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Romania's hunter of Communist criminals

In Romania, no one has been convicted for political crimes perpetrated under the Communist regime of Nicola Ceausescu. Marius Oprea succeeded recently in getting consideration of his proposed law to require the pensions of former Securitate officers to be shared with political prisoners.

Interview by Michel Bühner/Human Rights Tribune, back from Bucharest – Agents of the former Romanian secret service the Securitate are now required to share pensions with their former political prisoners, according to legislation proposed by the President of the [Institute for the Investigation of Communist crimes in Romania](#). Marius Oprea created the governmental agency in 2005 with the support of Prime Minister Calin Tariceanu to document serious abuses committed under the Communist regime that have never been punished. The task of the governmental agency is complicated by the fact that many former Communist aparatchicks are protected by their current positions in government or business.

On May 28, the legislation you have proposed was sent to the government and to the cabinet. It called for decreasing the amount of pension due former Securitate agents be decreased in favor of their former victims. Why did you decide to initiate this ?

Our judicial system has never defined these executions as crimes against humanity. For 25 years they have been considered 'normal' crimes.

You say that former Communist officials almost have more power now than before because they are everywhere, in government, the economy, business. What chance does this proposed law have in Parliament ?

I am confident in the pressure of public opinion because to vote against this law would be to admit being 'with them'. But it is true that we face enormous difficulties. For example, I sent two investigators to get a file from the Ministry of the Interior. When the official understood why we wanted it, he refused to allow them to see it although the file was in his office. We have a lot of evidence but nothing happens because these people are protected.

How do you conduct your research?

One third of the cases that we follow are the result of individual witnesses. People come to us seeking our help to find the body of family members or to denounce a person. For the rest, we initiate our own investigations. Of the 35 employees at the Institute, 20 are researchers.

Is the goal to accumulate documentation about these crimes ?

Not only. If we find something that might unlock a process, we communicate it to the prosecutor. It is he who will launch the investigation. But sometimes the prosecutors decline to

open a case under the pretext that we don't have the complete name or the address is missing. There are many officials from the former system, or their children, who are employees in the judicial apparatus and the police. It is difficult for them to question themselves.

Amongst the former generation who want to forget the past and the young who didn't know this period, is the population still interested in stirring things up?

Without any doubt. Everytime we reveal a case, it makes it into the newspapers and on television. There is clearly interest from the public. The media is our biggest ally. Another example, I give a university class on the history of the Securitate and it is always full. The third leg of our work moreover concerns education. We have organized a contest where young people must ask their parents about their stories of the Communist period.

What motivates you ?

Feelings of revenge, but not only personal ones. I was not a political prisoner although I was two inches away from being arrested just before the 'revolution' of 1989. But I've listened to hundreds of testimonies from victims and I think it is not too late to shine the light of truth on this period.

<http://www.humanrights-geneva.info/Romania-s-hunter-of-Communist,3204>