

ROMANIAN ARCHITECTS IN POLITICAL RECLUSION. THE VIRGIL ANTONESCU CASE*

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Abstract. Since the earliest times the authorities have identified the major social impact that architecture creation would have and acted consequently. As for the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century, the positions were totally different. Fascism started from what Mussolini said that ‘the new Italy needs a new architecture’. Sorin Vasilescu once stated that ‘*during those two decades of Italian dictatorship, there was no case – not even the exception that proves the rule – of an architect to have been the victim of any kind of repression.*’ In the Nazi Germany, the professionals who would not comply with the fundamental instructions given by the political sector for the state art and take part in other forms of artistic expression, would miss out on the major projects. The third case, the Bolshevik, is already known today – either a bullet in your head or a one-way trip to Siberia. The present study aims to bring to light what happened to the architects who protested or tried to enjoy a certain freedom in Romania between 1944 and 1964. Even though architect Virgil Antonescu had not been involved with politics and had no sympathies, he was active with George Manu’s efforts, his brother-in-law, to build a network of anti-communist resistance in the mountains. Along with Manu and his fellows, he identified possibilities of laying out hiding places, set up hosts, examined the strategy of a quick return and sheltering in the mountains and finding supplies during the conflict times. Architect, restorer and political prisoner, Virgil Antonescu is a leader of his generation from two points of view. Spiritual – he morally resisted the communist assault, by his conduct during prison time – and also professional, as he was an active presence in the restoration of historical monuments during the 6th-9th decades of the last century.

Rezumat. Puterea a identificat încă din cele mai vechi timpuri impactul social major pe care-l are creația de arhitectură, acționând în consecință. În ceea ce privește regimurile totalitare ale secolului XX, atitudinile au fost diferite. În cazul fascismului, pornindu-se de la afirmația lui Mussolini conform căreia noua Italie avea nevoie de o nouă arhitectură, așa cum spunea profesorul Sorin Vasilescu: „*în cele două decenii de dictatură italiană nu a existat nici măcar un caz – nici excepția care să fi confirmat regula – de arhitect care să fi fost victima unei forme de represieune*”. În cazul Germaniei naziste, profesioniștii care nu respectau direcțiile fundamentale trasate de politic în ceea ce privea arta de stat și participau la alte forme de expresie artistică, pierdeau comenzile majore. Cazul celei de-a treia ipostaze – cea bolșevică – este astăzi cunoscut: glonțul în ceafă sau voiajul siberian. Studiul de față și-a propus să descopere ce-au pățit arhitecții care au protestat sau au încercat să-și păstreze o formă de independență în România anilor 1944–1964. Deși nu a făcut politică și nici nu avea simpatii anume în acest sens, arhitectul Virgil Antonescu participă la efortul cumnatului său George Manu de organizare a unei rețele de rezistență anticomunistă în munți. Alături de Manu și trimiși ai acestuia identifică posibilități de amenajare a unor ascunzători, stabilește gazde, studiază modalitățile de retragere spre munte și aprovizionare în caz de conflict. Arhitect restaurator și deținut politic, Virgil Antonescu se plasează ca lider al generației sale prin cel puțin două componente. Cea spirituală pe coordonatele rezistenței morale în fața asaltului comunist – evidențiată în mod special de comportamentul său în detenție – dar și cea profesională, participând consistent la efortul restaurării monumentelor istorice din deceniile 6-9 ale secolului trecut.

Virgil Antonescu was born in Bucharest, on the 5th of December 1909, the son of Sultana and Lazăr. He attended the middle school classes until 1920, and then he enrolled in the ‘Matei Basarab’ high school that he graduated in 1928. In 1937, he was awarded the degree of license from the Academy of Architecture in Bucharest. He was employed, between 1936 and 1941, in the position of architect with the City Hall of district 1 Yellow (for a certain period, the districts were given a colour code). He married Gabriela Storck¹ in 1938 and divorced her the same year. In 1939, he married Elena Manu, councilman Ion Manu’s daughter and the sister of Gheorghe Manu, the scientist. In the year of 1941, architect Antonescu won a competition-based scholarship for Accademia di Romania² in Rome, while working for Grandi Film Storici at the same

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¹ Architect, one of the daughters in the family of painters and sculptors Frederic Storck and Cecilia Cuțescu-Storck.

² The school was opened in 1922 as a follow-up of a law of 1920 ratified by the Romanian Parliament, supported by Nicolae Iorga and Vasile Pârvan, which was stipulating the opening of Romanian academies abroad. Between 1922 and 1947, this school was granting scholarships to the most brilliant Romanian graduates. The institution was closed after 1947 by the Bucharest authorities and will continue its activity under the name of the Romanian Library in Rome until 1990 when it regained its former status.

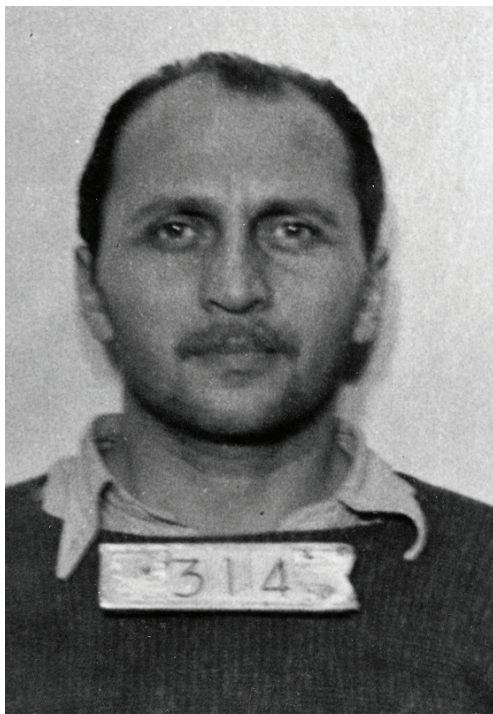


Fig. 1. Antonescu Virgil's booking photograph.

time. Two years later, he was assigned the development works for the ONT (The National Office for Tourism) in Rome. At the end of 1943, he returned to Romania, was enlisted for the Moldova battlefield in Piatra Neamț. The events on August 23rd, 1944 found him there – he will be discharged without having been an active soldier.

Even though he had not been involved with politics and had no such sympathies, he was active with George Manu's efforts, his brother-in-law, to build a network of anti-communist resistance in the mountains. Along with Manu and his fellows, he identified possibilities of laying out some hiding places, set up hosts, examined the strategy of a quick return and sheltering in the mountains and finding supplies during the conflict times. The Securitate (Department of State Security – secret police agency during communism) finds out and a Note from the General Directorate for the Security of the People – DGSP – says that urgent measures of tracking down must be taken all over the country, to take Antonescu into custody and placed him under strict watch.³ The order is reinforced and completed a few days later.⁴ The time during which the architect was a fugitive, since the time when this fact was made public until his arrest, lasted for almost 12 months. After managing to miraculously escape several attempts of being apprehended, under the charge of conspiracy against the

social order, architect Virgil Antonescu was arrested on 27.10.1949.⁵

The documents of the criminal records include a series of interrogation reports, relevant for both the biographical data and also for the dates when he was a fugitive. They are a genuine picture of a real harassment, the attempts of fleeing the country and the help that he was given by other people. In a first statement,⁶ we find out that upon his return from Moldova, while sick, he lived in Scrioaștea Commune in Teleorman County and later he moved to the vineyard estate belonging to the family, located in Chițorani-Prahova Commune, until the end of March 1945. When asked about his political activity after August 23rd, 1944, he admitted to have worked with George Manu, but he was permanently trying to diminish the role played within the organization. He was saying that he had agreed with his brother-in-law's request provided that the organization did not have a legionary purpose and insisted on him being used in the field only for the above-mentioned conflict, between the sunset and sunrise.

He slipped in the information that Manu had assured him that no assault would happen on either individual personalities or a group. Should a war have broken out between the USSR and the Anglo-Americans, the members of this organization would have withdrawn in the mountains, in places already established. There, they would have contacted various groups, recruited new members and looked for the possibly isolated fugitives. The main actions of the organization thus built aimed to obstruct the destruction of the communication channels (in that geographical area) of the military transportation.⁷ He did not deny whatsoever that he had provided the group, as a passionate climber as he was, military maps on a 1/100.000 scale on the mountaineering area from Penteleu to Făgăraș. He took two engineers into the mountains for

³ A.C.N.S.A.S., Informative Collection, File no. 263413, vol. 1, p. 10. Note on 9.11.1948.

⁴ *Idem*, p. 15. Note on 13.11.1948.

⁵ A.C.N.S.A.S., Penal Collection, File no. 465, vol. 1, p. 75. The arrest warrant.

⁶ *Idem*, vol. 4, pp. 270-272. Statement made in the presence of the investigation authorities on 31.10.1949.

⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 244-247. A statement given in the presence of the investigation authorities on 21.11.1949.

an exploration of a prospective area for future meetings but he insisted he had only had the role of a guide – later on, he even dismissed the statement of ever having met the two men. He stated that George Manu had told him at the beginning of March 1948 that he would leave the country, considering the internal and external political circumstances; shortly after they had found that they were on the wanted list, they started going into hiding and stopped doing any political activity – whatever the Securitate meant by this term back then.

On July 17th, 1950, the trial of the group debuted at the Military Court of Bucharest, department II. During the few minutes that architect Antonescu had available to defend himself, he changed his previous statement during the initial investigation. He said that he had never been part of his brother-in-law's organization, that he had denied all Manu's requests and had never been involved in politics. He admitted to taking two trips in the mountains with two engineers and said that he was not aware of their purpose. As for having been hosted by various people while he was a fugitive, he said that their relations were of strictly friendship and that he had never disclosed it to anyone that he had been on the run.⁸ The sentence that was given and read in the public meeting on 17.07.1950 was reading: *"The legionary movement, initiated and inspired by the German fascism, has raised its followers at the school of crimes and treason. While fighting for overthrowing the present government, they never stopped short of anything. Hence, besides their disloyal acts that are known from the other files, the defendants in this file built a legionary organization, under the leading of their legionary commander Gheorghe Manu, fighting against the working class and the popular democracy regime, while committing treason acts towards their Country".*⁹

In compliance with article 209, paragraph III of the Penal Code, along with article 157 of the Penal Code, single art. in Law 212/948, art. 304, 463 of the Military Justice Code, in unanimity of votes, architect Virgil Antonescu was sentenced to 10 (ten) years of heavy imprisonment, 5 (five) years of civic degradation, 5000 (five thousand) lei in court fees and the asset forfeiture.¹⁰

We do not hold any information about the moment when the architect was transferred to the labour camps at the Danube-Black Sea Canal. But what we know is that he was already in the sector 0893 Peninsula¹¹ on September 27th, 1950, coming from Poarta-Albă (starting with August). He will not be exempt from the



Fig. 2. George Manu, the architect's brother-in-law.

⁸ *Ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 40. An examination minutes for the accused person. We can very easily imagine the brutality of the investigation that the architect had to go through. It was actually common practice at that time to yield, sooner or later (during the investigation), to retract certain statements, partially or totally, in front of the court panel. During the trial, most defendants were complaining about the methods that the investigators had used to force a confession, but these details were not written down by the court clerks. By reading his statement, it is obvious that the architect was trying to lessen the role of the other accused people or of the people who had helped them or had been already targeted by the Securitate.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 88. Sentence no. 730, The Military Court of Bucharest Department II, the Presidium of the Romanian Popular Republic. Other convicts were: Zamfirescu Dan – 20 years of forced labour, Brătianu Dan – 15 years of forced labour, Penciucescu Gheorghe – 2 years of correctional prison, Delescu Mihai – 4 years, Burlacu Eugen – 5 years, Ionescu Florian – 2 years, Cantacuzino Ioan Șerban – 1 year and Zurescu Ion – 3 years.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 190. An individual extract from the sentence no. 730/950.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, vol. 3, p. 162. Evidence of the days having been worked between 18.08.1950 and 24.09.1950, signed by senior lieutenant Fecioru Ion.



Fig. 3. The Sports Arena in Constanța (2013).



Fig. 4. The Dragon's Fountain (2013).

re-education through work practiced by the communists in the colonies of the Canal, as he worked with a 'pickaxe' for a few months.¹² Later on he will be in charge with working in the technical offices that were supervising the various construction sites. In January 1953, in connivance with architect Puchilă¹³ and brigadier Marin Petrini,¹⁴ when the quantity surveyor Sergiu Macarie was released, they decided against announcing the administration about this event, as they did not want to have a 're-educated' person (a person who had been brainwashed by the communists) instead.¹⁵ All throughout the year of 1953 he will supervise the team of masons-stone carvers¹⁶ who will erect, among others, the fountain in front of the Constanța Sports Arena. A colleague remembers him as *"a man of great humour and optimistic; he was telling them once how he had all the Securitate people come to arrest him run away. When they entered his house, he grabbed a black ashtray of a unique shape and pretended to throw it at those people; the Securitate people, being afraid that he might hold a grenade, stormed out of his house, while Mr. Antonescu managed to escape through a back window and avoid the arrest for a while."*¹⁷

At the Canal colonies, the total of the days he worked was 1172, counted between September 1950 and March 1954.¹⁸ After this date and until he left to Aiud, the architect will be found in the 'offices' of Poarta-Albă Penitentiary.

The second period of the labour camp imprisonment started on October 8th, 1954 when he was transferred to Aiud Penitentiary. The transfer note that will be included with his documents mentions the high danger level that he poses for the government; as for specific marks, we read the appendectomy that he went through at Poarta-Albă, as well as the fact that he had broken his right leg.¹⁹ On July 16th, 1956, when Antonescu somehow sensed the opportunity to benefit from the conditional release law, he would require in writing the calculation of the number of days he had worked at Aiud. His plea²⁰ says that: *"[...] I arrived in Aiud Penitentiary – upon being transferred from the Poarta-Albă labour camp – within the Group of studies and design – on October 14th, 1954. Since the date of October 13th, 1954 I started working in Fabrică (factory) where I*

¹² The time when he will injure a leg that will impact all his life, to which a chronic appendicitis will add later.

¹³ Ioan Pușchilă, architect and political prisoner, arrested and sentenced for 7 years of reformatory prison in 1948, for conspiracy against the social order. Released in 1956.

¹⁴ Agronomist engineer, arrested and sentenced to 6 years of reformatory prison in 1948. He served time in Jilava, Poarta-Albă, Peninsula, Coasta Găleşu.

¹⁵ Stănescu 2012, p. 265

¹⁶ A.C.N.S.A.S., Penal Collection, File no. 465, vol. 3, p. 166. Time card.

¹⁷ Zugravu 2005, pp. 237-238.

¹⁸ A.C.N.S.A.S., Penal Collection, File no. 465, vol. 3, p. 159. The evidence of the days being worked, issued by sector 0841 Region of Constanța on 18.10.1954.

¹⁹ *Idem*, p. 160.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 143. A handwritten application addressed to the commander of the sector 0622 Aiud on 16.07.1956.

toiled incessantly – without a day to be missed – until the present time, in the Fabrica offices. I worked first with the Group of studies and design, then to the Penitentiary Works – currently, I am working with the Technical Department of Fabrica. All this time [...] I have not been paid, hence I am not included in the payroll; the number of my days of work will be collected from the timekeeping card or sheets. I therefore request your approval to make the number known to me". It should be mentioned that the conditional release law that the architect was talking about stipulated the possibility to have one's sentence lowered, depending on the number of days of work. As he was approaching his release term, Antonescu (from the prison) and his wife (from outside the prison) will forward more requests to the authorities from the labour camps he had been in, in order to know the exact number of those days.

There is no information on whether these requests triggered a certain attitude of the Securitate – but one thing is sure – this is when a fuzzy and interesting period of time started in terms of the architect's relation with the Securitate authorities or with the Penitentiary department. On January 7th, 1957 the Securitate was requesting from the Directorate of Prisons and Penitentiaries to allow a team to interrogate inmate Virgil Antonescu at Aiud Penitentiary.²¹ The next day, Securitate captain Nicola Constantin will forward a report to his direct superiors about making a trip to Aiud in order to better investigate and know inmate Antonescu.²² The officer was reminding about the interest that the institution was having in Țințăreanu Ion, who had fled the country in 1948, a former aviator and public clerk for Romanian Intelligence, the same person who was holding an important position within an espionage centre of the Romanian fugitives in Trieste, Italy. The conclusion of the report is the following: *"While taking into account his personal qualities, the fact that he had been a partner with fugitive Țințăreanu and has connections abroad, we trust on recruiting Antonescu and using him for abroad relations. In order to have better data to study, to establish the opportunities of cooperation with him within the Penitentiary and, if possible, of recruiting him, we therefore recommend that Captain Nicola C-tin travel to Aiud Penitentiary for 3 days."* Between the date of this report and the date of contact the architect, there would be another document. In a note-report²³ forwarded by the General Director Deputy of Department of Internal Affairs to the General Directorate of Penitentiaries and Labour Camps, we find out that inmate Antonescu Virgil worked for a total number of 2015 days, with a bonus of 1052 days, thus fulfilling the criteria stipulated in the decree regarding the conditional release. It should be mentioned that around that time the architect was himself in the middle of the process to find out the number of days he had worked, but he did not have the certainty of having the conditional release applied to him, as he had not been informed about the content of the note-report above.

The following documents regarding the issue of recruiting are relevant for the Securitate position and methods regarding inmate Antonescu. Hence, a detailed version of them will be presented below.

Report²⁴ including suggestions for recruiting inmate ANTONESCU VIRGIL at Aiud Penitentiary, as an agent in the case of fugitive Ion Țințăreanu":

[...] Antonescu Virgil is an extremely intelligent member, perspicacious, of a vast culture thanks to his studies he attended in Romania and abroad. He set himself apart as a good architect. He would deeply analyze any action he is involved in and he will not let himself involved in easy affairs that he does not trust. An example would be the instance when he refused to agree with Țințăreanu upon fleeing the country on a boat to Istanbul. Even though he was aware of various ways of crossing the border fraudulently, he did not venture into such action until he was sure of succeeding at it, as he was afraid of the consequences. He is a prudent person and predictable – should he be about to carry out an action, he will do it until done completely and he avoids being superficial.

He is an ambitious member and is very careful about his personality – he wants to keep his good and serious reputation, which he succeeds in most cases. He would not get involved in frivolous and useless

²¹ A.C.N.S.A.S., Network Collection, File no. 26958, p. 41.

²² *Ibidem*, pp. 43-45.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 135.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 2-11. Report dated 20.02.1950, signed by Securitate Captain Nicola Constantin.

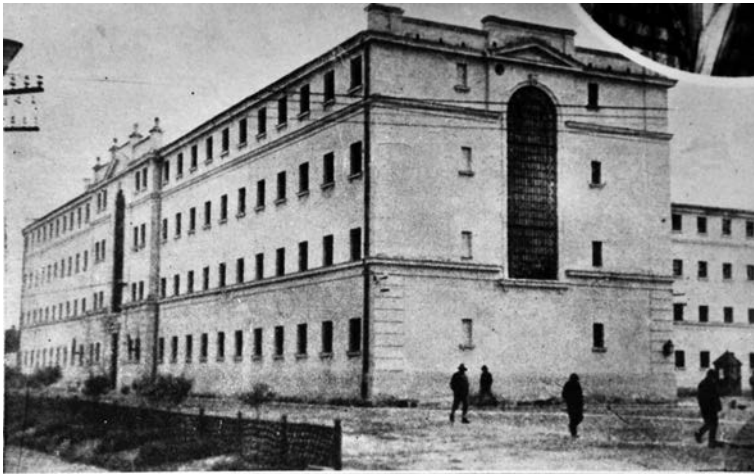


Fig. 3. Aiud Prison, inter-war time.

conversations, he is quite distant and sometimes he gives the impression of being indrawn. He has been acting as above since 1950, in all the penitentiaries he went to [...]. He works with passion and scrupulosity in his profession of architect-designer. Since 1950, as an inmate, he has been working at the Danube-Black Sea Canal as a technician, and later on he was the head of the design department with the Penitentiary Factory. As a designer, his projects were of a high quality. He showed a lot of interest in all the works he was assigned, in an attempt to have his name cleared and released before the initial sentence time (October

1959) [...]. During the discussions with the above-mentioned inmate at Aiud Penitentiary, in order to establish whether he is fit for recruiting, the conclusion is that Antonescu Virgil is willing to help our MAI (Ministry of Internal Affairs) authorities with any services, should he be given the possibility to be released and exempt from the rest of the sentence (two and a half years). He is not content with our authorities as he believes that his sentence was too long compared to what he had done against our State and because, according to the calculation done in compliance with the laws, Antonescu Virgil should have been already freed, as he had been rehabilitated by labour. His opinions about the rehabilitation were somehow crumbled under the pretext that he had been convicted for a counter-revolutionary activity in the Manu Group, which waives his right of enjoying the stipulations of the conditional release law that apply for some inmate who had really rehabilitated by labour.

Under this circumstance, Antonescu Virgil understood that his conditional release is only possible if he consents to have a honest cooperation with our representatives. Antonescu Virgil has been working on various sites and in the Aiud Penitentiary Factory as a technician since his imprisonment date, supervising high quality works and thanks to his positive attitude in the Penitentiary, the above-mentioned can benefit from the stipulations of the conditional release law concerning the inmates who worked in prison. To this end, the legal commission of Aiud Penitentiary examined the file of Antonescu Virgil and decided to have him conditionally released. For this purpose, recommendations have been made to the Department of Penitentiaries, Labour Camps and Colonies, to be approved by comrade Tănase, the Minister, under number 188.518 on February 16, 1957. [...] Since the above-mentioned member will be exempt from the rest of his sentence – two and a half years – based on the current laws, he will understand this release and recruiting as a first gesture of benevolence of our authorities, after he had consented to the latter. The recruiting of Antonescu Virgil will be initiated and completed at Aiud Penitentiary by Captain Nicola Constantin.

Report regarding the unsuccessful attempt of recruiting inmate Antonescu Virgil in the case of fugitive Țințăreanu Ion.²⁵

[...] In the first 5 days of February the current year, Aiud Penitentiary forwarded to the Department of Labour Camps and Colonies recommendations for a conditional release in the name of Antonescu Virgil. Also, the inmate was removed from the Penitentiary Factory and taken to the solitary confinement area where the inmates whose status was about to change – either released or transferred to other penitentiaries, etc. – were held. This action has given the possibility to Antonescu Virgil to conclude that he was about to be conditionally released, as considered

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 12-17. Report dated 25.02.1950, signed by Securitate Captain Nicola Constantin.

rehabilitated by labour, fact that changed the inmate's attitude towards our authorities and reiterated his verbal promise that he would do some services to the MAI so that he will be freed from prison.

As not being aware of the conclusions that Antonescu Virgil had reached, he was contacted again on February 22 the running year, within Aiud Penitentiary, to be recruited. The discussions with the above-mentioned inmate were as follows: At first, he was asked to express his opinions or conclusions that he had reached between the two meetings (January 28) and whether he had changed his previous point of view. Antonescu Virgil has stated that he is optimistic in terms of his future and he believes that he will be soon freed, according to the decree mentioned above. As for the issue regarding certain services that he might do to the MAI authorities to help him get out of prison, Antonescu said that he considers himself as being rehabilitated thanks to the work he had done in the penitentiary; and after he gets out, he wants to be left alone, he does not want to go any more through unpleasant moments – and the fact that he will disclose to the state authorities information about the people breaking the law, he will do it from a civic duty and not because of the obligations he would take before the MAI representatives. He was explained in detail that he would not be able to benefit from the stipulations in the conditional release law from the following reasons: the fact that he was allowed to work as an inmate since 1950 did have nothing to do with the intention of releasing him conditionally, but to have the possibility to enjoy another schedule than the forced labour. The inmates working in the factory had certain advantages from the penitentiary administration: a larger quantity of food, the ability to procure cigarettes, etc. He was charged for counter-revolutionary activity within Manu Group, no one in this Group has been conditionally released or pardoned; when considered his previous activity he is still classified as dangerous for the state security, he has not given any sign of loyalty towards the state authorities, hence he cannot be trusted much or at all. Upon hearing this, Antonescu Virgil expressed his dissatisfaction about the measures that are being taken against him since he does not intend to undertake anything hostile against the state security. He indicated again his desire to be conditionally released, as he was rehabilitated by work. Further, he was notified that as a follow-up of the opinions and conclusions that he had stated in the previous conversation, the Ministry of Internal Affairs examined his situation, which is as such: As he had been convicted for counter-revolutionary activity, he would not benefit from the stipulations of the laws regulating a conditional release of some working prisoners. He cannot consider himself rehabilitated by work since he had not shown any loyalty to the state government to be exempt from two and a half years of his sentence. The above-mentioned will be exempt and freed only provided that he understands to accomplish sincerely and with no holding back any mission that the MAI authorities will assign him in order to expose the members involved in espionage activities, sabotage or any counter-revolutionary acts against the Popular Republic of Romania (RPR).

He was also told that this exposure of the RPR enemies is a fair and noble cause and he would not in any way involve himself in errant ideas, similar to the one that his brother-in-law Gheorghe Manu had him adhere to. These services will be the best evidence for his loyalty towards RPR and he will always feel safe. Antonescu Virgil appreciated the openness of these discussions and asked for a 30-minute thinking time. When the discussions resumed, Antonescu stated that he still felt optimistic about his conditional release, based on the days he worked in the penitentiary and good conduct during his prison time. After his release, he really wants to be left alone and break any ties with his former friends. The request from MAI will constrain him to feel at unease even though free, which gives him the impression that he will again have upsetting surprises. The above-mentioned maintained his pendular attitude, saying that 'He is sorry to decline the proposal, which would mean to spend the last two and a half years in prison – but to agree to it, it means to have some trouble with the people exposed to the MAI who would kill him if they heard this.' He asked for another 4-5 weeks to think it over.

I believe that his request for this thinking time means that he was not indecisive but he wanted to see where he stands, whether he would be considered rehabilitated and released based on the work he had done in the penitentiary – hence, he would be exempt from bringing the services he should have to MAI. At the same time, he did not decline point-blank our proposal – in case his conditional release does not occur, then he will have the opportunity to talk to our representatives and agree to the proposal. He does seem to be fanatical, a person who would say no because of political reasons. He made it clear that he is aware that **this time left in prison (two and a half years) can be fatal to him**, but he hopes that his work and good conduct in the penitentiary will help him get out of prison earlier.

Further, we involved him in more discussions and gave him detailed explanations about any unclear issued that he had, in terms of keeping the secret, his fear of being assassinated by the people exposed, that he would be assigned

missions that are beyond his physical and moral possibilities. He was asked to be clearer about his position and whether he agreed with the proposal being made. Antonescu said that he still believed that he would be conditionally released based on his penitentiary work and, for the time being, he was not willing to enter into any agreements with MAI. But he also said that his decision could not be final and irreversible. When the discussions ended, he was told not to make any comments about this meeting with the other inmates, since this would stain his reputation and make things more difficult. He understood the situation very well and he said that he would explain his absence from the cell by having to come to an investigation. Just to mention, Antonescu Virgil shares a cell with more inmates.

While taking into consideration the good possibilities that this inmate has for informing us and in order to make him agree with our proposal, we suggest the following measures to be taken: to have postponed by 6 months the approval of the letter forwarded by Aiud Penitentiary to MAI regarding Antonescu's conditional release, based on the current law, as he was rehabilitated by his work. During this time, in cooperation with the section 'D', **Antonescu should be placed in solitary confinement and subjected to a maximum rigor. He should be forbidden to work at the Penitentiary factory. After 2 months of heavy imprisonment, he should be contacted again at Aiud Penitentiary, to have the investigation discussions resumed in terms of his connections and reiterate our proposal, viewing his release. All the measures above are meant to break Antonescu's morale and shatter his trust that he would be conditionally released, to give him an idea about the two and a half years in heavy imprisonment, which will make see his health jeopardized, a thing he is very scared of.**

Report regarding the recruiting of inmate Antonescu Virgil in the case of fugitive Țințăreanu Ion.²⁶

[...] On April 10 this year, Antonescu Virgil was again contacted at Aiud Penitentiary under the pretext of being investigated about the recognition of a person in a photograph, who had tried to sneak him out of the country in 1947. Before the interrogation, Antonescu asked us to go back to our prior discussions and the MAI proposal. While resuming this issue, Antonescu told us that he had thought seriously about the Securitate proposal and, to a certain extent, he regretted for not having agreed to it – he would have been freed by now otherwise. His conditional release, as rehabilitation by work, is being delayed and has no guarantees that he will benefit from this law. **Also, the prison time is harder and harder for him to bear and he has been contemplating the idea of killing himself since our last meeting.**

Further, Antonescu Virgil raised the issue that he would agree to cooperate, sincerely and with no holding back, with the Securitate of RPR, provided that he would not be assigned missions that are beyond his possibilities of information or placed in a situation where he would instigate certain people to hostile acts that will lead to their arrest. He was given detailed explanations that he would not be given assignments that are beyond his possibilities of information and he would never be placed in a situation where he would instigate certain people to hostile acts towards RPR, as this procedure is unknown to the Securitate. After he was set the record straight upon certain unclear and confusing issues for Antonescu Virgil, we went on signing the cooperation understanding. It was strictly brought to his attention that he was supposed to comply with the agreement and not to raise any objections after his release or prove a bad will and dishonesty attitude towards our representatives. This would only bring him inflictions and he could have the unpleasant surprise to go back to prison and serve the rest of the sentence up to 10 years.

Antonescu Virgil asked that he should not be given any difficult assignments during the first two months after his release, since he needs a medical treatment for his rheumatism. At the same time, he needs time to resume his relations with his former friends and acquaintances. There was an attempt to draft a plan for his connections and who would be the people 'of interest' for RPR (hostile persons). And this attempt has been unsuccessful since Antonescu has not been aware about the situation of his relatives, friends and acquaintances for 9 and a half years and he has nothing to say expect for what he had stated during the investigation. Antonescu suggested that one month into his release he would be able to draft a real plan and with precise perspectives. He was asked to write down whether he had found out among prisoners about various actions that they were about to carry on after they came out of prison. Antonescu related about the time when he was working on the Danube-Black Sea Canal site, he knew how the members of the Peasant

²⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 18-24. Report dated 11.04.1950, signed by Securitate Captain Nicola Constantin.

National Party and legionaries were organizing themselves, for a mutual benefit, but they did not have any definite purpose upon their release. At Aiud Penitentiary, Antonescu kept to himself most of the time and avoided any contact with fanatical and recalcitrant elements, as he wanted to have a good conduct that would help him to be released sooner. The attitude that he had adopted did not help him become acquainted with various actions being planned in the penitentiary by the inmates. He promised that he would let them know about any actions that would damage the state security until his release. He was not given any special assignment regarding the inmates so he would not raise any suspicions. Since Antonescu was living in the same cell with Prof. Bontilă Gheorghe,²⁷ sentenced with the Pop-Bujoiu Group, he was instructed to notify our representatives whether this inmate would give him a task to do after the release.

To be contacted in Bucharest after his release, he was told to call the number 3.98.70 and ask about 'VOICU', the name under which Captain Nicola Constantin is known. In case he would forget the phone number, a meeting was set up for April 24, at 11 am in 1848 Plaza, Aleea Marii Adunări Naționale (The Great National Assembly Drive). It should be mentioned that the proposals forwarded to the MAI regarding the release of the above-mentioned have been approved today, April 11, running year. Antonescu Virgil will be released in the following 48 hours.

A short comment should be made here. The Securitate people had the interest to recruit an agent for informative work in the case of Ion Țințăreanu – the official objective – and for other situations. Upon a careful study of the inmates, they chose Virgil Antonescu and they started a blackmail process. From the official reports, we notice that he initially declined the Securitate proposal to cooperate – we can easily imagine other duresses he was under, never mentioned by the officer. The perfidious play of the Securitate representatives with the architect's life is rather visible, where the latter is balancing on the rope for his life. As for the psychological profile sketched for architect Antonescu, this seems accurate. He surely planned his game carefully in this war of nerves, life and death – as Officer Nicola Constantin himself said. The immediate objective of the inmate was to get out of prison and then to find a way out of the Securitate straps. A first step was his momentary surrender and joining the 'game' when he signed the cooperation understanding. Thus, on 11.04.1957, architect Virgil Antonescu left the prison and returned to Bucharest.

The Securitate file opened in his name, more exactly under his code name 'Paul Florescu' includes two more documents. When reading them, we understand that an inmate managed to beat a system when he got off prison, unofficially after making the promise of cooperation, on the official grounds of having his sentence reduced. He refused to compromise and resisted to the pressure – either way, he was the winner.

Description of agent 'Paul Florescu'.²⁸

'Paul Florescu' was recruited on April 10, 1957, after a failed attempt in the month of February the same year. The above-mentioned was going to be released after a 10-year prison time for counter-revolutionary activity, and MAI exempted him from serving the last two and a half years, based on his work in the penitentiary.

*The recruiting was carried out under the pretext that, in exchange for his release, he would rehabilitate himself by performing informative work for the Securitate (to compensate for the rest of his sentence). **The purpose for which 'Paul Florescu' was recruited has not been reached. Right after his release, he adopted a hostile attitude, he went back on his obligations towards us, he proved a bad faith when he refused to give a written or verbal statement about people in his entourage in whom our representatives had a high interest. He displayed a reserved stance towards us, he would not show up at the meeting. When asked to accomplish real tasks, he would say no by reasoning that he is not cut out for the informative work.***

The training work has not taken to any result, in the sense that he would cooperate in an honest way. Politically speaking, he stated that he only wanted to be a spectator to the political events and to the RPR peaceful and constructive

²⁷ Born in Ploiești in 1904, PhD in Philosophy, arrested and sentenced to 15 years of forced labour in 1948. He will successively go to Malmaison, Jilava, Aiud, Gherla, Galați, Botoșani. Released upon the expiration of the prison time in 1963 and placed in house arrest in Lătești.

²⁸ A.C.N.S.A.S., Network Collection, File no. 26958, pp. 53-54. The description signed by Securitate Captain Nicola Constantin on 10.03.1958.

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STRICT SECRET

REPUBLICA POPULARA ROMINA

MINISTERUL AFACERILOR INTERNE

Direcția 2
 Serviciul 11
 Secția _____
 Biroul 2

Buc

Nr. 28936

DOSAR PERSONAL

AL

INF. AGENTULUI

NUMELE CONSPIRATIV PAUL FLORESCU

DOSARUL

A FOST MICROFILMAT AZI


De U. M. O. 680

Semnatura _____

Data deschiderii 10-IV-1958

R026958

Inchis la _____



1968984

R 026958

ARHIVA Nr. _____

Fig. 6. The cover of the architect's Network file.

efforts. He is solely interested to look for a job and make a living.

He would not miss any opportunity to display his dissatisfaction towards the state authorities, because he was wrongfully sentenced to 10 years in prison. 'Paul Florescu' is an intelligent member, well-rounded and he set himself apart as a good architect. He is a prudent, resolute, only preoccupied with his interest, ambitious and high-minded. He wants to build for himself a respectable reputation. In all cases, he is an indrawn, tight-lipped. He is aware that by his refusal to work for the Securitate, he will be under the lens of them and he is trying to be very cautious. He avoids making political comments. Due to his attitude and for the fact that he declines to write down all the information being asked from him, 'Paul Florescu' was taken twice to the police section, where the requirements of our understanding were discussed again. Even though he would change his behaviour during those meetings, he would come back to the next ones with the same reluctant attitude.

Lately, he failed to show up for the meetings and spends most of his time in the countryside looking for a job. In light of the fact that he is distant towards our representatives, he is hostile and refuses to work for the

Securitate, we recommend to drop agent 'Paul Florescu' out of the MAI Network.

Report for dropping out agent Antonescu Virgil, code name 'Paul Florescu' and delivery of the personal file to the section 'C.P'.²⁹

[...] Even during the second meeting with our representatives, Antonescu Virgil raised objections regarding the fact that he would not be able to comply with the obligation he tied himself down to. He asked us several times that he should not be given any tasks for 2-3 months and skip the meetings, as he was undergoing a medical treatment and looking for a job. He was not listened to, but rather our representatives started his training for national and international political situation. No task was assigned to him other than engaging in relation with his former entourage. During 1957, he was asked to write a statement with the information he was holding about a female who was an espionage suspect in 1948. Antonescu Virgil refused to do that.³⁰ He stated that he will tell us 'everything' he knows about people of interest in case of an investigation; on

²⁹ *Idem*, pp. 51-52. Report signed by Securitate Captain Nicola Constantin on 19.03.1958, approved by superiors on 20.03.1958.

³⁰ It is very likely to be about female architect Solange D'Herbez de La Tour.

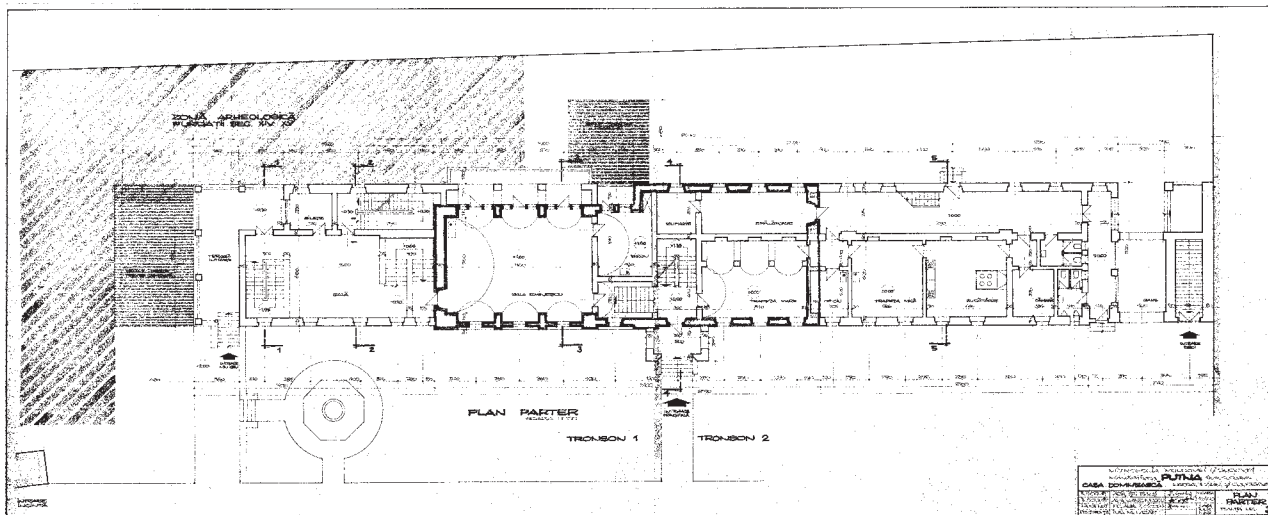


Fig. 7. The rehabilitation project for Putna Monastery, architects Ștefan Balș and Virgil Antonescu.

the other hand, he will refuse to write this information down, as informative reports drafted by him as an informer.

*Due to this attitude, plus that he was late for meetings or sometimes he would not show up, he was taken twice to the police station where our understanding signed at Aiud Penitentiary was talked about again. Even though he changes his attitude very often, he would display the same malignant behaviour during the next meetings. **Lately, he has not come anymore to the meetings, he spends most of his time in the countryside looking for a job, he is not a trustworthy person and his hateful attitude places him in an inimical position where he declines to do any services to our authorities.***

In light of the above, we recommend dropping Antonescu Virgil out and hand over his personal file to 'C.P.', without any understanding of cooperation, autobiography and the list of his connections.

Between the release date and his death, Virgil Antonescu did not tell much about the time he had spent in prison. Even to the questions that his relatives would ask him, he would give monosyllabic answers or change the subject.³¹ The only more substantial story was heard during an interview taken in 1991. The architect said that he had been arrested because of a follow-up, but he never mentioned the name of that person. Then, he was saying how his wife had attempted to come to the court and sit in the trial room, but she was not even allowed to get near the building. When he left the building, tried to look and see his wife but he got hit by some men who had surrounded him, rumbling and threatening. He also said about the time spent at the Canal, where dirt felt like home and skin diseases were no news to anyone. He was working on the construction site and the colonel coming to inspect them had only graduated three school years. The officer would look at the blueprints, frowning and saying, 'You, you are sabotaging this work. You are doing exactly the same thing was we were doing when you put us in prison.' Antonescu would answer, 'It is a very big difference. When we put our mind at something, we do it till the end, we are not mocking our work.' Among other things, he mentioned that he was part in erecting the Sports Arena in Constanța, an objective designed by convicted architects³² and completed under their supervision by other inmates. When asked about his meetings with George Manu while they both were imprisoned at Aiud Penitentiary, he said that he had never seen him, due to an extreme solitary confinement. He only found out about his brother-in-law after he was released in 1957. In regards to the 'subversive' organization, he said that they had certain sites in the mountains and shelters when a general conflict would have started, which were

³¹ Interview with Radu Davidescu, the architect's nephew, conducted by the author in Brașov, on 30.12.2012.

³² Along with Virgil Antonescu, there will be architects Ioan Pușchilă, G.M. Cantacuzino, Sorin Obreja, Constantin Joja and Gheorghe Anastasiu.



Fig. 8. St. Mina Church, Tăbăcăriei Park, Constanța.

spanning from Bucovina to beyond Banat. In the end, while describing the investigation, he remembered that the Securitate had already known all the secrets for a long time – during the interrogations, they were only filling in the gaps. The charges during the trial had nothing to do with the information they had previously collected. *'You were being tried, but you had the impression that you were assisting to somebody else's trial.'*³³

Along with his efforts – successful as we know now – to escape the grip of the Securitate, architect Antonescu was hired first in the studio of monuments restoration³⁴ run by Ștefan Bal, employed there by the 'good actions' of Balș who was related to Elena Antonescu – the architect's wife – born Manu. Since the moment he started there and until the Department of Historical Monuments was closed in 1977, architect Antonescu worked as a building engineer on a series of restoration works – the most important may be the sites for the wooden churches in Maramureș and Hanul Domnesc (The Princely Inn) in Suceava. After 1977 and until the end of the 80's, Antonescu worked with Ștefan Balș on a number of projects for the Patriarchate and Metropolitan of Moldova, with the best one being Putna Monastery. We also mention the restoration of the Church in Gurasada, the Church of Hodoș-Bodrog Monastery, the project for the Romanian community Church in Chêne-Bourg, Geneva. Prior to his death in 1998, he had the time to design, along with architect Nicolae Goga,³⁵ one of the largest wooden churches in the country built in the Maramureș style, inaugurated in 1997 in

Tăbăcăriei Park in Constanța, dedicated to St. Mina (Menas).

Architect, restorer and political prisoner, Virgil Antonescu is a leader of his generation from two points of view. Spiritual – he morally resisted the communist assault, by his conduct during prison time – and also professional, as he was an active presence in the restoration of historical monuments during the 6th-9th decades of the last century.

Bibliographical abbreviations:

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Ciuceanu 1991	R. Ciuceanu, <i>Intrarea în tunel</i> , Bucharest, 1991.
Stănescu 2012	M. Stănescu, <i>Reeducarea în România comunistă (1948-1955). Târgu-Ocna, Ocnele Mari, Canalul Dunăre-Marea Neagră</i> , Iași, 2012.
Zugravu 2005	C. Zugravu, <i>Dictatura, o tragedie românească</i> , Iași, 2005.

³³ Octavian Roske, Interview with Virgil Antonescu in Ciuceanu 1991.

³⁴ Studio organised within ICSOR (The Central Institute of City and Regional Planning). After 1959, it was affiliated to the Department of Historical Monuments.

³⁵ Architect, political prisoner, sentenced to 15 years of heavy imprisonment for conspiracy against the social order in 1948, released in 1963 from Aiud prison. The author of the memorial monument 'Calvarul Aiudului' (The Aiud Calvary).