

Claudia-Florentina Dobre

“Alyosha, go home!”

The Monuments of the Soviet Army in Romania and Bulgaria from the End of World War II until the Present

Monuments are concrete images of the relationship to the past of the society that builds, commemorates and sometimes destroys them. As marks of the identity of a place, monuments have the role of explaining the past, of educating the next generations, of responding to a desire for self-glorification, and of embodying the heroism and patriotism necessary for the creation of a national identity. They are meant to legitimise the nation and/or the dominant political regimes and their ideology by creating those common memorial spaces necessary for the existence of national memory. Monuments are also often the first targets of the vandalism that accompanies regime changes, taking over the desire for catharsis that animates, in a certain historical moment, whole groups in a society. Furthermore, the meanings of monuments change depending on the political, social and cultural contexts, as well as on the people who interact with them¹. Lewis Mumford considered the monument incompatible with modernity due to its fixity². What he ignores is precisely the versatility of meaning of a monument. It changes with each new gaze that rests on it.

This was also the destiny of the monuments built in Bulgaria and Romania during the communist period in order to glorify the “all-mighty Red Army”. Carved in stone, marble or bronze, enshrined in city landscapes (most of the time) and constantly celebrated (less so in Romania), they became the subjects of major controversies after the fall of communism. Some of them were vandalised, dismantled, transferred to other places, melted down or even transformed into something new entirely, more appropriate to the new political order.

My article deals with several case studies from Bulgaria and Romania in order to pinpoint two different approaches towards these monuments. I argue that these two ways of dealing with the Soviet memorials have been fashioned not only by historical memory and political heritage, but also by civic actions and a

new perspective on public space. Furthermore, in the aftermath of the Russian 2022 invasion of Ukraine, these monuments became the main catalysts for the feelings and opinions of the people in both countries towards the war and its participants.

The Ambiguous Soviet Heritage in Romania

At the beginning of World War II, Romania stayed neutral for a while. The loss of its territories³ as a consequence of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of 23 August 1939, and the constant pressure of Hitler, who needed the oil and the infrastructure of Romania to invade the USSR, ultimately pushed the new government, headed by Ion Antonescu⁴, to enter the war as an ally of Nazi Germany. After the defeat of Stalingrad (1943), Romanian politicians, reflecting general public opinion, asked the government to withdraw from the alliance with Germany. Antonescu procrastinated about the decision, although he initiated some talks with the Allies. As the pressure of the Red Army grew, King Michael I of Romania, in coordination with democratic political leaders, as well as communists, decided to organise a coup d'état on 23 August 1944. The government was dismissed and the ministers arrested while the country switched camps and allied with the Soviet Union in order to fight the Nazis. An armistice with the Soviet Union was signed in Moscow on 12 September 1944, the Red Army being already present on Romanian soil, perpetrating all sorts of crimes, from thefts to rapes to murders. The armistice did not change much of their behaviour, as proven by the numerous complaints submitted to the Romanian Commission for the Application of the Armistice⁵.

Despite this, the two armies fought together on the western front, the Red Army helping the Romanians to liberate its northern and western parts. However, the Soviets retained the right to administer the liberated regions of Romania, which explains why the



Fig. 1: Postcard with the Soviet tank monument in Cluj, Romania. Reproduction: Alexa 2014, Istorie...

building of monuments praising the Red Army started in this part of the country while the war was still raging. They were meant to celebrate the deeds of the Soviet soldiers and officers, but also to display Soviet power, and to send a message to the Romanians that the Russians were there to stay (which they did, the Red Army leaving the Romanian territory only in July 1958).

A significant example is a tank monument that was erected by the soldiers of the Red Army as soon as the Ukrainian unit liberated the city of Cluj, on 11 October 1944 (fig. 1). Inaugurated around the turn of 1944 and 1945, the monument was already there to welcome King Michael and Prime Minister Petru Groza, who visited the city on 13 March 1945. It represents the most effective Soviet tank, the T34, called "the universal tank". For fifty years, this Soviet tank stood behind the Orthodox cathedral, in the very centre of that Transylvanian city⁶. In front of the cathedral, an obelisk praising the hundreds of Soviet soldiers and officers who died in the battle to liberate the city was unveiled in the early 1950s. After the fall of communism in Romania (in December 1989), both monuments were removed. The obelisk was dismantled in 1990; on that very spot a statue dedicated to Avram Iancu, a Transylvanian Romanian revolutionary, was unveiled in 1993. The tank monument was

transferred to the cemetery dedicated to the fallen Soviet soldiers in a peripheral area of Cluj in 1991; it was replaced by a monument honouring the Romanian army instead⁷.

Shortly after the end of World War II, several other monuments celebrating the Soviet "liberators" were unveiled in various towns of Romania: Oradea, Arad, Lipova, Sântana, Baia Mare, Ocna Mureş, Braşov, Iaşi, Bucharest, Constanţa, Tulcea, Medgidia (fig. 2), Câmpulung Muscel etc. Most of these monuments remained in their original locations until the fall of communism, after which most of them were transferred to local cemeteries; very few remained in place (e.g. those in Aradu Nou and Lipova)⁸ and some were vandalised. Such actions especially targeted certain parts of the monuments: the red stars or the commemorative plaques, which were often removed and destroyed, or replaced by crosses (e.g. in Câmpulung Muscel, fig. 3), while some were stealthily destroyed (e.g. the obelisk in Cluj)⁹.

The monument dedicated to the Red Army, put up in Iaşi in 1963, seemingly vanished into thin air in 1998. The Soviet soldier statue, cast in bronze, was first transferred from its original location in the central park to the Eternitatea Cemetery in 1991, on the plot dedicated to fallen Soviet soldiers. As we now know, in 1998 the statue was melted down to cast an



Fig. 2: The Monument to the Soviet Army in the Orthodox cemetery of Medgidia, Romania; Soviet soldiers plot. Photo: Claudia-Florentina Dobre, 2023.

equestrian statue of Michael the Brave, a medieval prince who is celebrated for the supposed unification of three Ro-manian medieval countries; the statue was unveiled in 2002. Unaware of what had happened, in March 2007 the Russian ambassador went to Iași to lay flowers on the Red Army monument, but the statue was nowhere to be found. He asked the authorities about it, but the mayor claimed that the statue had been stolen. The press discovered that the thief was the mayor himself, who had signed a document authorising the melting down of the monument. The scandal intensified, with Russian officials strongly protesting against such practices¹⁰. In 2012, the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs pleaded for the rebuilding of the statue in order to repair this “act of vandalism”. He argued: “If, as the Russians tell us, a certain de-tensioning, a venting of the relationship, depends on such a specific and symbolic aspect, I think a formula should be found”¹¹. It was only in the wake of the invasion of Ukraine that this idea seems to have been abandoned.



Fig. 3: The Monument to the Soviet Army at the entrance of the cemetery in Câmpulung Muscel, Romania. Photo: Claudia-Florentina Dobre, 2013.

The Unwanted Soldier of Bucharest

The monument to the Soviet Army in Bucharest did not disappear, but it was never appreciated. In 1946, this statue embodying a Soviet soldier was erected in the very heart of the Romanian capital. Inaugurated in the presence of the Russian representatives in Bucharest and King Mihai, the last king of Romania, forced into exile by the communist government on 30 December 1947, the statue dominated Victoria Square. Shortly after its unveiling, it became the topic of mockery by one of the famous writers of the time, Păstorel Teodoreanu, who was eventually arrested. His epigram went as follows:



Fig. 4: The Soviet Soldier Monument in Bucharest in the Soviet heroes cemetery, Romania. Photo: Claudia-Florentina Dobre, 2010.

*"Russian soldier, Russian soldier
why are you so high,
because of the nations you freed
or due to your stinky feet?"¹²*

In the 1950s, such jokes could land people in jail, but in the 1980s they might even amuse Nicolae Ceausescu. The communist leader decided in 1986 to transfer the statue to another, smaller square on Kiseleff boulevard in Bucharest (fig. 4). The pretext for this relocation was the construction work at the Victoria subway station, but the real reason was the estranged relationship of Ceausescu with the Soviet Union and its leader Mikhail Gorbachev¹³.

In 1990, with a much reduced plinth, the statue was relocated once more, this time placed in the cemetery of Soviet heroes in Bucharest. In September 2009, the monument was painted red and the plinth covered in insulting inscriptions. In subsequent days, the Russian embassy in Bucharest sent a formal letter of protest to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, asking the authorities to punish those involved in these "acts of vandalism":

"Actions are needed for the future, so that such desecrating acts against military cemeteries will not occur any more. We rely on the fact that in accordance with the agreement in force between the governments of our states regarding the legal status of the Russian military cemeteries on the territory of Romania and of the Romanian military cemeteries on the territory of the Russian Federation, dated 8 November 2005, the Romanian side will take the necessary measures for the removal of the traces of this barbarism as soon as possible"¹⁴.

Nobody was punished but the cemetery was placed under surveillance and guarded. The place went on to be a celebratory spot for the Russian Federation each year on 9 May, Victory Day. On several occasions, Russian officials were joined by Romanian politicians, military officials and "friends" of the Russian Federation. The festivities ended for the Romanian authorities after the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. But there were no discussions about removing the monument.



Fig. 5: The Monument to the Romanian Army in Timișoara, Romania. Photo: Denisa Pană, 2023.

While in the capital of Romania there was silence about the Soviet soldier monument, Arad and Timișoara – two cities in the western part of the country, historically known for their anticommunism (Timișoara being the city where the Romanian revolution started in December 1989) – witnessed intense debates about the continuing existence of the Soviet Army monuments in 2022 and 2023.

Timișoara: A Controversial Monument

The monument in Timișoara (fig. 5), created by the famous Romanian sculptor Ion Vlad, located in the Central Park and unveiled on 30 December 1962, represents in white marble a soldier with a weapon at his feet, in a victorious pose. The uniform of the soldier belongs to the Romanian army while the boots are similar to those of the Soviet soldiers. The monument also has a relief with soldiers and people welcoming them with flowers, and here, too, the uniforms of the soldiers are both Romanian and Soviet, while the civilians represent generic communist workers. The original plaque was replaced after 1989 with a new one,

bearing a rather bizarre text, which says: "Glory to the Romanian soldier, inheritor of the traditions of ancient history who fought heroically against Bolshevism and Fascism for the freedom and independence of the homeland."¹⁵

After the fall of communism, the monument, situated in the very heart of the city, was used by Romanian army representatives as a focal point for military commemorations. Despite being held in such honour by the army, in November 2013 a local politician called for the removal of the statue, which, he believed, exclusively represented a Soviet soldier. His call was ignored by the authorities, but the invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 re-opened the discussion about the monument¹⁶. Two civic associations – the Timișoara Initiative and the Timișoara Society – instigated debates about the monument and whether it should be modified, moved, torn down or left alone. The debates heated up, and opinions leaned towards transferring it to another place. The discussions also stirred a political controversy¹⁷ between the mayor and the prefect, who were not only members of different parties but represented different ethnic groups as well (the mayor being an elected German, while the prefect is a Romanian, appointed by the state government). The prefect wanted to demolish the statue, because he too believed it depicted a Soviet soldier, while the mayor asked for specialists' opinions¹⁸.

The position of the mayor seemed to be the correct one in that a press release from 1962 shows that the monument in Timișoara was meant to celebrate the Romanian army. On 31 December 1962, on the front page of the German newspaper *Neuer Weg*, published in Bucharest, was written:

"On the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the proclamation of the republic, in the Central Park of Timișoara took place the festive unveiling of a monument erected in honour of the Romanian soldiers who fell in the fight for the liberation of our homeland from the fascist yoke"¹⁹.

It is worth mentioning that it was in the early 1960s that the Romanian communists started the process of detaching themselves from Moscow, taking advantage of the withdrawal of the Red Army in 1958. In the

official discourse of the time, the Soviets were depicted as allies during World War II and not as "liberators". As a consequence, no other monuments were built to honour the Soviet army, all the monuments unveiled from that moment on being dedicated to Romanian soldiers²⁰.

The Singular Arad Case: Three Monuments Honouring the Red Army

The town of Arad was liberated by a joint army of Soviets and Romanians on 22 September 1944. However, at the end of World War II, only the Soviets were praised as liberators. To honour them, three separate monuments were built in the town or on its outskirts. Their different fates exemplify the variety of approaches in Romanian society more broadly.

The first monument was unveiled on 7 November 1945 on Podgoria Square in the city centre. A 10-meter obelisk was placed on a concrete plinth 2.5 meters high. In its upper part, a sphere was mounted, above which was fixed a five-pointed metal star. Access to the plinth was provided by three steps with a fan opening, oriented towards the walkway in front. The protection area of the obelisk, a lawned rondo arranged with layers of ornamental flowers, was marked by a circular alley. Above the steps, on a white marble block, the following text was engraved: "This monument was erected by the inhabitants of the city and the county of Arad in honour of the liberating Red Army. Glory to the liberating Red Army! Arad, 7 November 1945". Above the inscription, in a bronze medallion, was a relief of the coat of arms of the Soviet Union. The monument was moved several times within the park and it was eventually removed in 1985²¹.

The large cemetery dedicated to the fallen Soviet soldiers in Arad hosts at its entrance another monument: a column in white marble bearing in its upper part a red star. On a white marble plate fixed on the facade was written in Russian, Romanian and Hungarian the following text: "Eternal glory to Soviet soldiers fallen in the fight for freedom and independence of the Soviet Union. Glory to the heroic Soviet Army that liberated Romania from the yoke of the fascist occupiers"²².

The third monument was unveiled in 1951 in the suburb of Aradul Nou. The obelisk, still standing, was slightly modified after the fall of communism. The three-meter column used to display at its top a sphere bearing the communist insignia: the crossed hammer and sickle in bronze. On the pyramid base was initially the coat of arms of the Soviet Union in bronze, above which, on the plinth, was engraved the inscription: "Glory to the Heroes fallen for the Liberation of the People". After the fall of communism, the sickle and hammer, as well as the coat of arms, were removed, and today they are considered lost²³. Ignored for more than three decades, after Ukraine's invasion the monument came under scrutiny. In May 2022, a city counsellor of Arad asked for its removal from public space, arguing that the monument which was

"a eulogy to the so-called Russian liberators is no longer relevant, if one looks at what is happening in Ukraine. While in the '50s the communist leadership of Arad decided to pay tribute to this army, I believe that in 2022 the Russian army can no longer be called liberating"²⁴.

On 24 August 2022, some Ukrainian refugees, joined by a few Romanians, gathered in front of the monument in Aradul Nou in order to protest against the invasion of Ukraine, and to ask for its removal. More than a year later, the monument is still standing in the same location, being in an advanced state of deterioration: the plinth is full of cracks, as is the obelisk. Nobody has initiated the administrative procedure to transfer it to the local cemetery, or to repair it.

Both actions could, in fact, be undertaken under law no. 422 from 2001, which is aimed at the protection of monuments. According to this law, a monument can be transferred to another location in order to be better protected²⁵. Law no. 379 from 2003, as regards the juridical regime of war cemeteries and monuments, grants protection to such monuments relocated to war cemeteries²⁶.

In Romania, there are currently 23 cemeteries dedicated to Soviet soldiers. The National Office for the Cult of Heroes, subordinate to the Romanian Army, ensures that the monuments and graves are maintained and reports any irregularities to local authorit-

ies. Since 2005, there has also been an agreement between Romania and the Russian Federation to protect and guard these cemeteries²⁷.

As one might infer from the examples mentioned above, in Romania the destiny of the Soviet monuments was, and still is, rather ambiguous. This ambiguity reflects Romanian rapport with the communist past in general, as well as its attitude towards the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation. This attitude started to change even during the communist era. From the early 1960s until the fall of the regime, the Romanian communists distanced themselves (slowly at first and very fast at the end) from the Soviet Union. They started in 1964 by rejecting the Valev plan to transform Romania into an agricultural hub, and continued with Ceausescu's politics of opening the country to Western investments, products and people (especially tourists), and not joining the Warsaw Pact troops in crushing the Prague Spring in August 1968. They ended up by accusing the Soviet Union of the betrayal of communist ideals in 1989²⁸.

The Romanian monuments dedicated to the Soviet Army have fallen prey to this approach to Moscow. While in the late 1940s and in the 1950s these obelisks and statues were focal spaces for celebrating Victory Day, by the 1980s they were ignored not only during commemorations, but also by local and national authorities, which led to them falling apart. Furthermore, several monuments were relocated during the communist period. I have mentioned the ones in Arad and Bucharest (relocated in the 1980s), but as early as 1955, the obelisk situated in the main park of Braşov was transferred to the local military cemetery²⁹.

Bulgarian "Alyoshas": The Much-Debated Soviet Heritage

During World War II, Bulgaria did not host Nazi troops and therefore did not need to be liberated by the Red Army. Furthermore, no Soviet soldiers died on its territory during the war³⁰. The arrival of the Red Army, which did not meet any opposition from the Bulgarian Army or administration, did not bring freedom for them, but communism. On 9 September 1944, the first pro-communist government was installed in the

capital Sofia, despite the weakness of the local communists.

However, with the help of the Soviets, the Bulgarian Communist Party consolidated its power through persecutions and crimes committed against the Bulgarian opposition, and also against all of the organisations and people representing civil society. By 1947, when the Agrarian Union was dissolved and its leader Nikola Petkov was condemned to death and executed together with 3,000 other individuals, the Bulgarian Communist Party had completed the takeover of the country³¹.

Led by Georgi Dimitrov, the transformation of Bulgaria into a communist country was initiated. After his sudden death in 1949, the Bulgarian Communist Party experienced difficulties in maintaining control. Internal struggles within the Party and the death of Stalin in 1953 led to "relaxations and the denunciation of the previous leadership"³². In 1954, a Bulgarian "native" communist, Todor Zhivkov, "became the First Secretary of the party [...] and the unchallenged leader of the country until 1989. Under his rule, Bulgaria was unquestionably loyal to Moscow"³³.

This loyalty was inscribed not only in the evolution of the Party and country, but also in concrete, marble or bronze, as hundreds of new monuments were built in order to celebrate the Red Army and the Soviet "liberators". The Soviet narrative was hardly ever questioned during the communist era, but after the fall of the regime, this discourse and the monumental representations of it stirred debates, controversies, civic actions, political statements and juridical action from the Bulgarian Supreme Court. In 1998, the Court ruled against any decision by the municipal authorities to dismantle these statues³⁴. Nikolai Vukov argues that people not only dismissed the Soviet imposed narrative, but they also "see an emphasized impulse to 'inspect' the sacredness of death and to question the ways it was interpreted in before 1989"³⁵.

The vast number of monuments from the era – around 400 – that celebrate the Russian and the Soviet military are scattered all over the country³⁶. The ones representing Soviet soldiers (commonly named Alyoshas) or dedicated to the Red Army fall prey not only to debates and civic actions, but also to a politic-



Fig. 6: The Alyosha from Ruse, Bulgaria. Photo: Claudia-Florentina Dobre, 2023.



Fig. 7: Alyosha of Plovdiv. Photo: Meglena Zlatkova, November 2023.

al divide between the ex-communists, regrouped in the Bulgarian Socialist Party (known as “the red party”) which claimed the socialist heritage, and the anti-communists (calling themselves the “blue” party) who have assumed the former opposition heritage³⁷.

Despite fierce discussions about these monuments, only one statue has actually been destroyed, in Pleven. It “was removed from the city centre in 1991 during the rule of the Union of Democratic Forces, or SDS, cut into pieces and melted down”³⁸. Those in Ruse or Burgas, however, acquired the status of “historical monuments” to be preserved thanks to the fact that they were “nationalised”, thus becoming the property of the Bulgarian state³⁹.

The Alyosha from Ruse was erected in 1947 and depicts a standing Russian soldier holding a flag in his left hand and supporting the flagstaff with his feet (fig. 6). On the pedestal are a pentagram and an inscription. On the back of the monument is a quote from Georgi Dimitrov: “The USSR’s friendship with Bulgaria is as necessary as the air and the sun for every living creature”. Designed by Yordan Krachmarov and his team, the monument is still standing at the entrance of Youth Park⁴⁰.

The Alyosha of Burgas is located in the city centre. On its pedestal a battle scene from World War II and the town welcoming Red Army troops are vividly depicted. After the fall of the communist regime, thousands of citizens signed a petition in favour of its demolition. In 1993, according to an agreement between Bulgaria and the Russian Federation, the monument was put under the protection of the state. It is “one of the few well-maintained monuments from the communist period, although swastikas are often scrawled on it”⁴¹. Soon after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, blue and yellow paint covered several figures of the plinth as a sign of support for the Ukrainians.

The Many Lives of the Alyosha of Plovdiv

The Alyosha of Plovdiv, “made after a photograph of Alexey Skurlatov, a Soviet Army signalman who worked on the re-establishment of the telephone connection between Plovdiv and Sofia in September 1944”⁴², was built in 1955–1957 on the hill above the city (fig. 7). It is 11 meters high, standing on a five-meter pedestal that bears two reliefs depicting war

scenes and Bulgarians welcoming the Soviet Army. The plinth has an inscription: "Honour to the invincible Soviet Liberation Army".

Inaugurated on 7 November 1957 to celebrate the Russian October Revolution, it became a subject of interest not only for Bulgarians, but also for Russians. In 1962, a Russian composer visited the town and was inspired by the monument. In the following years, he composed the song *Alyosha*, in which he glorified the Russian soldiers who fought for the liberation of Bulgaria⁴³. The song became very popular among Bulgarians in the 1970s and was even taught in schools. Eventually, it ended up as the anthem of the city of Plovdiv. Furthermore, and the song was popular in the USSR as well⁴⁴.

After the fall of communism, the Alyosha statue – as a symbol of the Soviet narrative about World War II and the liberation of Bulgaria – came under attack. Several civic and political initiatives asked for its demolition. The struggles for its destruction, preservation or transformation usually intensified during electoral campaigns. For many years, there was a tendency for anti-communist mayors of Plovdiv to promise to remove it, which quickly prompted protests from the Bulgarian Socialist Party⁴⁵. The Russian authorities also got involved, asking for the protection of the monument, and protesting against attempts at removal, or against acts of vandalism.

The most remarkable among these acts of vandalism took place on 7 November 2017, when the plinth under Alyosha was covered with a swastika and anti-Semitic slogans. The local socialist party accused the government of not being able to protect the monument and urged the municipality of Plovdiv to take action. They also expressed their interest in celebrating the 60th anniversary of the monument on 12 November 2017⁴⁶. Eventually, the Minister of Foreign Affairs condemned the vandalism, stating that:

*"Such manifestations are completely unacceptable and contradict the traditional tolerance of the Bulgarian society, as well as the obligations of the EU and international organizations to combat racism, xenophobia and hate crimes"*⁴⁷.

It seems that Alyosha – the statue as well as the song – haunts the social and individual imagination of the Bulgarians. In 2020, Kamen Stoyanov and Katharina Swoboda created *The Alyosha Project*, which consisted of a short film, called *Alyosha and the Cat*, and an exhibition opened in Gabrovo. The movie introduces the story of Vasil, a writer lacking inspiration who visits Plovdiv with his girlfriend. They visit the Alyosha monument, where they meet some Russians coming to lay flowers. As the directors explain: "Vasil asks them, why exactly they bring flowers and a Russian girl sings the Russian Alyosha song to them"⁴⁸. This encounter helped the writer-protagonist come up with a story about the role of the monument in generating connections between people. The exhibition in Gabrovo put together photos of Alyosha from the film and older ones from the archives. It was meant to raise awareness of the past among the people and to stir debates.

This was also the goal of another exhibition, *The Ghost Is Here*, organised and curated by Mitch Brezunek. The French artist created an artistic installation which transformed Alyosha into a ghost and opened on 9 September 2022 in Plovdiv. Brezunek digitally altered pictures of twelve Soviet monuments from different cities across Bulgaria, thus questioning its past and present. Some of the proceeds of this exhibition were meant to support artists from Ukraine and Bulgaria⁴⁹.

Until 2022, Alyosha's destiny was at stake mainly during electoral campaigns. It served as an instrument for pinpointing political opponents' legitimacy and international affiliation. Thus, for the anti-communists, Alyosha epitomised the strong ties of the socialists with Moscow, as well as the Bulgarian Socialist Party's inability to give up its communist past. For the Bulgarian Socialist Party, it symbolised the special relationship between Bulgaria and Russia, and the party's interest in maintaining this relationship.

After the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, a petition from the right-wing party, the Conservative Union of the Right (Консервативен съюз на десницата), asked for the removal of the monument as they see it as a symbol of the occupation of the country. They argued that "swinging Soviet weapons over the heads of Plovdiv residents and over the monument to the

Apostle of Freedom – Vasil Levski", a 19th-century revolutionary and a national hero of Bulgaria, is "an inadmissible symbol of occupation, domination of Bulgarian statehood and insult to the freedom of Bulgarians"⁵⁰.

Despite this request, Alyosha of Plovdiv is still standing on "his" hill, looking on the town and on "his" future, echoing the lyrics of the song dedicated to "him" by the Russian composer in 1966:

*"He'll never descend from this hill
[...]
He stands, looking over this town.
This town, this town
It seems he has looked over this town
For all time"⁵¹.*

The Many Faces of the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia

While the Alyosha of Plovdiv has stayed put, the Monument to the Soviet Army in the capital of Bulgaria was transferred from the city centre to some remote place in December 2023 (fig. 8). Over the years, it has generated not only debates and struggles to demolish or preserve it, but has also stirred the interest of the international media on various occasions⁵².

The memorial complex was located in the central park of Sofia, between the Bridge of Eagles and the "St. Kliment Ohridski" University of Sofia. The complex was built between 1952 and 1954, was 37 meters high, and was composed of a rectangular pedestal on which stood an eight-meter statue representing a soldier of the Soviet army, accompanied by a Bulgarian man, woman and child (fig. 9). There were other, secondary sculptural compositions and several reliefs surrounding the main monument⁵³.

In the first years after the fall of communism, the monument underwent "a process of 'natural' trivialisation, [...] the space around it became known mostly as the main meeting point of 'skaters' and 'rollers'"⁵⁴. Discussions about its demolition arose especially when the anti-communists took power. Over the years, it also became a gathering place for many left-wing and pro-Russian organisations, especially on



Fig. 8: The Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia, Bulgaria, before removal. Photo: Liliana Deyanova, December 2023.



Fig. 9: The Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia in its original location. Photo: Claudia-Florentina Dobre, 2013.

days of commemoration, such as 9 May⁵⁵. Eventually, it came to represent freedom of expression, as Bulgarians use it to express their feelings in regard to current national or international events.

Covered in graffiti over the years, the reliefs of the monuments have attracted the interest of the Bulgarian Socialist Party which in 2010 decided to clean the monument in a campaign called "clearing history"⁵⁶.

At the same time, the anti-communists advocated for its demolition. Protests of both parties took place in front of the statue, but eventually it was cleaned and not demolished⁵⁷. These protests, debates and campaigns revealed the growing interest in the monument. In 2011 the repainting of the reliefs even gained international attention.



Fig. 10: A souvenir cup, commemorating the intervention of 2011 in the sculptural relief on the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia. Photo: Claudia-Florentina Dobre, 2023.

During the night of 16 June 2011, a group of anonymous artists who called themselves "Destroyed Creation" painted the Soviet flag in the colours of the USA flag, and the soldiers in a way that made them resemble pop-culture figures: Captain America, the Joker, Ronald McDonald, Wonder Woman, Santa Claus, Wolverine etc. Under the relief was written, *In pace with the times (V Krak s vremeto; fig. 10)*⁵⁸. The creators of this artistic act claimed that the purpose was not political, but aimed at making themselves heard, and that it "was not against the victims of World War II and their families. It was targeting propaganda, and the way it changes without the people actually changing"⁵⁹. But the pro-Russian Bulgarian Socialist Party introduced another interpretation: in their eyes, this action was part of a secret plot to advertise the American dream. Furthermore, they stated that "the painting of the monument is blasphemy. The prosecutor's office should start a judicial procedure for hooliganism"⁶⁰.

The relief was cleaned after three days, causing protests from the supporters of the artistic makeover, but praise for the authorities' promptness from others.

The authorities of Sofia claimed that they did not believe that some NGOs had done it overnight: "According to Bulgarian National Television, the money came from the 'Bulgaria-Russia' forum, chaired by Svetlana Sharenkova"⁶¹.

Meanwhile, the Committee for the Dismantling of the Soviet Army Monument, which was created at about the same time, made several arguments for the removal of the statue. According to them, the Soviet army did not liberate Bulgaria from the Nazis, but instead imposed a totalitarian regime on the country⁶². Furthermore, the committee argued that "the presence of this monument in our capital renders [it] impossible to condemn the obscurantism of the totalitarian regime"⁶³. The debates around the relief prompted the film director Anton Partalev to make a short documentary in 2012 called *In Step with the Time*, which featured anonymous artists, but also representatives of the pro-Russian organisations⁶⁴.

In the subsequent years, other artistic interventions involving the Monument to the Soviet Army stirred debates, political statements and protests from Russian officials. Commemorating the victims of communism in front of the memorial in 2013, the sculptures were painted again, this time in the colours of the Bulgarian national flag. Later that year, the monument was covered in pink paint, "with a text of apology for the participation of Bulgaria in the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, recalling David Cerny's Prague Pink Tank of 1991"⁶⁵.

On 23 February 2014, when the Russian forces occupied the Crimean Peninsula, the monument received another makeover in protest of the invasion. The statue of one of the soldiers and the flag above it were painted in the national colours of Ukraine. The phrase "Glory to Ukraine" was written in Ukrainian on the monument. The Russian authorities protested, asking Bulgaria to "conduct a thorough investigation of this hooligan incident and to accuse those guilty of such an unlawful conduct and also take appropriate measures to bring the memorial back to its normal state"⁶⁶, which eventually happened. On 12 April 2014, however, the relief was painted in the colours of the Polish flag, with an inscription underneath remembering the Katyn massacre⁶⁷.

The day after the 24 February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the mayor of the Sredets district in Sofia announced that the municipality was going to dismantle the Monument of the Soviet Army. This did not prevent people from manifesting their disapproval of the invasion of Ukraine, the monument again being vandalised several times in the following days. One of the vandals was a 61-year-old Bulgarian, who declared: "My main protest is against the war that Russia is waging against Ukraine, but the date also coincided with Red Army Day, which is celebrated on February 23, and now it is Defense of the Fatherland Day."⁶⁸

Further acts of vandalism, protests and gatherings in support of the monument took place in front of it in the following months. On 4 May 2022, the reliefs were covered with a Bulgarian flag by a group of people, while the plaque praising the Soviet army was damaged: "an act that was described as 'blasphemy' by the Russian ambassador to Sofia, Eleonora Mitrofanova"⁶⁹.

On 15 August 2023, the governor of the Sofia region announced that the monument had become the private property of the administration, which planned to remove it from the square by the end of 2023. The pro-Russians organised a camp with several tents to protect the monument⁷⁰. On 17 August, several football fans of the Levski team, using gas against the people in the tents, damaged the plaque dedicated to the Soviet army, which prompted new protests from Moscow. The next day, four of them were arrested. While condemning the vandalism of the supporters, the governor of Sofia asked for the camp to be dismantled⁷¹.

These symbolic and/or physical struggles around the monument in Sofia can be explained by the position Russia still holds in the national memory of Bulgaria, namely whether the Russians and the Soviet Union are seen as liberators or occupiers. In other words, these struggles are driven by Bulgaria's relationships with the Russian state and the Soviet Union before it, and by the respective political agendas of the anti-communists and former communists. At the same time, as Ivaylo Dichev pointed out, these interventions were "a way for young people to gain control over the public space"⁷². Kristina Dimitrova has emphasised that these initiatives are confrontations of

the power discourse, while using "the symbolic meaning of the place to demand respect of human rights and freedom of expression". But they have also "evolved as a medium for street art's social criticism and contemporary art actions focused on broader issues such as the conscious use of public space by citizens, thereby provoking public debates on the contemporary way of living in the city"⁷³.

Conclusion

From their creation to the present, the destinies of the Soviet army monuments in Bulgaria and Romania reveal the different approaches of the two states to their past, their relationships with the Soviet/Russian state and the political and cultural tensions existing within the national borders and beyond. At the time of their construction, these obelisks, soldier's statues etc. were meant to epitomise the relationship of both of these countries with the Soviet Union and to promote the Soviet narrative about World War II. Even during the communist era, they fell prey to the politics of the communist regimes in the two countries: they were sometimes ignored and even removed from public spaces in Romania, while they were officially celebrated in Bulgaria.

After the fall of communism, however, these monuments began new lives. They were not just stones in a landscape, whose meanings were mandated by the authorities, but they became real vectors of memory. To this day, they are hybrid places where past meets present and memory challenges forgetting, where politics encounters civic actions, and where individual and collective memories intertwine.

Endnotes

- James E. Young, "Écrire le monument: site, mémoire, critique", in: *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, no. 3, May–June, 1993, pp. 732–733.
- Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, New York 1938, p. 438.
- Romania lost Bessarabia, Bukovina and the Hertza region on 28 June 1940, the north-eastern part of Transylvania on 30 August, and the southern part of Dobrogea on 7 September.
- Antonescu was a Romanian army career officer who rose to prominence during the 1940 crisis, which led to his nomination as Prime Minister. He was also Minister of the Army after the abdication of King Charles II. After liberating Bessarabia and Bukovina, he appointed himself a marshal and the head of state, the young King Michael only holding an honorary position, as the constitution was abolished and a military dictatorship was proclaimed. Arrested in 1944 and deported to Russia, in 1946 he was brought back to Romania, where he was condemned to death and executed. Antonescu is considered responsible for the persecution of Jews from Bukovina, Bessarabia and Transnistria, as well as for the Iași pogrom.
- Marius Oprea, "Ce se întâmplă când rușii ocupă o țară: România sub teroarea soldaților Armatei Roșii" [What happens when the Russians occupy a country: Romania under the terror of the Red Army soldiers], in: *Mediafax.ro*, 16.1.2022, <https://www.mediafax.ro/editorialistii/istoria-fara-perdea-marius-oprea-ce-se-intimpla-cind-rusii-ocupa-o-tara-romania-sub-teroarea-soldatilor-armatei-rosii-20463424> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
- Liviu Alexa, "Istorie de Cluj: Tancul stalinist din Piața Avram Iancu se odihnește în cimitirul central" [Cluj history: The stalinist tank from Avram Iancu Square stands in the central cemetery], in: *Ziarul de Cluj*, 15.2.2014, <https://ziardecluj.ro/istorie-de-cluj-tancul-stalinist-din-piata-avram-iancu-se-odihneste-in-cimitirul-central/> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
- Ioan Ciorca, *Monumentele și statuile Clujului* [The monuments and statues of Cluj], Cluj 2022.
- "Urmele celui de-Al Doilea Război Mondial rămân în Lipova: monumentul eroilor sovietici" [The traces of World War II remain in Lipova: The Monument of the Soviet Heroes], in: *Zig-Zag prin România*, https://zigzagprinromania.com/blog/monumentul-eroilor-sovietici/dsc_1282/ (last accessed 7.11.2023).
- See Claudia-Florentina Dobre, "Следи от комунизма. Памет и забрава в публичното пространство в София и Букурещ. Образцовият случай на шест паметника и тяхната съдба" [Remnants of communism: Memory and oblivion in the public space of Sofia and Bucharest. The case study of six monuments and their destiny], in: *Да познаем Комунизма* [To know about communism], ed. Ivaylo Znepolski, Sofia 2012, pp. 117–166.
- "Statuia soldatului sovietic, topită la ordinul lui Simirad" [The statue of the Soviet soldier, melted down on Simirad's order], in: *Adevarul*, 29.6.2007, <https://adevarul.ro/stiri-interne/societate/statuia-soldatului-sovietic-topita-la-ordinul-lui-658626.html> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
- "Relațiile româno-ruse tensionate din cauza unei statui din Iași" [Romanian-Russian relations under tension due to a statue in Iași], in: *Evenimentul Zilei*, 1.3.2012, <https://evz.ro/relatiile-romano-ruse-tensionate-din-cauza-unei-statui-din-iasi-969124.html> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
- Soldate rus, soldate rus / te-ai înălțat acolo sus / că liberași popoarele / sau fiindcă-ți put picioarele?* See Claudia-Florentina Dobre, "Pasts Into Present: Ideology, Memory, and Monuments in Communist and Post-communist Romania", in: *Sensus Historiae*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2016, p. 178.
- Vasile Buga, "Relațiile româno-sovietice în anii '80" [Romanian-Soviet relations in the 1980s], in: *Politică externă comunistă și exil anticomunist*. Anuarul Institutului Român de Istorie Recentă [Communist foreign affairs and the anticommunist exile: The annuary of the Romanian Recent History Institute], vol. II, Iași 2004, p. 103.
- "Rusia insistă să fie anchetată vandalizarea memorialului militar sovietic din București" [Russia insists that the vandalism of the military memorial in Bucharest be investigated], in: *Romania libera*, 21.9.2009, <https://romanalibera.ro/special/rusia-insista-sa-fie-anchetata-vandalizarea-memorialului-militar-sovietic-din-bucuresti-165331/> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
- Ștefan Both, "Statuia ostașului sovietic, mutată din Parcul central din Timișoara?" [The statue of the Soviet soldier moved from the Central Park in Timișoara?], in: *Historia*, 19.5.2023, <https://historia.ro/sectiune/actualitate/statuia-ostasului-sovietic-mutata-din-parcul-2268544.html> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
- Vasile Docea, "Monumentul ostașului din Timișoara: o controversă" [The monument of the soldier in Timișoara: A controversy], in: *Puterea a cincea*, 28.7.2023, <https://putereacincea.ro/monumentul-ostasului-din-timisoara-o-controversa/> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
- Brândușa Armanca, "Efectul războiului împotriva Ucrainei asupra statuilor staliniste. O sculptură de Ion Vlad e vizată la Timișoara" [The effect of the war in Ukraine on the Stalinist statue: A sculpture by Ion Vlad is under pressure in Timișoara], in: *Europa Liberă România. Newsletter*, 11.6.2023, <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/razboiul-din-ucraina-a-aprins-discutia-despre-statuile-staliniste-din-romania/32444254.html> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
- Docea 2023, *Monumentul ostașului din Timișoara*.
- Quoted from *ibid.*
- Dumitru Almaș and Ioan Scurtu, *Itinerare patriotice* [Patriotic itineraries], Bucharest 1985.
- Horia Truță, "Monumentul săptămânii – morminte și monumente ale eroilor militari sovietici" [The weekly monument: Tombs and monuments of the Soviet military heroes], in: *Biblioteca Județeană "Alexandru D. Xenopol" Arad*, 31.7.2020, <https://bibliotecaarad.ro/monumentul-saptamanii-morminte-si-monumente-ale-eroilor-militari-sovietici/> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
- Ibid.*
- Ibid.*
- M. B., "Mutarea Monumentului Eroilor Sovietici, doar o idee fără pași concreți" [The transfer of the monument of the Soviet heroes, an idea without any concrete action], in: *Arad Online*, 17.1.2023, <https://www.aradon.ro/aradon-stirile-judetului-arad/mutarea-monumentului-eroilor-sovietici-doar-o-idee-fara-pasi-concreti-1654833/> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
- Ibid.*
- "Norme juridice" [Legal norms], in: *Oficiul național pentru cultul eroilor*, s.a., <https://once.mapn.ro/pages/legislatie> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
- "Evidența mormintelor de război din România" [Evidence of war graves in Romania], in: *Oficiul național pentru cultul eroilor*, s.a., <https://once.mapn.ro/pages/evidenta-mormintelor-de-razboi-din-romania/> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
- Claudia-Florentina Dobre, *Fostele deținute politic și Securitatea. Studii de caz* [The former political detainees and the Securitate: Case studies], *Targoviste* 2023, pp. 55–63.
- Cosmin Năsui, "Stalinismul în artă" [Stalinism in the arts], in: *Astra*, no. 1–4, 2018, p. 111.
- Nikolai Vukov, "Death and the Desecrated: Monuments of the Socialist Past in Post-1989 Bulgaria", in: *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2003, p. 51.
- Emil Giatzidis, *An Introduction to Post-Communist Bulgaria: Political, Economic and Social Transformation*, Manchester / New York 2002, p. 20.
- Ibid.*, p. 23.
- Ibid.*, pp. 19–23.
- Bruno Sconfelder, "Judicial Independence in Bulgaria: A Tale of Splendor and Misery", in: *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 57, no. 1, 2005, pp. 61–92.
- Vukov 2003, *Death and the Desecrated*, p. 51.
- Ani Ivanova, "The Thick Red Line", in: *Vagabond, Bulgaria's English Magazine*, 18.12.2009, <https://www.vagabond.bg/index.php/thick-red-line-2196> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
- Claudia-Florentina Dobre, "Les combats mémoriels du postcommunisme bulgare: Le communisme et ses monuments", in: *Anuarul C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor*, no. 12, 2011, p. 239.
- Ivanova 2009, *The Thick Red Line*.
- Nikolai Vukov and Svetlana Toncheva, "Town Squares and Socialist Heritage: The Reworking of Memorial Landscapes in

- Post-socialist Bulgaria", in: *The Politics of Heritage and Regional Development Strategies: Actors, Interests, Conflicts*, eds. Sebastian Schroder-Esch and Justus H. Ulbricht, Weimar 2006, p. 127.
40. "Alyosha Monument, Ruse", in: *Audio Travel Guide for Romanian-Bulgarian Cross-Border Area*, s.a., <https://audiotravelguide.ro/en/alyosha-monument-ruse/> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
 41. Alison Furuto, "Forgotten Monuments from the Communist Era in Bulgaria", in: *ArchDaily*, <https://www.archdaily.com/101626/forgotten-monuments-from-the-communist-era-in-bulgaria> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
 42. Ibid.
 43. Ibid.
 44. Felix Münch, "Present Struggles with the Heroes of the Soviet Past: 'Alyosha' Monuments in Tallinn, Vienna, Plovdiv, and the Post-communist Space", paper presented at the ASN World Convention, Columbia University, 18.–20.4.2013, pp. 12–15.
 45. Dobre 2012, Следи от комунизма, p. 125.
 46. "The Monument of the Soviet Army in Plovdiv Was Painted with Swastikas", in: *Novinite.com*, 10.11.2017, <https://www.novinite.com/articles/185085/The+Monument+of+the+Soviet+Army+in+Plovdiv+was+Painted+with+Swastikas> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
 47. "Bulgarian Foreign Minister Condemns Desecration of Alyosha Monument in Plovdiv", 11.11.2017, <https://en.topwar.ru/129397-mid-bolgarii-osudil-oskvernenie-pamyatnika-aleshe-v-plovdive.html> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
 48. "Short Film", in: *The Alyosha Project: A Research Project about the Alyosha Monument in Plovdiv, Bulgaria*. Initiated by Kamen Stoyanov and Katherina Swoboda, s.a., <https://alyosha.info/short-film> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
 49. Teodora Barzakova, "In Bulgaria, Soviet War Memorials Are Turning into Ghosts", in: *Radio Free Europe*, 17.9.2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/bulgaria-soviet-war-memorials-ghosts-art-nft-brezunek/32038555.html> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
 50. "They Submit a Proposal for the Removal of the Alyosha Monument in Plovdiv", in: *World Today News*, 24.2.2022, <https://www.world-today-news.com/they-submit-a-proposal-for-the-removal-of-the-alyosha-monument-in-plovdiv/> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
 51. Münch 2013, *Present Struggles...*, pp. 13–14.
 52. Most recently: "The Troubled History of Bulgaria's Soviet Monument", in: *Radio Free Europe*, 27.2.2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/sofia-soviet-monument-vandalism-ukraine-war-protest/32290150.html> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
 53. "Monument to the Soviet Army", in: *Nonument!*, s.a., <https://nonument.org/nonuments/monument-to-the-soviet-army/> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
 54. Stylian Deyanov, "A 'Communist' Monument in Central Sofia and the Debates around It", paper presented at a seminar held at the Communication Department, University of Vienna, 30.3.2018, p. 3.
 55. Ibid.
 56. "Младите социалисти чистят паметници, без да подбират" [Young socialists clean monuments without selection], in: *News.bg*, 4.3.2010, <https://news.bg/politics/mladite-sotsialisti-chistyat-pametnitsi-bez-da-podbirat.html> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
 57. Deyanov 2018, A "Communist" Monument..., p. 4.
 58. "Monument to the Soviet Army, Sofia", in: *Alchetron*, 10.7.2022, <https://alchetron.com/Monument-to-the-Soviet-Army,-Sofia> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
 59. Mariya Cheresheva, "Painting Monuments Stays in Vogue in Bulgaria", in: *Balkan Insight*, 8.5.2017, <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/05/08/painting-monuments-stays-in-vogue-in-bulgaria-05-07-2017/> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
 60. "Боядисването на паметника е цинизъм. Прокуратурата образува досъдебно производство за хулиганство" [Painting the monument is cynicism: The prosecutor's office initiated pre-trial proceedings for hooliganism], in: *Дума*, no. 139, 21.6.2011. Quoted from Deyanov 2018, A "Communist" Monument..., p. 6.
 61. "Sofia Graffiti Fans Mourn Soviet Memorial's New Look", in: *Balkan Insight*, 22.6.2011, <https://balkaninsight.com/2011/06/22/soviet-army-monument-in-sofia-washed-clean-overnight/> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
 62. Deyanov 2018, A "Communist" Monument..., p. 7.
 63. Quoted from *ibid.*, pp. 7–8.
 64. See "In Step with the Time. Plot", in: *IMDb*, s.a., https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7162946/plotsummary/?ref_=tt_ov_pl. The documentary, presented at CinEast 2011 and the South-East European Film Festival 2013, is not publicly accessible anymore, except for a short fragment on YouTube: NINATEKA.PL, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hLKD2K3pY&t=32s> (all last accessed 7.11.2023).
 65. Deyanov 2018, A "Communist" Monument..., p. 10.
 66. *Monument to the Soviet Army 2022*.
 67. "Monument to the Soviet Army, Sofia", in: *Wikipedia*, s.a., https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monument_to_the_Soviet_Army,_Sofia (last accessed 7.11.2023).
 68. "Sofia's City Council Approves Plan to Move Contentious Soviet Red Army Monument", in: *Radio Free Europe*, 9.3.2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/bulgaria-sofia-red-army-monument-moved/32310767.html> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
 69. Nikolov Krassen, "Soviet Army Monument in Sofia to Be Removed after Years of Debates", in: *Euractiv*, 7.3.2023, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/soviet-army-monument-in-sofia-to-be-removed-after-years-of-debate/> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
 70. "Bulgaria: Soviet Army Monument in Sofia Fenced Off on Safety Grounds", in: *The Sofia Globe*, 25.8.2023, <https://sofiaglobe.com/2023/08/25/bulgaria-soviet-army-monument-in-sofia-fenced-off-on-safety-grounds/> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
 71. "Футболни фенове атакуваха съветския паметник. Костадинов ги нарече 'еничари' и получи предупреждение" [Football fans attacked the Soviet monument: Kostadinov called them 'janissaries' and received a warning], in: *Radio Free Europe*, 18.8.2023, <https://www.svobodnaevropa.bg/a/fenove-atakuvaha-savetskia-pametnik/32553454.html> (last accessed 7.11.2023).
 72. Cheresheva 2017, *Painting Monuments...*
 73. Kristina Dimitrova, "Appropriations of Urban Spaces as Resistance: The Soviet Army Monument in Sofia", in: *Critique & Humanism*, no. 46 (special issue: Issue Youth, Civic Action and Protest), 2016, p. 51.

Picture Credits

- Fig. 1: Alexa 2014, *Istorie...*
 Fig. 2–4, 6, 9, 10: Claudia-Florentina Dobre.
 Fig. 5: Denisa Pană.
 Fig. 7: Meglena Zlatkova.
 Fig. 8: Liliana Deyanova.

Abstract

As a matrix of meanings, monuments are often at stake in the processes of appropriation or disavowal of the past, while preserving their status as marks of identity for the individual, the group, the city or the nation. This was also the destiny of the monuments built during the communist period in Bulgaria and Romania in order to glorify the "all-mighty Red Army". Carved in stone, marble or bronze, and enshrined in the city landscape, they were celebrated constantly during the communist period. After the fall of the regimes, they were often vandalised, dismantled, or melted down, and became controversial. This article looks at the different stages of those transformations, focusing on the discussions and laws in the past decades. First the general situations are introduced in both of these countries, and then a few of the most intriguing case studies are reviewed in greater detail.

Author

Claudia-Florentina Dobre is a Senior Researcher at the "Nicolae Iorga" Institute of History, Romanian Academy, Bucharest. She earned her PhD at Laval University in 2007 with a thesis on women's memories of communist political persecutions in post-communist Romania. She has conducted research on memories of communism, on museums, memorials and monuments, on deportations, on everyday life in Romania during the communist era, and more broadly on the knowledge exchange and academic cultures in the Black Sea region in the 20th century. Her most recent publications are: "Fostele deținute politic și Securitatea. Studiu de caz" (Women, former political detainees, and the Securitate: A case study; Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2023); and "Ni víctimas ni heroínas. Las antiguas detenidas políticas y las memorias del comunismo en Rumanía" (Neither victims nor heroines: Former political detainees and the memories of communism in Romania, 2022).

Email: cfdobre@iini.ro

Title

Claudia-Florentina Dobre, "Alyosha, go home!" *The Monuments of the Soviet Army in Romania and Bulgaria from the End of World War II until the Present*, in: kunsttexte.de, no. 1, 2024, section Ostblick, thematic issue: *War on Monuments: Documenting the Debates over Russian and Soviet Heritage in Eastern and Central Europe*, ed. by Kristina Jõekalda (15 pages), www.kunsttexte.de.

<https://doi.org/10.48633/ksttx.2024.1.102643>