



## The organization of Romanian social memory after the December 1989 events

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### **Abstract**

*The social memory phenomenon causes debates nowadays, puts in opposition methodological schools, generates a series of incompatible theoretical positions. Proof that the concept of “social memory” “lived” its first age are the numerous research which regards the phenomenon, studies which led either to new theories of social memory (the theory of the organization of memory according to culture and interests is one of the acknowledged theories from which it starts in the development of the subject), or they certified the ones established until then. The present paper proposes as its objective to evaluate the factors which led to the readjustment of the social memory of the Romanian people after the events from 1989. I consider that the social memory can be organized under the influence of factors which acts unitary. As a result, I will analyze the connection between the political factor (decision – maker agents that can influence some contents of the collective memory) and the social one (the public opinion of the group that undergoes major alterations regarding the contents of memory). I initiated the investigation approach from the observation that certain contents of the social memory resignify themselves through the direct influence of the social group, the power structure having the role of putting into practice the community’s “desire”. The necessity of a unitary co-operation between the community and the decision factor for the achievement of a new mnesic construction is imperative. For that purpose, I will analyze the effects of the non-unitary actions of these factors against the social memory, being known that not always the decision factor and the social factor (the community) have the same attitudes towards certain mnesic contents. One can observe certain patterns concerning the organization of social memory in relation to these two factors, being analyzed the intentionality (what the two parts desire) and the purpose (the way in which a certain content “imprints” itself into the collective memory). The differences between the decision of the political factor to impose a certain content of the memory and the public opinions/attitudes concerning that particular content are produced more often than not, by different interests, which generates conflicts. In the present paper I will assess the function of the interests’ conflicts in the organization of the social memory.*

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### **Keywords**

*Social memory, collective memory, social remembrance*

### **Introduction**

This research paper has to be seen as an endeavor of description of some mnesic phenomena such as: the persistence of memories under the circumstances of the repeated endeavors of change; the change of the landmarks of memory; the resignification of some memories.

The analysis is deductive –from general to particular. This thing is valid both for the theoretical analysis and for the so-called research. Considering the fact that it is a field of study less known by the scientific community, I decided to present a short history of the term of social memory.

The research, although has as object the change of the memories of some communities, one cannot ignore the general social context. In this special case, the change of the denominations that used to bring to memory the communist regime could be considered a universal phenomenon valid for the societies from East Europe that have passed to democratic regimes. More often than not, the local communities, under the pressure of society have accepted the new denominations assigned to some places. There are cases in which denominations that would bring to memory the communist regime have persisted. The members of the community did not yield the pressure of the society and of the elite (political, intellectual) and have maintained their denomination. That is the case of the village 23 August from Constanța County, Romania, whose denomination, which brings to memory the National Day of Romania from the communist period, has been kept. The explanation of the persistence of this denomination is in keeping with the theory of the organization of the memory in terms of interests. The present study is based on this theory.

### **Social memory vs. collective memory**

Like other fields of sociologic research, social memory the way it appears today to the psycho-sociologic community is the resultant of some periods of intense accumulation of knowledge about this phenomenon. At the beginning the subject of social memory was approached by the French sociologist and philosopher Maurice Halbwachs.

The reasoning that imposed the social memory as a subject of research in social psychology is rendered by Septimiu Chelcea (2006, 259): “like each and everyone of us possesses a memory, through which we are ourselves, likewise societies possess a memory- *collective memory*. This reasoning, as well as the entire panoply of empirical data which he had at his disposal must have determined Maurice Halbwachs (1877–1945)

to impose a new concept and a new field of research-social memory upon the psycho-sociologists.

In 1925, Maurice Halbwachs publishes *Les cadres sociaux de la memoire* (*The social frameworks of the memory*), a paper which represents the first step of defining and theoretical framing of the social memory phenomenon. The title of the book suggests what Maurice Halbwachs' disciples have observed: the Durkheimian foundation of his work. The similarities between Émile Durkheim and Maurice Halbwachs views are numerous, but the most important elements and those which are relevant proportional to the theme approached in this paper are the following: the approach of social memory as a social fact and the relation of collective representations – social memory.

The defining of collective memory from the Durkheimian theoretico-methodological view implies a process of extrapolation of the distinctive characteristics of the social fact to the defining features of the social memory. According to Émile Durkheim (1895/2002, 5), the distinctive features of the social fact are: “the exteriority proportional to the individual consciousnesses” and “the coercive action which it exercises or which is liable to exercise over the collective consciousness. Further on, I will analyze the social memory from the perspective of these two aspects which describe a social fact.

At an epistemic level, one can state that it is a glaring mistake if we define social memory under the form of a summing up of individual memories. Adrian Neculau (1999, 180) indicates that social memory can be built leaving aside individual memories. The summing up of the individual memories does not signify social memory. The memories which are part of the collective memory are the result of an aggregation process on several levels: individual, collectivity, society. I consider this definition of the social memory limited concerning the perception of the essence of the social phenomenon put forward here because the role of the individuals bearing memories and other contents of collective memory are neglected. Maurice Halbwachs (1950/2007, 96) indicates the subordination relationship between the individual memories and the social memory:

Collective memory [...] comprises the individual memories, but it is not to be confounded with these ones. It progresses after its own laws, and if some individual memories sometimes infiltrate into it, these ones change their image once they are reorganized in an assembly which is not a personal consciousness anymore.

One can observe from the information mentioned in the previous paragraph that the social memory fulfills the first condition in order to be considered a social fact – the exteriority towards the individual consciousness.

The coercive action of the social memory towards the individual consciousness has represented the object of some empirical research which demonstrated this matter. Among these studies one can note those which approach the phenomena subjacent to the social memory like autostereotypes, the collective/national identity and the oblivion. Consonant with the information mentioned in this paragraph, Septimiu Chelcea

evidences this coercive character of the social memory through the metaphor of “the too tight tire” which “presses us”.

From a methodological point of view, some kind of caution is to be imposed in explaining the social memory phenomenon through reference to the theory of the social fact belonging to Émile Durkheim. The French sociologist judges that the social fact is characterized by an independence state in terms of its manifestations at an individual level. Furthermore, Émile Durkheim considered that we do not have to use the psychic facts in the sociological analysis. Nevertheless these very psychic facts make a difference for the study of the social memory.

There are authors which make use fallaciously of the terms “collective memory” and that of “social memory”. These authors consider the two terms interchangeable. Maurice Halbwachs (1925, 1950) used to discriminate the individual memory, the collective memory and the social memory. In the view of the French sociologist, the social memory represents the result of some processes of filtering, rebuilding and “essentialization” of the contents of multiple collective memories, which coexist in a geographical and cultural space (Constantin *et al.*, 2004, 58). Thus the collective memories are defined as being characteristic for each group respectively. A relevant example for the support of this idea are the memories of the deportees, of the refugees and of the distressed. Ticu Constantin (2004, 58) is of opinion that the collective memories “are conditioned by the common, social entourage and coexists, in the same time and space, with other collective memories, having not only common elements like these ones, but also differentiation elements.” Maurice Halbwachs (1925) has defined the collective memory with reference to the concept of “social entourage”, term which designates in the French sociologist’s outlook the social group and the milieu (or the social context) on which the social memory depends (Neculau, 1999, 180).

Moses Finley (1981) has an unhackneyed view towards the collective memory. He considered the collective memory as being a transmission to a large number of individuals of the memories of a single individual (or of more individuals), repeated in more sequences (Neculau, 1999, 32). Unfortunately neither this definition of the collective memory is exhaustive because is restricted to the consideration that the social memory means just transmission. The other two processes incident to the social memory and the collective memory (the codification and the retrieval) are not directly inferable from this definition. According to Michael Finley the collective memory does not transcend the individual experiences. Not every individual memory conveyed to a group of individuals and repeated in regains can be understood as a collective memory. The frame of defining the social memory comparative with the collective memory can be the same (the social group, the community). The thing that distinguishes the social memory from the collective one is the fact that the social memory, in the processes of storage and retrieval of information makes use of the intelligence acquired socially by the individuals. The social origin of the memory is given by the fact that “the memories are related with an assembly of notions utilized by the group which we followed throughout our existence. (Neculau, 1999, 180). Some psycho-sociologists advocate that the social memory has in its building several collective memories.

Ticu Constantin (2001, 146) suggests that a definition of the social memory with reference with the general pattern of the memory accepted by the majority of the psychologists. The social memory is defined as being: “a component of the episodic memory, which stocks information relating to the meaningful moments, facts and characters of the social life of a certain group or of a collectivity.” This definition is restricted to the social memory like a storage system of information by the human collectivities, without being emphasized as a significant element of the social memory “the flyback”, namely the retrieval of this stored information. Maurice Halbwachs demonstrated that both the stored information and the flyback are mnemonic processes owed to the social life. Practically one cannot talk about a social memory retrospectively to one single process, the storage one respectively, the “holding” of information, but we have to consider the other process complementary to the former mentioned—the one of retrieval of information. The theory of social frames of the memory shows that the social memory does not represent “the retention of images” but their “reconstruction”.

The storage of information is not possible however without their previous codification. Without codification the storage space of the information should be larger. Even if we acknowledge that the collective memory is “better” than the memory of the most performant member of a group (Clark and Stephenson, 1989) the fact that this too is limited has to be acknowledged. Roger M. Tarpy (1997) states the three phases<sup>2</sup> of memory: *encoding, storage and retrieval*.

The concept of “memory” is ambiguous, and by attaching the adjective “social”, which theoretically should make a distinction between “individual memory” and “social memory” results in even greater ambiguity. Alin Gavreliuc (2004, 94) talks about in his study about “the avatars of an ambiguous concept”. Though metaphorical, I consider that this wording renders very well the diversity of significations attached to the term of social memory. Maybe due to this ambiguity the term is not included in most dictionaries and foreign, but also Romanian sociology and psycho-sociology encyclopedias. It seems that the term of “collective memory” is most often explained in foreign dictionaries (by choice in professional French literature), being preferred to that of “social memory”. Among the dictionaries mentioned in the bibliography of this paper only *The Encyclopedia of psychosociology* contains the term of “social memory” and *The Dictionary of psychology* coordinated by Ursula Șchiopu contains only the terms with reference to the concept of “social memory” (“episodic memory”).

Septimiu Chelcea (2006, 221) defines “the social memory” as being “the system of storage and mental retrieval of information by the human collectivities (groups, communities, peoples).” An adequate definition. One can observe that this definition comprises all the others.

A proper definition of the social memory could be: “An emergent and continuous social process of manufacturing, storage and putting up-to-date of the information considered to be having the same signification for a human collectivity (group,

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<sup>2</sup> The three phases are not to be seen separately, but it is needed to have an overview in which these phases are part of some relations, constituting an ensemble.

community, people).” One can distinguish, in regard to the previous definitions that social memory can be regarded as an emergent product of a human collectivity because it has a spontaneous and unpredictable character as we shall see. The social memory is a continuous process of manufacturing, storage and putting up-to-date of the information, because this information are updated constantly, being converted or cleaned of the redundant load. It is retained, thus, only what is essential and what has signification for the collectivity.

In the research of the persistence of memories under the circumstances of some pressures for the changing of the political and intellectual elites I will demonstrate the spontaneous and unpredictable character of memory. The molding of memories according to the pressures of the society and of the elites can be shirked, when the interests of the communities infringe the new contents to be introduced.

### **The theory of the organization of the memory by culture and interests: Frederic c. Bartlett**

Below I will approach one of the fundamental theories on which this study is based. Achieving a series of well controlled experiments, Frederic C. Bartlett (1932) demonstrated that the waste in time of some information regarding certain events or facts occurred in the past is not due to oblivion, but to “the meaning reorganization of the memory” through the organization of mnesic information around a “significant element”<sup>3</sup> (Chelcea, 2006, 262).

In the British scholar’s view culture represents one of the fundamental manner of organization of the memory due to the attachment of significations procedure, discovered after the experiments. A suggestive example is that of the return from a trip to London of some African Swazi men, who evoked the image of a police officer who was running the traffic in an intersection from the British capital. The police officer’s gestures resembled very well with the greetings of the Swazi population (Chelcea , 2006, 262).

Both Halbwachs’ studies (1925, 1950) and that of Frederic C. Bartlett (1932) exhibit the creative character of the memory and the fact that the past can be modified according to the cultural requirements of the present (Haas, 2004, 96).

### **The organization of the social memory regarding the Romanian people after 1989**

#### ***Hypothesis and research methodology***

In the research undertaking one has started from the assumption that in democratic societies, any change in the content of the social memory suggested by the intelligentsia, can be undertaken only with the assent of the people. The acceptance of the change of the contents of the collective memory under the influence of the

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<sup>3</sup> Named "interest".

intelligentsia can be carried out in two ways: by “tame acquiescence” or by “acceptance obviously expressed” (ballot or opinions).

Several procedures have been used for the acquisition of data from the current research. The field of study of social/collective memory does not boast specific methods. This was noticed by Patrick Rateau (2010, 44) who believes that “The delineation of a methodology that would be appropriate to the study of the social memory could seem to be a difficult endeavor. Actually, there are neither instruments nor slide scales *ad hoc* of phenomena, nor specific methods for the acquisition of data.” Nevertheless, “surrogate” methods and techniques of research can be used, or better said borrowed from other fields of study.

The present study combines two classes of research methods: methods characteristic to sociology/psychosociology (case study, the study of social documents, secondary analysis of data) and methods characteristic to history (deductive method and analogous method). Being a psychosociologic research, one can note a greater weight of the methods and techniques borrowed from sociology. In the methodological field the two sciences, the psychosociologic study of the collective memory and history should work together (Ricœur, 2001). Even though some authors suggest for the study of memory a brewage of specific characteristic rather to psychosociology (Rateay 2010,44), history, through its methods and theories, could enrich the scientific knowledge about the memory of a group.

The novelty of this research is the desire to capture with a descriptive character resistance phenomena to the change of the memories of different communities. The descriptive approaches give the impression of a lack of methodological rigor, unlike those that also have an explanatory component. Unfortunately, the topic that I have chosen for this research and the data collected do not allow the analysis in depth of the phenomenon. For the most part, behind a refusal to change a memory can exist several explanations, at a declarative level. But, not always, what is expressed verbally can be considered to have the value of truth in bearing on the problems tackled. As a matter of fact, the theories from the field of the collective memory are general, descriptive, being in the same time poor in explanations. A certain breach between the theories of social memory and the empirical data is obvious. I believe that the Frederick C. Bartlett’s theory of the organization of the memory depending on interests is the most adequate for the analysis of the mnesic phenomena mentioned in this article.

The research regarding the mnesic processes that occur at the level of certain local communities are few in number. The research that have as object the change of the mnesic contents for societies prevail. Very rarely, researchers from the field of humanistic sciences bend on the analysis of the memories of a community. Even so, one has to appreciate the great number of research done on topics related to social memory appeared after Second World War. The fall of the totalitarian regimes in Europe and the establishment of the democratic regimes had led to profound social changes. The change of the people’s memories regarding the vanished communist regimes are characteristic to all societies that have had communist regimes. Research on the topic of memory witnessed a reversal in the entire world. In our country, after the December 1989 events

sociology and the research about the social memory grow in number. The appearance of the concept of “emergent sociology” has allowed researchers the framing of the sociology of memory among the so-called “emergent sociologies”. The studies about the memory of some local communities could be made apart from major social changes.

### **Results and discussion**

After the 1989 events the authorities have started a reorganization campaign of the social memory through the replacement of the cities and streets names, places which reminded of the communist past. Thus it came to a national process of resignification of some elements which could be considered reference marks reminding of the old system. In other words the Romanians have learnt how to forget, deliberately everything that reminded of the old system.

I feel inclined to believe that the renaming of the towns and streets after 1989 was an emergent intentional process. I say “intentional” because this fact was done with the gentlemen’s agreement of the communities. The term “emergent” which characterizes too the changing process of toponyms after the fall of communism shows the spontaneous and unpredictable character of the social memory. I believe that to create a strategy to reconstruct the social memory after a certain plan is a measure very hard to achieve because it requires the use of some various techniques and the control over people’s memories cannot be achieved entirely. Secondly, the intervention of a multitude of reorganization agents is needed, who through their cumulative effort can reorganize the contents of the social memory. Among these agents who have the role of reorganizing the social memory we mention: the political elites, the scientific communities, the institutions of the state, mass-media, highly cultivate men (writers, painters, sculptor etc.). These ideas represent the main element of this study.

The changing of toponyms phenomenon after the fall of communism is not encountered only in Romania. Journalist Marius Cosmeanu has carried out an investigation in the capitals of Balcan area and in Berlin, as part of a programme of Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN)<sup>4</sup> and arrived at the conclusion that in most European capitals the name of the streets that reminded of the communist system were changed. With the exception of East Berlin which still preserves the old names. Serge Moscovici, at the VIII<sup>th</sup> General Conference of the European Association of Social Experimental Psychology which took place in Budapest in July 1990, brought forward for discussion the problem of reorganization of the social memory in Hungary after the fall of communism by the renaming of the streets and boulevards (Chelcea, 1996, 117).

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<sup>4</sup> Source:<http://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-6384293-batalia-pentru-redenumirea-strazilor-studiu-caz-europa-est.htm> retrieved on 13.10.2010

### **23 August, Constanța County – a failed trial of reorganization of collective memory**

In order to maintain the idea that a consensus between the local community and the political factor is needed concerning the changing of a toponym I have chosen for a case study 23 August town from Constanța county.

The motivation of the choice of this town as a research subject is simple. 23 August from Constanța county is one of the few towns which still bear a name which reminds one of the communist past (or at least this is what some politicians think). Another town from Constanța county founded in the communist era which maintained the name that reminds one, more or less of the communist system is 2 May. The novelty in the case of 23 August town is that there were two trials of the local authorities to change the name after 1989 (in 1994 and 1996). The motivation for which the residents refused the renaming of their town into “The Union” like it was suggested is interesting. It supports *the theory of the organization of memory in terms of interests* by Frederic C. Bartlett.

The action of resignification of a place or of a naming of a town is not a one-sided act. The changing of a toponym implies a significant mnemonic effort from the part of the community. Here it is one of the theoretical assumptions that needs empirical testing.

23 August is a town with about 5000 inhabitants. The ethnic structure of the town<sup>5</sup> shows that about 90% of the inhabitants declare themselves Romanians and about 9% Crimean Tatars. 23 August is situated in the vicinity of several spas and of some economically developed areas. Nevertheless, the inhabitants have as a primary work the agriculture. Some of them work on the naval dockyards nearby or as a seasonal in tourism. It is well-known that, during the inter-war period the town was named Lady Helen and that the communists have changed the name of the town in 1945.<sup>6</sup>

Geographically, the 23 August town is situated between Constanța and Mangalia near the Tătlăgeacul Mare Lake. One must know that there were attempts of renaming the town after the name of the lake Tătlăgeacul Mare, but they failed. The Tatar population and that Turkish (especially the old) assigns sometimes to the town, in the ordinary talks the name of Tătlăgeacul Mare (*Balaban Tatlıcaq* in Crimean Tatar<sup>7</sup> or *Büyük Tatlıcak* in Turkish) how an inhabitant of the town<sup>8</sup> confessed by chance. Even the Romanian inhabitants of the town use sometimes the name of Tătlăgeacul Mare for the town according to the same source. Tătlăgeacul Mare Lake is in fact a nautical harbor according to the geographers. What is interesting is that the ownership over the crystal of the water with a surface of 63759,7 mp was tabulated illegally by the Local Board of the 23 August town only in 2003. In other words there were a lot of issues raised by the usage in administration of the name Tătlăgeacul Mare for the town 23 August so long

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<sup>5</sup> Source: [http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/23\\_August,\\_Constan%C8%9Ba](http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/23_August,_Constan%C8%9Ba) retrieved at 13.10.2010

<sup>6</sup> Unsifted information.

<sup>7</sup> There are three Crimean dialects encountered in Dobrogea: Crimean Tatar (after the place of birth of the population who speaks this dialect), Noghai Tatar (after the name of a Tatar leader) and the sea-coast Tatar dialect (identified among the Tatars who live at the beach side).

<sup>8</sup> Named, conventionally, hereinafter S.N.

as the lake in the vicinity of the town was not situated in the public domain of the town. Only by a government act from 2009 the lake has entered in the public domain of the town.

The town of 23 August was founded by the Turks and Tatars. As an evidence there is a testimony of a schoolmaster named Miu Crăciun from 1946:

“This village, formed in times immemorial, nobody knows when it was founded. It is known that it was founded by the Turks and by the Tatars. In 1888 4 families of Romanians came here: Nic. Lungu, N.R. Lungu, Nic. Novac and Nic. Moise. In 1924 colonizers who settled in the east part of the village came. Nowadays the population is entirely Romanian. There are only 10 Turk families, who will leave in the spring.” (Șandru, 1946, 163)

The rise to power of the communists meant the renaming from Lady Helen into 23 August. It is easy to understand the impulse for which this change was made taking into account the royalistic sonority of the name “Lady Helen”. Nowadays, in the 23 August town there is a street named “Lady Helen”, probably in memory of the inter-war name of the town.

The authorities’ attempts between the years 1994 and 1996 to change the name of the town from “23 August” into “Tătlăgeacul Mare” and “The Union” have failed. The obtrusion into the collective memory of the name “The Union” has met with a refusal from the part of the local community. It has to be mentioned that in Romania there were other towns or villages which bore the name of 23 August. In this instance the changing of the name did not face any problems. Thus the town of 23 August from Tulcea County became the town of I.C. Brătianu by the 86 law from 15th September 1995, and the town of 23 August from Vaslui County received the name of Floreni, by the 35 law from 18th May 1996. Nevertheless one can notice that in the case of these two names of towns the change was made after upwards of five years from the fall of communism. By way of proof we have been left the political discussions about the renaming of the towns which have a name with a communist sonority, the stenograph of the debates from the House of Commons from 25th March 1996. The subject of the discussion was: *The enactment of the bill concerning the changing of the name of some towns from Romania and of the bill for the modification of Law nr.2 /1968 concerning the administrative organization of the territory of Romania*. By analyzing these discussions we can draw interesting conclusions. The debate is not limited only to the changing of the name of only one town, but to the changing of the names for a multitude of towns among which we mention: the town of 23 August Constanța, the town of 23 August Tulcea county, the town of Oțelul Roșu (The Red Steel).

From these debates one has to take into account a few aspects. The renaming of the towns has to be a political decision based on the inhabitants’ desiderata:

“now we introduce, in the modifications which we propose at Law nr. 69, that the resolutions should be put into operation from below, from local boards, to exist their decisions. However, there is in the current law, in Law nr. 69, a provision,

according to which any modification of the administrative-territorial partition-and we consider this to be a modification of the law concerning the administrative-territorial partition-must be done in consultation with the citizens from the respective towns, by referendum. However, we have not enacted the form of development of the referendum, so that, practically, we do not have a text.”<sup>9</sup>

The view is taken also by the UDMR deputy Ladislau Borbély:

“I consider that it would be an unicum if we voted, and I think that neither from a procedural point of view should we accept this thing. Therefore, we cannot put in the meeting such a resolution when Law nr. 69/1991 and its subsequent modifications too, including the subscription by the Romanian government of *The European Charter of the local autonomy* makes provision for this incumbency, to consult the local communities in such matters. Therefore, from a procedural point of view, the committee would be in the wrong, if the resolution were put to the vote.”<sup>10</sup>

The second course of action on which the discussions of the House of Commons are structured make reference to the historical justification of the new names. Here there is the intercession of the deputy Petre Țurlea relevant for this matter:

“I take advantage of this small break, to tell you the following thing: almost three weeks ago, I preferred an amendment to this list to the committee. I have observed that, in the main majority of the cases, these modifications, prompted through the respective list and approved by the committee, have at the basis the historical criterion. Consequently, in my amendment, having at its basis strictly this historical criterion, I made a proposition related to a town from Transilvania, to Odorhei.”

In the matter of this discussion concerning the return of some town to their preceding names, things are not so clear. Ionel Fleșariu, participant of those discussions from the part of the government shows:

“All the names whose changing is submitted, from Tulcea, actually, were introduced around 1983. The old names were very old. For instance, in Geographic, statistical and historical dictionary from 1896, drawn up by Grigore Dănescu, these names are mentioned: Pardina, Jurilovca and so forth. There were not some superior reasons which, in 1983, have led to the changing of these names. If you wish, in a justification received from Tulcea county, for Jurilovca (maybe what I have to say now is derisive, but I mark it at the first item), quoth he this modification of name had been made because the leader of the state at that time, having speech difficulties, could not pronounce “Jurilovca” and then he said it should be named “The Union” (I wrote here this justification). Hence, the inhabitants, in all reason, request assertively, to come back to the old names. For

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<sup>9</sup> The intercession of Ionel Fleșariu in the House of Commons.

<sup>10</sup> Except from the stenograph of the discussions from the House of Commons on the 25<sup>th</sup> March 1996.

instance, Pardina is an old village of Lippovans, we all know it this way: Jurilovca the same way. These are the present names, and the inhabitants of these villages, citizens of the respective county and even those from all over the country call them at the present day, like they use to be, and not after the new names.”

One can notice from Ionel Fleşariu’s speech a justification of the coming back to the old names – the previous renaming’s by choice some of them were not made on the strength of some sound arguments.

The debates concerning the signification of the day of 23rd August are important in understanding the changing decision of the name of the town from “23 August” to “The Union” or “I. C. Brătianu”. Here there is a justification of deputy Viorel Munteanu for keeping the name of “23 August” in which case the citizens refuse the renaming.<sup>11</sup>

“There is no problem, history has both good and bad data! Those who have to appreciate them are not those who live in a certain strict period of time, but they will appreciate history, after 100 years, after 200 years..., but these are the data from history, some appreciate them in a sense, others appreciate them in another. I say that, being memorable data from Romania’s history, must be left the way they are. As far as the change is concerned “23 August” into “I.C. Brătianu”, I have nothing against it, there is “I.C. Brătianu” Boulevard, but “23 August” is a historical day, from Romania’s history, it is not necessarily related to communists or anything else. Therefore, historians still discuss about 23 August. I do not want to recount here what they discuss, that it was good, that it was bad, that we reversed arms, but it is still a memorable historical date for the nation, not necessarily related to the instauration of the communist system in Romania.”

Adrian Năstase, the president of the House of Commons at that date points out what the tendency of the discussion should be concerning this historical date and these names of towns. In the former president of the House of Commons’ view, everything that should matter in the making of the decision is the citizens’ desideratum:

“I make a motion that we should not skirmish in historical debates, here the problem is rather simple, the people in the respective towns or villages have taken some decisions, we respect them or not. If we like certain names, we can struggle to rename the towns/villages in which we live as we want them. Otherwise, however, I consider it to be normal to take into account the inhabitants’ point of view. If they do not like it to be called in a certain way, why should we make them..., especially if there are historical reasons. I propose that we should take into account the proposer’s point of view related to this matters and it has neither rhyme nor reason to discuss now if the 1st of May was important or not, 23 August was important or not... It is an issue for history seminars, not for our discussion today.”

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<sup>11</sup> The argumentation is rather interesting. One can mark out that the day of 23<sup>rd</sup> August is not, in the deputy’s opinion, a day of sad memory. Moreover he considers this date as being retainable: “memorable”.

Another problem that should be put to the issue is the signification of the two names raised for discussion “23 August” and “The Union”. It is known that the present name of the village 23 August makes reference to a historical event – the act of reversing the Romanians’ arms against the German army in 1944. Labelled by some historians as a gesture of cowardice from the part of the Romanian army, the event was exploited by the communists as an act of bravery that must be celebrated. A series of arrangements were made to impose this event on the Romanians’ social memory. Therefore, the original names of some towns or villages by the name of “23 August” have been changed, a stadium was built bearing this name and, perhaps the most important thing, the day of 23rd August was declared national day. The other name (“The Union”) makes reference to the unification of Dobrogea with Romania from 1878. One could speculate that this name brings conflicts with the Turkish or Tatar populations from the region in as far as the events from 1878 do not have a positive signification for these two communities.

As a matter of fact the reason for which the citizens of the village made a stand against the new naming was entirely different. At the beginning of the 90s the village of 23 August was one of the villages in full blast turistically speaking. The requisite of some profits from touristic activities was created for the population of the village. There were two kinds of tourists that visited the area. The first kind, less numerous was made up of those who visited the area for the archaeological remnants (near the village of 23 August there are numerous archaeological sites dating from the Greco-Roman era). The second kind was represented by those who practiced a recreational tourism by means of such activities as going to the beach in spas like Mamaia, Costinești, Olimp.<sup>12</sup>

Like S.N. mentions the inhabitants of the village of 23 August refused the changing of the name lest the tourists should find this village with more difficulty. It seems that even the present mayor of the village of 23 August, Mugar Viorel Mitrana advocates the theory according to which the inhabitants refused the changing of the name of the village for economic reasons.<sup>13</sup>

This is how the population’s economic interests led to the keeping of the name of 23 August. Another argument for the maintenance of the name of 23 August could be that on the 23rd August 2008 the European Parliament adopted *The Proclamation concerning the enouncement of the date of 23 August as “The European day of celebrating the victims of Stalinism and fascism.”*<sup>14</sup>

Under the terms in which the local authorities from the village of 23 August, Constanța county have in progress a project of transforming this village in one of the most high-end holiday resort, the changing of the name becomes a political desideratum increasingly hard to achieve.

The inception of a case study on this theme could defend Frederic C. Bartlett’s theory *the theory of organizing the memory according to interests*. The political and social

<sup>12</sup> S.N.

<sup>13</sup> Source: [http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/23\\_August,\\_Constan%C8%9Ba](http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/23_August,_Constan%C8%9Ba) retrieved at 13.10.2010.

<sup>14</sup> Referring to 23 August 1939, the date of the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop treaty.

factors should act uniformly when a change of the name of a street or town is wanted. Although there are data which defend this theory in the case of the village of 23 August from Constanța however it is mandatory a thorough research centred round the psychosociological dimension of the phenomenon under discussion and for choice on the way how the memory is organized pursuant to interactions among people on the one hand and, between man and society on the other hand (Chelcea, 1996, 119).

### ***The persistence of the marks that remind us of the communist period after 1989***

Not all toponyms that reminded one of the communist period were changed after 1989. For that purpose we can mention the case of some places in Bucharest. Moghioroș square has remained under this name even now in the local's consciousness. Even the park of Moghioroș remains on the local's consciousness under this name although the authorities of the capital city of Bucharest have renamed it Drumul Taberei Park (The Road of the Camp Park). I was surprised when one of my acquaintances<sup>15</sup>, in a discussion had used these two names of these places, although he/she lived for a short while in the neighborhood:

I do not know where the name of Moghioroș comes from...My sister who lives for four years in the neighborhood, she taught me the name.

The theory of the social amnesia can explain these phenomena. The social amnesia, even if it enters the field of the oblivion phenomena, it differentiates from these in that once lost some significations of some places, these "fall into oblivion" forever, remaining in people's memory like some forms voided of significations: "Thus it is a matter of a process of social amnesia, owed to a deficiency of our memory, which does not apprehend but forms, forgetting their significations" (Stahl, 1983, 260). Henri H. Stahl gives as an example the act of keeping one's fingers crossed, an act voided of signification but one which has remained in the people's memory being practiced almost ritual-like by most of us when somebody needs luck. Such as consensual truth that arises from the people's consensus that the respective event took place, this belief too has signification due to the fact that the members of the community practice it.

One can draw the conclusion that out of this two examples that the simple change of some plaques on a street does not lead to the change of the name of the street in the inhabitants' consciousness. A certain amount of time is needed for the assessment of the new name and the forgetfulness of the old one.

The changing of toponyms after 1989 was a pervasive phenomenon. I personally consider that it did not exist a reorganization plan of the memory after 1989 and for that purpose I can bring several arguments: the changing of guiding marks was done gradually; the political factor did not have all over the same role in changing the guiding marks (here can be recalled the resistance to change cases mentioned above); the authorities' lack of feedback in resistance cases to the reorganizing of the social memory. A consensus between the political decision and the society's interests is necessary in the case of the changing of a name of town/village or street.

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<sup>15</sup> Named conventionally I.L.

## Conclusions

The study in evidence does not render all the dimensions of the social memory phenomenon having to the utmost extent an explorative character and in the slightest degree an explanatory character, like many studies sacred to this subject. Nevertheless certain sociological explanations used in this paper will be used as basis for future research of the social memory.

The lack of consensus between the political decision and the public opinion concerning certain contents of the memory that are to be imposed to be resignified can generate interests conflicts. More often than not the public opinion had fundamental role in changing or the keeping of some toponyms in our country after 1989. The tacit acceptance of the new names imposed by the political factor is the expression of the consensus between the political factor and the social one and of their unitary action. It can be outlined, on the strength of these conclusions a bifactorial causal model of the organizing of the social memory.

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