



## ORIGINAL PAPER

# Politics of the Past: the Instrumentalization of Nicolae Iorga's Memory in the Romanian Parliament (1990-2000)

Georgiana Țăranu<sup>1)</sup>

### Abstract:

This article aims to shed some light on how Nicolae Iorga, one of his country's most important modern intellectual, was remembered by elected officials in the Romanian Parliament in the first post-communist decade. Through a qualitative analysis of parliamentary speeches and contextualisation, we look at how his legacy was used in a variety of manners by politicians acting as agents with quite different agendas. Most of the members of Parliament who engaged in memory politics in Iorga's case were representatives from the governing party FSN/FDSN and the two ultranationalist parties, PUNR and PRM. Two main patterns emerged in the discourses that made reference to Iorga in this first decade: on the one hand, discourses of collective victimhood by exploiting the historian's violent death and externalizing the blame, and on the other hand, discourses of xenophobia and antisemitism. Overall, the politics of memory of Iorga in the 1990s did not differ significantly from the national-communist narrative of the late communist decades.

**Keywords:** *Nicolae Iorga, politics of memory, Romanian Parliament, post-communist Romania, Romanian historians.*

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<sup>1)</sup> PhD, University Ovidius of Constanța, Faculty of History and Political Science, Romania, Phone: 0040768814526, Email: georgianataranu87@gmail.com.

## 1. Introduction

Memory studies is a rapidly growing multidisciplinary field of research expanding across established disciplines, such as sociology, history, political science, psychology, literature, but also easily integrated by more recent disciplines such as cultural studies or media studies (Sturken, 2008: 73-74). In the Romanian political context following the end of communism, just as in most cases of regime transition from authoritarian rule, historical memories quickly proved “foundational to social and political identities” (Hite, 1078). After the overthrow of the communist dictatorship in December 1989, in Romania, just as in neighboring Bulgaria, “no neoliberals came to power” in 1990 (Iacob, 2020: 124). The new political forces and the former secret police, the Securitate, quickly rebranded, needing to portray themselves as rightful owners of the new regime. Nationalism once again offered a common language to rally Romanians against an internal or external enemy (Ioanid 1994: 173; Gallagher, 1992: 571). Historical memories thus quickly became “mobilized to challenge opponents.” (Hite, 1078). In the face of political and economic insecurity, the national past always serves as a powerful tool (Berger, 2007: 38-39). In post-communist Romania this was the case too, so national history was brought in to provide a sense of belonging to a worthy culture with a pre-communist pantheon of exceptional Romanians. It infused a degree of certitude in uncertain times. As Tom Gallagher has noted, the interwar period became the point of reference for the politics of memory of the government ever since 1990 (Gallagher, 1999: 141-142). Great personalities and significant events started to be celebrated or commemorated, either because they could trigger feelings of pride over being Romanian or fears of losing the national identity because of internal or external enemies.

Nicolae Iorga came as an obvious choice as he had been both the most important pre-communist historian to legitimize the nation-state and the dominant figure of the country’s cultural scene for over three decades, widely acclaimed both at home and abroad. Moreover, Iorga had informed Romanians about the glories and virtues of their past and had defined the nation against various enemies (Jews, Hungarians, Russians, Communists, Nazis). This meant that his legacy was read as a very versatile nationalism which could be used in a variety of manners by agents with quite different agendas. The politics of memory concerning Iorga thus became part of the identity politics of the Romanian nation in the post-1989 setting.

This article aims to provide a discussion of the acts of remembrance towards Nicolae Iorga (1871-1940) registered in the first post-communist decade in Romania through parliamentary speeches. It builds on the premise that parliamentary debates matter and are fundamental to democratic regimes, since they offer key valuable informations on the position-taking strategies of politicians on any topic (Proksch and Slapin, 2015). Thus, what the Members of Parliament (MPs) communicate on the past and on the great personalities sends a message to the public in terms of who and what deserves to be remembered and how.

Iorga is remembered as modern Romania’s most important and renowned historian and public intellectual (Pop, 2021). More specifically, the focus will be on who and why took the floor in both Houses of the Parliament to remember Iorga in the first post-communist decade. The narratives of the past are generally constructed by different types of agents of memory, all found in pursuit of legitimacy and identity. Three main categories of agents engaged in remembering Iorga can be identified as follows: the public institutions and the political establishment, the academe, and society at large,

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understood as comprised of non-governmental organizations, in general. Essentially, each of them engaged in remembering practices for different purposes, be it scientifically, politically or culturally motivated. This article deals only with the ways in which elected representatives, namely the MPs, were involved in works of remembrance towards Iorga. I will be looking at their political discourse when taking the floor and the respective context in which it was delivered. The current qualitative analysis is part of a larger research in which I am discussing the instrumentalization of Iorga's legacy by various regimes and actors starting from 1941 and up to the present.

By exploring how politicians acting within the most representative institution of a democratic regime chose to remember Iorga, I highlight how his work and biography were instrumentalized to legitimize various political agendas. I conclude by looking at how this contributed to the perpetuation of the cult of the exceptionality of Iorga which hinders fresh domestic critical reflections on his political biography.

While extensive research covered the interaction between Iorga's work and a myriad of narrow topics one can relate his massive scholarly output to, there is no published study specifically concerned with the uses of his legacy in the post-communist years. While the last thirty years have registered many ways of dealing with Iorga's memory, my attempt here is to sketch an overview of the most relevant uses of his memory by the elected representatives of the first post-communist decade, which saw the resurgence of extreme right-wing nationalism (Gallagher, 1999).

### **2. Why to remember Iorga?**

The first section provides a historical background for understanding Iorga's profile and why would such a profile be tempting for MPs to associated themselves with. Why was there so much interest in remembering Iorga? To look at who he was and what he represented for modern Romania is a first step towards understanding why he continues to be so relevant to post-communist Romanian society and politics. Just a quick overview of his political biography will provide some answers.

Iorga was a polymath, a Renaissance-like figure who authored more than one thousand volumes and brochures and over 20,000 articles (Theodorescu, 1976: 11; Iorga was recently included in a list of 500 Western polymaths by Burke, 2020: 267). He is considered "the father of Romanian nationalism" and "the teacher of the Nation." His historical research, his university teachings, his journalism and writings were all meant to promote his nationalist dream. This dream was not only his own, but became the national project of most of the political establishment prior to the First World War: a single unified state for all Romanians living in the provinces neighboring the Old Kingdom of Romania, found under imperial rule: Austro-Hungarian Transylvania and Bukovina, and Russian Bessarabia. This dream came true in the wake of the Paris Peace Conference under the form of Greater Romania. Iorga became the most authoritative voice among the historians legitimizing the new nation-state, just as Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos was for the Greeks or Mykhailo Hrushevsky was for the Ukrainians (Berger, 2007: 38-39; Turda 2011: 352-53; Gazi, 2010: 208). While he was a mercurial personality, constantly involved in cultural and political debates, he was celebrated already during his lifetime as the country's most knowledgeable intellectual both at home and abroad. Many times his declarations were seen as having "delphic authority" (Pearton, 1988). His nationalism had started and finished by being antisemitic, with an interlude of exercising moderation in the 1920s and up until the mid-1930s. As a politician, he mainly held conservative views, supporting the monarchy even during the

royal dictatorship of King Carol II in 1938-1940, but his politics was full of paradoxes (Michelson, 1992; Ioanid, 1992; Nagy-Talavera, 1999: 242, 313-319; Țăranu, 2021b). On foreign affairs, he fiercely condemned both Nazism and Communism, while admiring Mussolini's Italy (Țăranu, 2018). He was assassinated in November 1940 by the Romanian fascist Iron Guard during its time in government alongside General Ion Antonescu, in the course of the totalitarian regime of the National Legionary State (September 1940 – February 1941). Overall, his life and work were put to the service of building and supporting the nationalist project and his most cited scholarship on the domestic front has to do with the question of national identity. Similar to Mihai Eminescu, the national poet, Iorga is praised as the national historian and his writings were and still are an important source for Romanian nationalist-chauvinist discourses.

### **3. Politics of memory up to 1989**

Ironically, Antonescu was the first to recover Iorga's memory after the Iron Guard's removal from power and the establishment of his own military dictatorship. His regime revived some of Iorga's cultural initiatives and historical research institutions and used Iorga's antisemitism, anti-communism and nationalist historiography to support the wartime propaganda (Țăranu, 2021a: 145-46). Even more ironically, after a complete ban on his name and work of around two decades, a cult of Iorga emerged during national-communism. This was part of a strategy of legitimization, employed throughout Eastern Europe, by domestic elites in their attempt to adapt the Soviet model and root themselves nationally (Petrescu, 2009). It was Nicolae Ceaușescu, the communist dictator who ruled Romania between 1965 and 1989, who encouraged the reappropriation of key figures from the national pantheon as a way to legitimize his rule at home and his distancing from the Soviet Union abroad (Iacob, 2014). Thus, starting from the mid-1960s Iorga became remembered this time as a martyred anti-Nazi and a scholar who had dedicated his life to argue in favor of the rights of smaller powers in international affairs and their national sovereignty. Especially in the 1970s Iorga became the subject of a cult of personality meant to illustrate how exceptional Romania was and thus lay the foundations for the cult of personality of Ceaușescu himself (Iacob, 2014: 185-91). If the politics of memory towards Iorga (or any other great figure of the national pantheon) between 1940 and 1989 had been mostly a matter to be shaped and administered by the regime, the collapse of communism brought along a democratization of memory.

### **4. Agents of memory after 1989**

In the post-communist period there was a plurality of competing actors who were no longer dependent on or inhibited by the monolithic political power and who could engage in different acts of remembrance. Broadly speaking, the agents of memory dealing with Iorga's legacy after 1989 can be grouped into three categories: the academic community (historians, scholars, editors, the Romanian Academy), political and public institutions (political parties and institutions such as the Romanian parliament, the government, other public institutions such as museums) and non-governmental organizations. Although each group had its own diverse ways of remembering Iorga, interestingly, in some cases, as we will see further on, the first and second group overlapped, meaning the historians entered politics and had access to more resources and a larger audience for their work of remembrance. Essentially, Iorga's memory was used to legitimize different narratives of the post-1989 context. Both

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political leaders and historians felt the need to tell Romanians who they were, where they came from and to whom they could look for a role model. While the former engaged in politics of memory towards Iorga in order to get votes, the latter had various reasons, of a scholarly and biographical nature. To put it briefly, they were all in pursuit of "a usable past" (Iordachi & Trencsényi, 2003). Before moving to the MPs as a case study, just a quick overview of how Iorga's legacy has been re-assessed by professional historians and scholars.

Historians were, for obvious reasons, one of the first groups interested to remember Iorga, who was seen as the epitome of their profession. This initially translated into honouring his legacy without the ideological constraints. Thus, in the first post-1989 decade, there were few domestic attempts to think critically about Iorga's legacy, published mainly by foreign academic journals or publishers (Ioanid, 1992; Volovici, 1991, translated in 1995 in Romanian, see Volovici, 1995). Starting with Lucian Boia's book (1997) on the founding myths of the history of the Romanian people, Iorga became one of the subjects of interest in the famous polemic which opposed the author's iconoclastic perspective to the iconophile one of Ioan Aurel Pop, a medievalist historian from Cluj (Pop, 2002). In short, it can be summarized as a dispute between the defenders of the nationalist grand-narrative of Romanian history and the deconstructionist school (Murgescu, 2003).

The following two decades have not seen too many critical approaches of Iorga appearing in Romania (Stanomir, 2000; Iacob, 2014; Țăranu, 2015, 2016, 2018; Adam, 2018; Bărbulescu, 2020), while such endeavours were already the norm abroad since the 1970s (Oldson, 1973, 1991; Pearton, 1988; Michelson, 1992; Gazi, 2010; Turda, 2011). On the homefront, the hagiographic monographs and sympathetic editions flourished after 1989 (see the only post-1989 biography by Nagy-Talavera, 1999; a few examples in Țurlea, 2008, 2001, 2016, Iorga, 1999, 2009, 2015). Overall, there is little doubt that there is still a cult around Nicolae Iorga's figure, both in society and in the historical literature in post-communist Romania. By this I mean that his complex biography and massive output are constantly celebrated, but hardly ever critically engaged with. This fact is increasingly underlined by recent scholarly contributions, especially abroad (Daskalov, 2015: 278; Schmitt, 2017 [2016]: 24; Țăranu, 2018). With this background on the general trends within the historical literature regarding Iorga, we can now address our case study regarding the MPs.

### **5. The MPs as agents of memory**

This section looks at how the elected representatives inside the Romanian Parliament approached Iorga's legacy. For this purpose, the main data were collected from the legislative institution's website, which hosts parliamentary records starting from 1992 onwards. Through a qualitative approach, I will underline here the most important themes that have emerged in the speeches of the Members of Parliament when referring to Nicolae Iorga. I will do so in a chronological order since this enables us to observe how references to Iorga changed over time as governments and political agendas changed.

Due to the instable political environment and the costs of the economic transition, scapegoating of foreign models of political and economic change and xenophobic messages (anti-Hungarian and antisemitic) were used to mobilize voters in the first post-communist decade. Among modern Romania's great personalities exhibiting such stances at some point in the previous century, Iorga had one of the

highest intellectual authority and the most complex cultural identity. Unsurprisingly, the MPs praising Iorga when taking the floor came, during the late 1990s and until the mid 2000s, from the ranks of the main ruling party, National Salvation Front (FSN), the largest post-1989 political party and a direct successor to the former Communist Party, but especially from its ultranationalist satellites, the Party of Romanian National Unity (PUNR) and the Greater Romania Party (PRM). These were the parties of 'radical continuity' with the old regime (Shafir, 1994: 350-5) which used much of same people and rhetoric.

## 6. Politics of victimhood

One of the first tropes to be found in many of the parliamentary speeches regarding Iorga came under the form of commemoration. The mourning of Iorga's violent end at the hands of a death squad, composed of members of the fascist Legionary Movement, in November 1940, was the first act of remembrance organized by Parliament fifty years later. Thus, on 27 November 1990, the newly elected post-communist Parliament held a special session to pay homage to Iorga and Virgil Madgearu, another interwar political leader assassinated by the same death squad and on the same day as the historian (Parlamentul României, 1991). Such type of public usage of history turned into a great occasion for populist political actors to produce discourses of victimhood nationalism. There is a growing body of literature addressing how this type of victimhood identity narratives can prove powerful tools to mobilize populations (Lerner, 2020). As already discussed, this did not represent an innovation since the communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu had already initiated the recovery of Iorga, among other leading figures of the past, starting from the mid-1960s (Zavatti, 2016: 199-204). Thus, the historian's status as the most famous victim of the communist regime's arch-enemies, the Romanian fascists and Nazi Germany, continued to provide legitimacy in the post-1989 period just as it did in the previous decades for Ceaușescu's propaganda.

Among all speakers taking the floor in November 1990, the one who probably best exemplified this continuity in the politics of memory, or rather of commemoration, was Alexandru Bîrlădeanu. An old Communist and a former high rank party official, Bîrlădeanu became after the Revolution a prominent member of the FSN and a President of the Senate between 1990-1992. In opening the November 1990 session, Bîrlădeanu stated that Iorga's "martyrdom of 50 years ago (...) continues to feel to this day as alive in the hearts of our people as it did back then" (Parlamentul României, 1991: 5). Not only a significant part of the old elite was also the new elite, but the same was true for the neo-Communist interpretation of the past during the early transition process. And yet this discourse was not the monopoly of the governing FSN as one might think. Echoing the same legacy was the poet Ioan Alexandru, a MP from the opposition National Peasant-Christian Democratic Party (PNT-CD). Alexandru's lyrical speech referred to Iorga's assassination as "the stabbed heart of the Romanian people," the final blow delivered at a moment when the country had been crucified by its neighbors, i.e., territorially dismembered in 1940 (Parlamentul României, 1991: 39).

What was different in the politics of memory regarding Iorga in the post-1989 period was that, this time, the victimizers changed. While the communist tradition of commemoration of Iorga elaborated on the Fascist perpetrators, both foreign and domestic, in post-communism some of the elected officials in the Romanian Parliament blamed the globalized West, not for the crime, but for rendering the historian's work no

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longer relevant (which seemed to be a crime in itself). At the same parliamentary session of November 1990, while all of the speakers, representing a full spectrum of political views, stood in awe of Iorga's many achievements, one intervention distinguished itself. The flamboyant nationalist senator Gheorghe Dumitrașcu, from the governing FSN, delivered a speech which advanced a sense of fear over the loss of national identity. It was in fact an prejudiced reference to the West, which supposedly tried to lecture Romanians on different issues (Parlamentul României, 1991: 12-13). Most probably, the reference was to the firm reactions of condemnation by the United States of America and other major Western European states of the coalminers' violent march to the capital, in June 1990. The miners had been summoned by Ion Iliescu, then head of the FSN and the first president of the country, against his opponents. The bloody clashes led to the regime's international isolation and the frozen of agreements with the International Monetary Fund and the Council of Europe. Coming back to senator Dumitrașcu, he further argued that Romania had had two truly outstanding "professors," since they were the only great personalities who were self-taught, meaning they did not need lessons from abroad to excel. The two were Iorga and Mihai Eminescu, the national poet. This rhetoric was bounded to that of national exceptionalism which had dominated the 1980s official discourse. Dumitrașcu, who was also a nationalist historian, added to his anti-Western attitude another typical warning: the Romanian people were in danger of having their latinity "erased," meaning the very core of their national identity. Guilty of such an unfeasible act were all those (unnamed) trying to "melt us into an amorphous continental or world mass", again an implicit reference to those expressing their aspirations for Romania to join international organizations. Whoever held such views was accused to commit "an attack on Iorga," meaning on the historian who had worked so hard to highlight the Latin origins of his people (Parlamentul României, 1991: 13). Iorga's status as a victim became instrumentalized in the MP's speech to project feelings of collective victimhood in face of a perceived external danger: the "patronizing" West. In fact, the move was political and it helped deviate the attention from the West's critical scrutiny of the dubious actions of the governing FSN. The same type of attitude would be pursued later on, receiving even more xenophobic tones.

At the end of the decade, in June 1999, a parliamentary intervention by a deputy from the extreme right-wing Greater Romania Party (PRM), Nicolae Leonăchescu, was illustrative of the same pattern. Formally, the intervention was meant to mark Iorga's 128 anniversary (Leonăchescu, 1999). In fact, the core of the MPs' message delivered the same kind of demagogical anti-West warning: "Globalism, Americanism, Europeanism, National Socialism, Internationalism, Sovietism are different names of the same danger: the loss of national identity." Such a striking juxtaposition reflected the deputy's degree of xenophobic fanaticism, in concord with the rhetoric of his party. Yet it had another, highly political, motive. The speech was meant to show support for the PRM's president, Corneliu Vadim Tudor, who had been stripped of his parliamentary immunity few months earlier and was at that very moment facing prosecution for libel (Mocanu, 1999). Vadim had been one of the most turbulent and intemperate of the ultra-nationalists of the first two decades. At times close to those in power, namely with the successor of the FSN, the Party of Social Democracy in Romania (PDSR), at times attacking them, Vadim was known to face many libel suits as he rabidly attacked most of the opposition leaders (Shafir, 1997). Against this background, Leonăchescu used Iorga's position as a political victim of the Fascists to warn about Vadim, without explicitly naming him:

the political persecution of valuable people, of our great national values, the planned destruction of formidable political opponents is a heinous act (...). The rulers should pay attention! The country's valuable people are to be defended, not killed, not persecuted!" (Leonăchescu, 1999).

It was thus an interesting example of how an agent of memory can abuse memory, employing a victimhood narrative to excuse a perpetrator type of behaviour.

### **7. Holocaust denial and the rehabilitation of Ion Antonescu**

Iorga was constantly invoked, just as Mihai Eminescu, as a powerful authority behind most nationalist claims, and all the more so by populist political actors in times of crisis (for Eminescu see Bot, 2001). In the case of the Romanian Parliament, it is easily noticeable how, after the anti-communist democratic opposition gained power in 1996, the references to Iorga multiplied in the following legislative assembly in the ranks of the extremist parties. Their main discourse revolved around the fact that Romania's territorial integrity needed to be defended against external or internal danger (mainly Hungarians and Jews) and that the ruling coalition, the Romanian Democratic Convention (CDR) was influenced by foreign powers. Most of the interventions came from MPS who were also historians and who backed their expertise by frequent references to Iorga only to carry out attacks against political competitors and to promote their own agendas. This is an important overlap between the agenda of some from the academic community and a part of the political establishment.

The most important and productive of the historians-politicians acting as agents of memory of Iorga in the first post-communist decade were also Holocaust deniers and admirers of Ion Antonescu, the country's dictator during the Second World War and Hitler's close ally. Antonescu is a controversial figure in Romanian history, with the record of a war criminal, who yet refused after Stalingrad to send more Romanian Jews to the death camps (Deletant, 2006: 2). Two such cases are worthy of attention, those of Petre Țurlea and Gheorghe Buzatu. Both were historians and editors of Iorga's works, Holocaust deniers and champions for the cause of the rehabilitation of Ion Antonescu (for Buzatu, see Shafir, 2014: 942-64; for Țurlea, see Ioanid, 1994: 175; also Țăranu, 2021a). Furthermore, both MPS were members of small populist neo-communist satellite parties, providing between 1992-1996 a parliamentary majority for the Democratic National Salvation Front (FDSN), the main successor of the FSN, led by Iliescu (the present day Social Democratic Party, PSD).

From the early 1990s onwards, Iorga's name was on the lips of some Transylvanian nationalists advancing a fierce chauvinistic and particularly anti-Hungarian rhetoric. One of the most representative such politicians was Petre Țurlea, a knowledgeable historian, scholar and editor of Iorga. He was also a MP on behalf of FSN between 1990-1992, then of its main successor, the FDSN, moving to become a member of the PUNR, the ultra-nationalist anti-Hungarian party based in Transylvania, in 1996. In the Romanian Parliament, Țurlea dedicated much of his interventions to the three following points: condemn the Hungarian minority in Romania for different so-called irredentist actions, honour Iorga's memory and advocate for the rehabilitation of Antonescu. In fact, the last two overlapped in many of his parliamentary interventions. Such was the case on June 4, 1997, when Țurlea used the intervention dedicated to Iorga's 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary to respond to a political opponent, without missing the opportunity to express his conviction that Ion Antonescu was a hero, and the Romanian people would not forget that (Țurlea,



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1996). He acted likewise in 1999, when he wished to send “a thought of gratitude” for the two greatest personalities of twentieth century Romania, Iorga and Antonescu, one as a cultural figure, the other one as a political and military leader (Țurlea, 1999). Similarly, in 2000, Țurlea took the floor to ask the House to observe a moment of silence in the honour of three Romanian personalities, “the true and greatest heroes of the Romanian people”: Mihai Viteazul, a medieval prince who ruled simultaneously, for a short time, Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania, and is seen as the symbol of Romanian unity, Iorga and Antonescu (Țurlea, 2000). To place Iorga in the company of the two was strange in many respects, but what was obvious was Țurlea's efforts to whitewash Antonescu's criminal record and increase the legitimacy of his agenda.

Another MP involved in the politics of memory regarding Iorga was senator Gheorghe Buzatu (1939–2013), an influential professor and historian from Iași, editor of volumes on Iorga since the communist era. Buzatu was also a member of parliament on behalf of the extremist and antisemitic Greater Romania Party (PRM), of which he was also a deputy chairman. He was mostly concerned with denying Romania's involvement in the Holocaust and rehabilitating Ion Antonescu (Shafir, 2007: 173-197). He tried to obtain legitimacy for this agenda in many ways. One of the methods was through his parliamentary speeches. One of the most illustrative interventions by Buzatu was as a reaction to the Emergency Ordinance no. 31/2002, which outlawed fascist, racist and xenophobic organizations, symbols, statues, or commemorative plaques, and banned the naming of streets or foundations after personalities condemned for war crimes and crimes against humanity (OUG 13/2002). The normative act was meant to put a quick stop to Antonescu's cult as a national hero as Romania was negotiating membership of NATO. The country's reluctance to reckon with the past, especially concerning its participation in the Holocaust, had alarmed so much its Western partners that U.S. officials listed it as a condition for the country's accession to the Alliance (Shafir, 2007: 181-82). Buzatu took the floor in May 2002 to criticize the ordinance for opening the way for the labeling of many interwar Romanian personalities as fascist, Iorga included (Buzatu, 2002). He stated as follows:

I believe that the apotheosis of this ordinance will come when Nicolae Iorga, our foremost historian and one of the world's greatest, will be placed - as in the 40s-60s, about which we have developed amnesia - in the ranks of fascists and nationalists. (Buzatu, 2002).

This was ironical because Iorga's relationship with fascism, especially with fascist Italy, was indeed a taboo subject (Țăranu, 2018). Such warning coming from a senator who was also a well-known historian was not meant to further encourage honest research. Buzatu's political statement clearly showed how politics and academia mingled and how historians got involved in memory politics and used their knowledge to promote who got to be remembered and how. History was called upon to maintain a certain collective memory of the great personalities, of whom Iorga and Antonescu were the foremost figures for the nationalist historians and politicians of the 1990s.

After four years of amendments and procrastination, the Law no. 107/2006 approved the Emergency Ordinance no. 31/2002, two years after an international commission set up by President Ion Iliescu and chaired by Elie Wiesel, a Nobel Laureate and Vice-Chairman of the Yad Vashem Council, issued a report on the history of the Holocaust in Romania (International Commission on the Holocaust in

Romania, 2004). While the law did provide sanctions, in practice there were no such cases registered and popular antisemitic stereotypes remained high for a country of with only 3271 registered Jews (Fati, 2021).

## 8. Conclusions

As Romania experienced her security, political and economic aspirations coming true by joining NATO in 2004 and the EU in 2007, the extreme right-wing parties of the 1990s gradually lost their vigor. The two main political parties engaged in memorializing Iorga's legacy failed to enter Parliament: PUNR in 2000, PRM in 2008 (Preda, 2013: 54), while other minor radical right-wing groups appeared and disappeared (Cinpoș, 2013). A plurality of arenas and agendas emerged, more focused on the fight against corruption, economic growth, modernization, and dealing with the communist past, which polarized the political establishment and society at large (Tismăneanu & Stan, 2018: 52).

While in the legislative body the references to Iorga became scarce, the MPs and other main political actors moved their speeches to other arenas, namely in Vălenii de Munte. A place of memory associated with Iorga's nationalist legacy, Vălenii de Munte is a town where the historian initiated, among other cultural institutions, a nationalist summer university dedicated to promoting the cause of political unity of all Romanians in a single state, dedicated especially to those living in the neighboring empires, starting from 1908. The informal summer university has been reestablished in the 1990s, replicating on a smaller scale some of the activities that used to be held every August under Iorga's leadership: a series of lectures by well-known academics, book launches, celebrations etc. When observing those taking part in the events and their discourses, a tendency can be easily noticed: less and less honest critical and valuable debates and more and more nationalist politics. Savvy political actors participated to the summer school held in the so-called "University of the Whole Nation" and "the Mecca of Romanianness" (Țurlea, 2008: 100) to gain symbolic and political capital. Only a few more recent examples will suffice to understand how the politics of memory of Iorga attracted and still attracts top officials. In 2009, it was during the summer university that the former President Ion Iliescu, who is also an honorary citizen of Vălenii de Munte, launched an attack in the press against the president in charge, Traian Băsescu (Ziarul Valea Prahovei). In 2013, the same Iliescu, alongside the Prime Minister, the President of the Senate, and the Minister of Culture, to name but a few high-ranking government and elected officials, participated to the summer courses. Another participant was a former general, Mircea Chelaru, who had founded a party using the same name as Iorga's party, The Romanian Kin (Neamul Românesc). A last example meant to show how relevant Iorga's nationalism still is for Romanian politics is the fact that he is also used by the new populist and anti-system party, the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR), which entered parliament suddenly following the elections of December 2020. In one of their local headquarters, a picture of N. Iorga is hanging on the wall, next to other national political figures (Ziua de Constanța, 2022).

To conclude, the use and abuse of Iorga's one century-old ideology by MPs prove how nationalism is a versatile and mobilizing ideology. It also shows how figures from the national pantheon are easily remembered and instrumentalized by different political actors to legitimize various agendas. Those who engaged in remembering Iorga in the Parliament in the first post-communist decade – mostly MPs cultivating a

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narrative of extreme nationalism, holding xenophobic and antisemitic views, denying the Holocaust and praising Antonescu – and how they chose to remember Iorga speaks about themselves and how memory is political (Mauratonia, 2014). Another conclusion to be drawn from this study on the parliamentary interventions of the 1990s is that the majority of them did not mark a separation from the past discourses on Iorga of the late communist decades. There is a clear continuity of the cult of national exceptionalism emerged during communism only with different actors.

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