

UDPR or “A Fictitious Reality”: The Lesser-Known Aspects of the History of the Union of Democratic Priests in Romania

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Abstract:

The Union of Democratic Priests in Romania was a subordinate pro-Communist organisation created by the Romanian Communist Party in 1944 as part of the national front strategy imposed by the Soviets in occupied Eastern Europe. Its aim was to rally Romanian Orthodox clergy who, because of their strong traditional anti-communism, would not otherwise be willing to join the RCP or other pre-existing subordinate organisations. The RCP needed to “re-educate” and “politically mobilise” the priests rather than antagonise them until it was fully in power. Although the UDPR is mentioned in many studies of the establishment of the Communist regime in Romania (especially its first leader, Fr. Constantin Burducea, and its most famous manifestation, the General Congress of Priests, 16 and 17 October 1945), little is known about it. This dearth of information is partly because of the lack of historical evidence for other aspects of the UDPR’s existence and partly because historians probably regard the UDPR as inconclusive and uninteresting at a time of transition when a whole world was collapsing, and other events/political formations seemed more appealing. Be that as it may, there are still interesting aspects to be discovered about the UDPR, which we try to address in this study and which ultimately help us to better understand the changes in the relationship between church and state that began at that time and, more broadly, the turbulent period between 1944 and 1948. Based on Romanian and Soviet archival documents, newspapers of the time and published diaries, this study aims to shed light on some lesser-known aspects, such as the UDPR’s relationship with other pro-Communist organisations and with the ministry for religious denominations, the reason why the Soviets refused to send a delegation to the General Congress of Priests, the UDPR’s official newspaper and the involvement of two of its members (Constantin Burducea and Constantin Dolea) in the repression, namely in the first arrest of Father Arsenie Boca in 1945.

Keywords: *The Union of Democratic Priests in Romania; Romanian Communists; USSR; Ministry for Religious Denominations; Lumina Creştină.*