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Anticommunist armed resistance

**C**ommunist resistance was a subversive or open form of opposition that began in the second half of the 1940s. Its objectives were mainly expel the Soviet occupier, stop the country's communisation and overthrow the communist regime and defend national institutions, including the monarchy. Anti-communist resistance had a national character, provided by the spread of resistance groups across the territory of the entire country, and brought people of all ages together and from all social categories, including peasants, intellectuals, public servants, former officers in the royal army, priests, pupils, students, etc., as well as former members of political parties (Liberals, National Peasants, Social-democrats and Legionnaires).



**A**part from shows of passive opposition, anti-communist resistance also manifested itself through the creation of several armed paramilitary groups and organisations. Of these, one part recruited members, organised, acquired weapons and ammunition, but did not engage in fighting the communist regime, instead waiting for a future conflict between Soviets and Anglo-Americans. Other groups withdrew to the mountains and engaged into direct fighting with the communist authorities. These were armed resistance groups, the vanguard of the resistance movement, and their members were known as 'partisans' or sometimes 'outlaws' (for example, members of the organisation led by Gavrila Olteanu - 'Outlaws of Avram Iancu' -, and groups led by colonel Arsenescu and major Dabija). In the Securitate documents, the main institution involved in the fight against anti-communist resistance, mountain fighters are identified as 'bandits,' 'fugitives,' 'terrorists,' 'enemies of the people,' 'counterrevolutionaries' or 'legionnaires.'



**A**long with partisans, who effectively fought in mountains and forests, there were people supporting them, usually local villagers - the support network - who supplied food, equipment or accommodation. Some were brutally punished by communist authorities for support offered to anti-communist fighters.

**I**n spite of the harsh conditions, the number of resistance organisations was significant. Thus, according to Securitate documents, from 1945 to 1959 no less than 1,196 resistance groups were uncovered. Of these, just in 1949 there were 200 subversive groups identified, as well as thirty-three 'terrorist gangs' (partisan groups).

**T**he actions of armed resistance groups were most of all defensive; their members did not engage in acts of sabotage against military, industrial or communication objectives. They did not attack the local population or state institutions, but only used available weaponry in response to actions organised against them by Securitate troops. Among the few exceptions were the attack against the gendarmerie of Teregova (Banat) in 1949 and the attack against authorities in the village of Baisoara, from the Western Carpathian Mountains. Partisans did not hesitate to punish those who betrayed the movement.

**A**mong the active methods used by resistance organisations were the writing and spreading of manifestoes, word of mouth propaganda or attempts to get support from western countries or, after the Soviet-Yugoslav split of 1948 from Tito's Yugoslavia.

**T**he first resistance groups emerged in Bukovina during the spring of 1944 in response to the advance of Soviet troops into Romanian territory. Established in March 1944, with the agreement of the withdrawing Romanian authorities, the 'Bukovina' Regional Fixed Battalion was made up of 1,378 volunteers and was to act against Soviet troops. Only a few months after its creation, a number of its members were captured by Germans and, after 23 August 1944, by the NKVD and deported to labour camps in Siberia.

**I**n May 1944, as a reaction to crimes and looting committed by Soviet troops against the local population, partisans groups emerged in Bukovina. The most important of these were led by Vladimir Macoveiciuc, Vladimir Tironiac, Ion Vatamaniuc, Constantin Cenusă and Petre Maruseac, each of whom had a staff of between fifteen and 120 partisans. They too fell victims to the NKVD, were caught, tortured, executed, while others were sent to Siberia where they disappeared.

**S**ome of the partisans not captured by Soviets remained in hiding and continued actions against the Red Army and, after 6 March 1945, against the communist-led government. At the same time, new resistance groups were established in Bukovina, especially after 1948. The most lasting of them was led by Gavril Vatamaniuc which held on until 1955 when some of its members were executed by the Securitate and others, including Vatamaniuc, were arrested and condemned to hard years of prison.

**T**he 'National Resistance Movement' (MNR), established in September 1945 by General Aurel Aldea, Admiral Horia Macellariu, General Constantin Eftimiu and Lieutenant Colonel Eugen Plesnila was one of the most important resistance organisations in the initial period of communist power instatement. The MNR had the objective of overthrowing the communist regime, getting the country out of Soviet occupation, organising an armed resistance movement behind Soviet troops after the outbreak of war between the United States and the Soviet Union, protecting the king and other figures of political life.

**F**ounders of the MNR formed a complex organisation that included a Central Command, led by General Aldea and eight territorial action areas, with food supplies and weapon and ammunition stores. The organisation had connections in the Royal Palace, in the ministries, in the General Staff, in the political and business life, from which it received military and political information, as well as financial support.

**M**NR attempted to bring the resistance movement in the country under a single command. To this end, it contacted and included in its fighting plans other organisations, such as 'Outlaws of Avram Iancu,' 'Voice of Blood,' 'Sinaia Armed Group,' etc.

**H**owever, the MNR activity did not get beyond the organisational phase, as the group was infiltrated by the state's intelligence structures and dissolved in 1946. During the same year, the first trial of MNR was held. Those who escaped the first wave of arrests, among which was Admiral Horia Macellariu, tried to recreate the movement's central command, but from 1948 were caught and convicted in several subsequent trials.

**B**etween 1947 and 1948, in the context of an increasing communist repression against those considered enemies of the new regime, resistance movements multiplied. The peak period of the armed resistance movement was between 1948 and 1955; fighting groups could be found everywhere in the country, in Banat, Arad, Vrancea, Maramures, Western Carpathians, Dobruja, Oltenia, Arges-Muscel, Fagaras and Bukovina.

**T**he non-interventionist attitude of western powers during the Hungarian Revolution in the autumn of 1956 ended hopes of Romania's anti-communist resistance groups in the possibility of external support (the myth of the Americans coming) and of a war starting with the objective of liberating Eastern Europe from Soviet occupation.

**B**etween 1957 and 1958, under the pressure of new waves of repression, a final push by the last resistance groups took place. These were eliminated, however, and the armed resistance movement ended, even if the hunt for partisans continued during the following years. Colonel Gheorghe Arsenescu, who had established the group called 'Outlaws of Muscel' in 1948, was captured in 1960, after a period when he stayed hidden. Ion Gavrilă-Ogoranu (the 'Romanian National Army' group), who escaped from the Securitate trap in 1955, stayed hidden until 1976, when he was eventually captured.

**T**he failure of the anti-communist resistance movement during the first years of the new regime was caused by several factors. Partisans were few, poorly equipped with weapons left from the war, and did not manage, with the exception of some isolated cases, to coordinate at a national level. Against them, the communist regime mobilised important military forces, were well equipped and trained. The main intervention force was the Securitate troops. They were joined in their fight against partisans by the border guards and rural militia offices. On the other hand, if the support expected by partisans from the West failed to come, the newly established communist regime was supported by the USSR with equipment and military training.

**M**any partisans were killed in fights with police forces, while others chose to commit suicide rather than fall into the hands of Securitate (including Vladimir Macoveiciuc, Ion Uta, Gogu Puiu, Gheorghe Corneliu, etc.). Of those captured by the Securitate, some were taken from detention centres and killed; others were sentenced to death and executed. Thousands of people who offered help to partisans were convicted to hard years of prison.

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