appeal to mass awakening.¹⁶⁷ As a result, the rhetoric around SLOMR only gravitated around procedural criticism in relation to legal matters. The most prominent example in this sense was Vlad Georgescu, who repeatedly pledged SLOMR’s compliance with Romanian legislation,¹⁶⁸ as well as international agreements¹⁶⁹

Over the years, RFE received various critiques from their audience for their excessive moderation. In response, Vlad Georgescu would further accentuate RFE’s ambiguous role by arguing that the radio was not airing propaganda, it did not distribute untruths, and did not launch rumors. In his view, RFE was a serious program that only promoted founded arguments, with truth as their only propaganda, neither encouraging, nor discouraging emigration.¹⁷⁰

The limits of RFE’s support for SLOMR is further revealed in an interview between Dinu Zamfirescu and Mihnea Berindei, as they recall a discussion with Noel Bernard, head of the Romanian RFE department, on the topic of SLOMR. As an institution financed by the U.S. State

¹⁶⁵ Ioana Macrea-Toma, “Radio Free Europe in Paris: The Paradoxes of an Ethereal Opposition” (MA thesis, Central European University, 2008), 65.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁶⁸ “Domestic Bloc” no.19, 19 March 1979, D.C. HU OSA 300-60-1: 419: Labor/TU: Free trade unions 1979-1987; RFE/RL Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Records Relating to Romanian Opposition and Protest Movement; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

¹⁶⁹ “Domestic bloc” (unspecified number), 12 April 1979, ANIC., *Fond Anneli Ute Gabanyi*, dos. nr. 156, f. 32-35.

¹⁷⁰ “Listeners mail” no. 35, 3 October 1982. HU OSA 300-60-3: 13/ Letters & appeals from Romania 1982 [2 of 3]; RFE/RL Research Institute; Romanian Unit; Records Relating to Romanian Opposition and Protest Movement; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

Department, they had to comply with political trends. In this sense, it was concluded that if SLOMR was existing only because of RFE, then they could not support it any longer. As a result, the adherents names were to be made public, but without their contact details.¹⁷¹ In Carl Gibson`s view, this had an important impact on the movement`s development, as this decision prevented possible sympathizers from contacting other members and sustaining the collective effort.¹⁷² Nevertheless, this decision could also be interpreted as an attempt to limit authorities` repression against SLOMR`s sympathizers, who could have previously use the details aired by RFE to locate the individuals and investigate them.

3.2 Mapping the transnational connections and external supporters

The most noticeable support for SLOMR from abroad came from France, where, according to Samuel Moyn, it was the transformation of the left that proved the most vital agent of change, since there human rights triumphed due to competition within the left rather than with its rivals, and it transpired through the substitution of utopias.¹⁷³ Immediately after the news about SLOMR was broadcasted by RFE, French trade unions, such as the French Democratic Confederation of Labor, General Labor Confederation, National Education Federation expressed their support for SLOMR by addressing multiple letters to Nicolae Ceaușescu, and the General Union of Romanian Trade Unions.¹⁷⁴

Nevertheless, this support did not come out of the blue, as it is mostly the merit of the French Committee for the Defense of Human Rights in Romania for SLOMR`s exposure in the Western media. Established in 1977 in support of *Goma movement*, the committee was initially formed of 10 members, Romanian and French individuals specialized in Romanian issues, which

¹⁷¹ “În fața microfonului (I) [In front of the microphone (part one)],” 12.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, 166.

¹⁷⁴ “Domestic bloc` (unspecified number)`, (no date), ANIC., *Fond Anneli Ute Gabanyi*, dos. nr. 156, f. 46-64.

had previously visited Romania for sociological or historical studies. The committee later transformed into The League for the Defense of Human Rights in Romania [In Romanian: *Liga pentru apărarea drepturilor omului în România*] accounting around 70 members by 1986¹⁷⁵ and affiliated to the Fédération Internationale des Droits de l'Homme. In this respect, they were creating press releases for Agencie France Presse (AFP) and sought to establish contacts with journalists from the main daily newspapers in France. As they were creating files based on RFE materials, letters from Romania and discussions with individuals, the members of the organization were at pains to acquire their own credibility. The first articles about human rights cases were published in leftist journals *Liberation*, *Le Rouge*, *L'information ouvriere* and later, in more centrist paper *Le Monde*.¹⁷⁶

The French Committee for the Defense of Human Rights in Romania held various press conferences in Paris on the issue and organized demonstrations in support of SLOMR's cause and condemned the repression faced by its adherents. Aside from the translation of incoming texts from Romania, they tried to establish telephone contacts with SLOMR sympathizers, and sent people to visit Vasile Paraschiv as well as the adherents of the local SLOMR committee from Timișoara.¹⁷⁷ Attention was paid to an important share of the mass-media represented by French trade unions' press. Many of the materials concerning SLOMR were published in papers affiliated with the socialist CFDT and 'Force Ouvriere', as well as some factions from within *Confederation Generale de Travail*, a trade union with an anarcho-syndicalist tradition, who actively demonstrated in support of Vasile Paraschiv and later SLOMR.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Mihnea Berindei, Radu Chiriac, Carl Gibson and Dinu Zamfirescu. Transcription by Ion Solacolu in "În fața microfonului (I) [In front of the microphone (part one)]," 11.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Mihnea Berindei, Radu Chiriac, Carl Gibson and Dinu Zamfirescu. Transcription by Ion Solacolu in "În fața microfonului (III) [In front of the microphone (part three)]," *Dialog*, no. 74 (April 1987): 20.

The League for Industrial Democracy's comparison of workers' rights between East and West in 1980 also disseminated the case of SLOMR. The declared purpose of the study was to elevate the issue of worker rights to a more prominent place in the broad human rights debate.¹⁷⁹ Concomitantly, Amnesty International popularized SLOMR's cause in their reports¹⁸⁰ and International briefings¹⁸¹ by integrating their case in the wider discussion of Romania's human rights violations. Later, in 1983, the French journal, *L'Alternative*, devoted a special issue to the repression in Romania, illustrating not only a chronology of SLOMR's existence, but also a series of demonstrations that took place in Paris in support of the imprisoned members or adherents of the trade union.¹⁸²

3.3 The limits of International Labor Organization's support

By 1979 the international arena was already becoming acquainted with the International Labor Organization's cases on matters concerning violations of workers' rights to association and collective bargaining. As the only tripartite United Nations agency, ILO had been investigating complaints against East European governments in terms of trade union rights since the 1950s, but the number of cases multiplied in the late 1970s, with USSR¹⁸³ and Poland being put on the spot on such issues.¹⁸⁴

ILO's case no. 1066 represents the very first complaint submitted against the Romanian government on matters of freedom of association. In this framework, SLOMR's struggle for

¹⁷⁹ League for Industrial Democracy, *Workers' Rights, East and West: A Comparative Study of Trade Union and Workers' Rights in Western Democracies and Eastern Europe* (New Brunswick, London: Transaction Publishers, 1980).

¹⁸⁰ Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report 1980* (London: Amnesty international, 1980), 290–295.

¹⁸¹ Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Briefing: Romania*, 6–7.

¹⁸² *Roumanie Crise et Repression*, Supplement to issue no.20, *L'Alternative*: pour les droits et les libertés démocratiques en Europe de l'Est (Paris: Maspéro, January 1983), 18–32.

¹⁸³ G. Von Potobsky, "Protection of Trade Union Rights: Twenty Years' Work by the Committee on Freedom of Association," *International Labour Review* 105, no. 1 (January 1972): 69–83.

¹⁸⁴ David A. Wirth, "Trade Union Rights in the Workers' State: Poland and the ILO," *Denver Journal of International Law and Policy* 13 (1984): 269–282.

legitimacy continued long after the movement's repression by the Romanian authorities. Two years after Carl Gibson's departure from Romania, he was approached by Ion Ganea¹⁸⁵ in order to commence the procedures for submitting a complaint against the Romanian government at the International Labor Organization.¹⁸⁶ Following Gibson's accounts, as the organization could not be approached by individuals on this matter, there came the idea of forming a SLOMR informal support committee to pursue their interest. Apart from Gibson himself, this committee also came to include people like Radu Câmpeanu, Ion Ganea, Cicerone Ionițoiu, Vlad Dragoescu, Michel Korne, Ion Solacolu.¹⁸⁷ With Carl Gibson as SLOMR's representative abroad,¹⁸⁸ the committee compiled a file with materials published by the French press and met with Blaise Robel, representing the WCL, and Gérard Fonteneau, vice-president of the International Labor Office (ILO).¹⁸⁹

Even though the support from the WCL was not as prominent as in the Polish case,¹⁹⁰ it definitely was not negligible. Persuaded by the evidence provided by the SLOMR informal support committee,¹⁹¹ the representatives of the WCL¹⁹² alleged that the Romanian authorities practiced various methods of intimidation, arrests and beatings, while using pretexts that were

¹⁸⁵ After the Second World War, Ion Ganea was a member of the Liberal Youth, a youth organization of the Romanian National Liberal party. Between 1959- 1964 he was imprisoned for conspiracy. He left for Switzerland in 1978 and placed under secret police surveillance in 1981. For more details about his life please see: Ion Ganea Argeș, *Cinci ani în Gulagul românesc [Five years in the Romanian Gulag]* (București: Vremea, 2014).

¹⁸⁶ Gibson, *Symphonie der Freiheit - Widerstand gegen die Ceaușescu-Diktatur*, 346.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 345.

¹⁸⁸ Carl Gibson, interview by author, telephone interview, 19 May 2016.

¹⁸⁹ Carl Gibson, "David și Goliath: Sindicatul liber și guvernul român [David and Goliath: The free trade union and the Romanian government]," *Dialog*, no. 26 (August 1982): 7.

¹⁹⁰ For more information on ICFTU and WCL support on KOR and Solidarity, see: Idesbald Goddeeris, ed., *Solidarity with Solidarity: Western European Trade Unions and the Polish Crisis, 1980-1982* (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2010), 101.

¹⁹¹ Carl Gibson, interview by author, telephone interview, 19 May 2016.

¹⁹² Blaise Robel to Francois Blanchard, 10 July 1981. HU OSA 300-5-190: 38; RFE/RL Research Institute; Analytics Research Department; Records of Vlad Socor; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

designed to conceal the anti-union nature of their actions.¹⁹³ Their complaint from July 1981 marked the beginning of a three-year investigation from the ILO's Committee on Freedom of Association (CFA) concerning Romania's compliance with Convention no.87¹⁹⁴ and no. 98.¹⁹⁵

The CFA's 1066 case consisted of a series of inquiries between the Romanian Government and the International Labor Office. While both the WCL and the Romanian government were asked by the committee to provide further information on the matter, the Report indicates that the WCL supplied numerous documents based mainly on French publications, in order to support its' allegations. In doing so, it provided further information on the persons involved and the repression faced.¹⁹⁶ As the committee requested further clarifications on the reasons for arrest and detention of the named persons, the Romanian government firstly denied the existence of the organization, and later claimed that most of the named persons did not exist, as the authorities indicated that they were unable to locate them at the specified addresses.¹⁹⁷

As the complaint made further allegations and the government failed to provide sufficient information, CFA requested the Romanian government's approval for a direct contact mission,

¹⁹³ International Labor Office, "Case No. 1066 (Romania): Complaint Presented by the World Confederation of Labour against the Government of Romania," in *Official Bulletin*, vol. LXVII, B 3, 1984, 25, accessed May 19, 2016, [http://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/P/09604/09604\(1984-67-series-B\).pdf](http://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/P/09604/09604(1984-67-series-B).pdf).

¹⁹⁴ In 1948, the ILO adopted the organization's 87th Convention: Freedom of Association and the Protection of the Right to Organize. The aim of this Convention was to protect the right of workers and employers to create and maintain organizations independently of governments. The right to organize free and independent unions was considered a fundamental right of all working people, which depended on three principles: no distinction was to be made amongst those entitled to the right of association, there was no need for previous authorization to establish organizations and finally, there was freedom of choice with regard to membership in organizations. For more details about the convention please see: International Labor Organization, "Convention C087 - Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87)," n.d., accessed April 19, 2016, http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312232.

¹⁹⁵ In 1949, the ILO adopted another important Convention which is No. 98: the right to organize and collective bargaining. Convention No. 98 expands on the right to organize, especially in the area of discrimination against unionists and their organizations, protects workers' organizations against acts of interference by employers and provides a focus on collective bargaining. For more details about the convention please see: International Labor Organization, "Convention C098 - Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98)," n.d., accessed April 16, 2016, http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_Ilo_Code:C098.

¹⁹⁶ International Labor Office, "Case No. 1066 (Romania): Complaint Presented by the World Confederation of Labour against the Government of Romania," 26.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

which was rejected.¹⁹⁸ In this sense, it is important to note that the direct contacts method was introduced by the ILO in 1971 and was initially intended to permit a more detailed examination of the issues raised during the regular supervision of the application of Conventions. According to this procedure, a direct contacts mission collects additional information through dialogue with all the parties concerned.¹⁹⁹ In this case, this would have meant a dialogue between WCL representatives, people involved in SLOMR and the Romanian government.

In order to prove their respect for human rights, and particularly freedom of association, the Romanian government answered that the unity of workers dated from the late 19th century, and that the freedom of association was guaranteed by the Constitution, while The General Union of Romanian Trade Unions, an organization with 7.5 million members, stood as an example in this sense.²⁰⁰ Thus, the Romanian government's reply is similar to the ones promoted earlier by the Soviet Union. In Jacobson's view, while the USSR had cooperated with the CFA's investigation to the extent of replying to questions and supplying documents, it also attempted to indirectly develop the proposition that there was actually greater freedom of association than in non-communist countries.²⁰¹

It is important to contextualize the Romanian government's initial attempt to portray SLOMR as a committee for the defense of human rights. From this point of view, the distinction I have made in the methodological chapter between Principle VII and *Basket Three* of the Helsinki Final Act is of vital importance. Following this thought, any allegations about SLOMR as a human rights committee could have been dismissed on the basis of non-interference in internal affairs.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 27.

¹⁹⁹ Eric Gravel, Isabelle Duplessis, and Bernard Gernigon, *The Committee on Freedom of Association: Its Impact over 50 Years* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2002), 15.

²⁰⁰ International Labor Office, "Case No. 1066 (Romania): Complaint Presented by the World Confederation of Labour against the Government of Romania," 28.

²⁰¹ Harold Karan Jacobson, "The USSR and ILO," *International Organization* 14, no. 3 (Summer 1960): 418.

Based on the information provided by both the WCL and the Romanian government, the CFA concluded in November 1984²⁰² that in spite of the attempts to dismiss the trade union character of SLOMR, its aims at promoting and defending workers' interest fell under the definition contained in art.10 of Convention no.87. The fact that SLOMR intended to struggle for human rights was not considered sufficient evidence to prove that the organization was not of a trade union character.²⁰³ Moreover, concerning the ability of workers to freely set up organizations of their own choosing, the CFA stressed that there were certain provisions in the Romanian law that appeared to be restrictive. In this sense, while art.164 of the Labor Code stated that trade unions operated by virtue of the rules of the General Trade Union Confederation, art.26 of the Romanian Constitution and art.165 of the Labor Code highlighted that the trade union had to mobilize the crowds for the accomplishment of Romanian's Communist Party program of building a new society,²⁰⁴ which led CFA to indicate 'a de facto monopoly' of UGSR.²⁰⁵

The named report ends with the recommendations of the committee, which expressed the firm hope that the new trade union legislation, whose preparation had been mentioned by the Romanian government, would take into account the Committee's comments and that it would give 'full effect' of the Convention no.87.²⁰⁶ Although SLOMR was seen by the ILO as a trade union, the Romanian government considered it 'merely a committee for the defense of human rights'. At the same time, the ILO recommendations could only have succeeded with the

²⁰² International Labor Office, "Case No. 1066 (Romania): Complaint Presented by the World Confederation of Labour against the Government of Romania," in *Official Bulletin*, vol. LXVII, B 1, 1984, 110–120, accessed May 19, 2016, [http://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/P/09604/09604\(1984-67-series-B\).pdf](http://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/P/09604/09604(1984-67-series-B).pdf).

²⁰³ International Labor Office, "Case No. 1066 (Romania): Complaint Presented by the World Confederation of Labour against the Government of Romania," 33.

²⁰⁴ "Codul Muncii 1972 [1972 Romanian Labor Code]," n.d., sec. 165, accessed April 4, 2016, <http://lege5.ro/Gratuit/gyytanzt/codul-muncii-din-1972>.

²⁰⁵ International Labor Office, "Case No. 1066 (Romania): Complaint Presented by the World Confederation of Labour against the Government of Romania," 33.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

cooperation of governments²⁰⁷ and whatever international legitimacy SLOMR might have had, it still had to follow the Romanian law.

3.4 SLOMR`s epilogue

By the summer of 1979, all the activities initiated around SLOMR since late February came to an end at the national level. According to a secret police document from September 1979, there were no reports of any new activities in this respect.²⁰⁸ Ionel Cană, Gh. Brașoveanu, G. Calciu-Dumitreasa, Nicolae Dascălu, Carl Gibson and Erwin Ludwig served prison time on various accusations. Apart from the main figures involved in the SLOMR endeavor, there were also dozens of sympathizers imprisoned or intimidated.

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

In response to the criticism concerning human rights violations and religious rights in Romania, the *Securitate* orchestrated in October 1980 the publishing of a report about SLOMR.²⁰⁹ Originally published in English, the book was translated into French shortly after and excerpts were disseminated through the mass media in Western Europe.²¹⁰ With a special focus

²⁰⁷ International Labor Organization, “Special Procedures for the Examination in the International Labour Organization of Complaints Alleging Violations of Freedom of Association,” p. art. 12, accessed April 19, 2016, http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:62:697875547273406::NO:62:P62_LIST_ENTRIE_ID:2565060:NO#E5.

²⁰⁸ ACNSAS, *Fond Documentar*, dos. nr. 14945, vol. 6, f.335-337.

²⁰⁹ ACNSAS, *Fond Documentar*, dos. nr. 8852, vol. 6, f. 403-422.

²¹⁰ “Megafonul Securității [The megaphone of Romanian secret police],” *Dialog*, no. 61 (March 1986): 7.

on the priest Calciu-Dumitreasa, the report was signed by Constantin Michael-Titus and it represents an inquiry into the personal background of SLOMR`s initiators, aiming at discrediting them, by allegedly highlighting the priests` former connection with the Iron Guard, the doctor`s delusions and the economist`s religious fanaticism.

The report had all the ingredients prepared to prove its credibility: the author explained his alleged path to meeting the initiators by obtaining permission to see the persons in question and by receiving access to files from the Office of the Prosecutor General.²¹¹ According to Ionel Cană`s memoirs, Michael-Titus visited him and Braşoveanu and posed as a foreign journalist interested in promoting their cause.²¹² But the final report, rather than reflecting their position, shared a similar tone with the authorities discourse: The lists of names were fabricated,²¹³ Radio Free Europe was blamed for falling into subversion and into a type of militancy which was far from being political, but more akin to espionage, infiltration and terrorism.²¹⁴ In sum, the actions of SLOMR`s initiators were portrayed as foreign infiltrations into a country that was now paying the price of an independent foreign policy.²¹⁵

In the following years, RFE would again give voice to SLOMR`s initiators on several occasions. In 1981 it was the turn of Nicolae Dascălu to inform the listeners about his emigration to the USA and about the efforts of submitting an official complaint against the Romanian government.²¹⁶ Later in 1987, Ionel Cană left Romania and gave several interviews for the New York branch of RFE²¹⁷ and the BBC²¹⁸ about his efforts to organize an independent trade union

²¹¹ Constantin Michael-Titus, *Romania under Pressure*, vol. II (London: Panopticum Press London, 1981), 5.

²¹² Cană, *Sindicat liber și dictatură [Free trade union and Dictatorship]*, 1:145.

²¹³ Michael-Titus, *Romania under Pressure*, II:29.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, II:28.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, II:17.

²¹⁶ ACNSAS, *Fond Informativ*, dos. nr. I 258979, vol. 3, f. 41-42.

²¹⁷ Cană, *Sindicat liber și dictatură [Free trade union and Dictatorship]*, 1:93.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:95.

in 1979.²¹⁹ Moreover, in 1988 RFE announced that Ionel Cană along with 6 other members of SLOMR established an organization in the USA with the aim of promoting and supporting Romanian workers according to the principles and the statutes of the free international labor organizations.²²⁰ Once again, Romanians from abroad were all invited to join the organization and support the cause of Romanian workers.²²¹ Despite its idealistic aim, my research did not identify any noticeable activities from the organization.

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

The focus then shifted to labor disputes and Carl Gibson`s efforts in obtaining an official complaint against the Romanian government represent a breakthrough in the history of Romanian workers` actions against the authorities under state-socialism. The ILO`s pursuit for SLOMR`s legitimacy proves once more the Romanian authorities` unwillingness to engage in a real dialogue with the workers, as they attempted to negate their existence, discredit them and ultimately concealed the nature of SLOMR`s endeavors.

²¹⁹ ACNSAS, *Fond Informativ*, dos. nr. I 258979, vol. 4, f. 220-232.

²²⁰ `Articles of incorporation of The Free Trade Union of the Romanian Workers (SLOMR)`, 1 July 1988, Washington D.C. HU OSA 300-5-190: 38; RFE/RL Research Institute; Analytics Research Department; Records of Vlad Socor; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

²²¹ `Apelul SLOMR către poporul român din România și exil`. HU OSA 300-5-190: 38; RFE/RL Research Institute; Analytics Research Department; Records of Vlad Socor; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

Conclusions

This thesis has analyzed how human rights discourses sought to be appropriated and instrumentalized in matters concerning labor relations in state-socialist Romania. With the incorporation of transnational connections and the international actors of the period, this thesis brings a new perspective on the way in which Romanian workers addressed their grievances, while simultaneously highlighting the opportunities and the limitations of the human rights discourses in the 1970s.

Although a failed project, SLOMR case is of vital importance in understanding the reasons behind the scarcity of Romanian workers actions by highlighting the way in which the Helsinki Accords brought new resources for social movements. In doing so, it uses relative deprivation theory to reveal the mechanisms and the tools that could be used to support the workers' demands both nationally and internationally. In this respect, RFE played multiple roles in the development of the SLOMR movement. One would be their self-proclaimed objective of disseminating pieces of information about the development of human rights international documents and organizations since the 1975, which further accentuated workers' sense of relative deprivation, already triggered by their relations with the UGSR.

Secondly, SLOMR's deficit of organizational resources of individual groups sought to be compensated by external support networks, and again, RFE played a pivotal role in promoting their organization and in creating a channel of communication between people across the country. Based on the four stages framework, I proposed the idea that SLOMR unsuccessfully tried to bureaucratize, as this stage overlapped with the decline phase. In this sense, the structure of SLOMR is of a unique character, as the Coalescence stage started with the initial broadcast of the founding document at RFE in March 1979 followed by people's adherence to the organization by

sending letters, making phone calls and trying to contact the initial group. The bureaucratization stage was unsuccessful, as the state intervened and deployed repression against the adherents. Even though there were attempts to create other working groups or local committees, they were quickly silenced. In this sense, the decline phase was accelerated, which led to the demise of the endeavor at national level by the summer of 1979.

Nonetheless, the four-stage interpretative framework only partially contributes in revealing SLOMR`s development. It is for this reason that this framework was combined with the analysis of the transnational connections that contributed to the movement`s international exposure, as SLOMR`s struggle for legitimacy continued long after the movement`s repression by the Romanian authorities. The biggest achievement of the SLOMR movement consists in the collective efforts of obtaining an official complaint against the Romanian government within International Labor Organization, which represents a breakthrough in the history of Romanian workers` actions against the authorities under state-socialism.

By contributing to a seemingly separate Romanian historiography on workers actions on the one side, and the human rights movement on the other, this analysis also revealed the limitations of this discourse. Although human rights idiom was invoked to support SLOMR`s struggle, both by its initiators as well as their international supporters, the international agreements on the matter were not legally binding. In this respect, the invocation of human rights did not ultimately help in the implementation of their endeavor, but rather served as a resource for various organizations (Amnesty International, the French Committee for the Defense of Human Rights in Romania) to demand the release from prison of some of SLOMR`s initiators.

Moreover, even when the discussion of SLOMR`s legitimacy was pursued in terms of labor relations by the ILO, the Romanian authorities` tried to portray SLOMR as a committee for the defense of human rights, thus transforming the issue into a national one, as the Principle VII of

the Helsinki Final Act was not a matter of inter-state relations. As the ILO refused to accept this perspective, the Romanian authorities refused to engage in a real dialogue with the workers, as they attempted to negate their existence, discredit them and ultimately conceal the nature of SLOMR`s endeavors.

One of the limitations of this analysis was that it could not offer a definitive answer on the question of SLOMR`s number of sympathizers, due to the nature of the archival resources used. The materials from the Open Society Archives and the Gabany Anneli Ute fund from the Historical National Archives of Romania only partially reveal details about RFE`s programs and corporate discussions of the Romanian RFE unit that took place in period. Nevertheless, this might serve as a stepping stone for future research, as empirical contributions could be drawn from the consultation of the corporate materials as well as the recordings of RFE shows in the archival resources located in The Hoover Institute, USA.

Ultimately, this research has laid the foundation for comparisons of the SLOMR movement in Romania to other movements across Eastern Europe by highlighting SLOMR as one of the most salient attempt of a collective workers` stand against Romania`s political regime`s exploitation in the late 1970s through the appropriation of human rights discourse as a strategy for legitimization and attracting international attention.

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