

S P E E C H

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

**RULE OF LAW PROGRAM
SOUTH EAST EUROPE**
THORSTEN GEISSLER

Juli 2011

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Annual Meeting
of the European Network of Official
Authorities in Charge with the
Secret-Police Files

14 July, Bucharest

Parliament Palace, Bucharest, Romania

July 14, 2011

Opening speech by

Thorsten Geissler

Director, Rule of Law Program South East Europe,
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

It is both an honour and a pleasure for me to welcome you on behalf of the Rule of Law Program South East Europe of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

We gladly support this conference because we highly appreciate the work done both by the national institutions which are a part of your network and by this network itself.

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The Rule of Law Program of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation works in ten countries, the six republics that once formed Yugoslavia, and in Romania, Bulgaria, Albania and Moldova. Our Program supports democracy and the protection of human and civil rights, as well as the fight against corruption and justice reform. Moreover our objective is to protect ethnic and social minorities and to support lustration – coping with the past.

Lustration is primarily the preventive affirmation of civic virtues and the strengthening of democracy. The aim of lustration is to protect newly emerged democracies from people in high positions of power with a communist past who try to undermine it.

A democracy which replaces a dictatorship endangers its credibility when it allows former perpetrators to retain their positions and pursue their career under the new order, and we all know that this happened more than once.

I am, however, as a German conscious of the fact that the situation in my country was quite different to the one in the other countries that are represented here today. The old elite of the GDR could easily be replaced by West Germans, in fact thousands of West Germans found new career opportunities. But there was no second Romania and what is true for Romania is true as well for all the other countries.

Maybe not only in Romania, a lot of people made a disappointing experience. Firstly democracy and the new economic order did not translate into jobs and wealth for themselves. They were no longer denied a passport but they still had not enough money to travel. Secondly they noticed that a lot of those who had served the communist regime with passion were still key players and they also observed that some of those became rich very quickly, also because the old networks were still working while they themselves remained poor.

Furthermore people seem to forget quickly and nostalgia and romanticism become a common phenomenon, or as the Chinese put it "The memory paints with a golden paintbrush".

So when the Romanian Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crime and the Memory of Romanian Exile in December 2010 released the results of an opinion poll I was stunned.

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According to the survey, 59 % of Romanians consider communism a good idea, 44 % think this good idea was wrongly applied while 15 % think it was well applied. Only 29 % of respondents view communism as a bad idea. Had the abuses of communism already been forgotten by such a substantial part of the Romanian population ?

Maybe the results would have been different if the following questions had been asked:

- Would you like to be denied the right to say what you really think politically?
- Would you like to have no permission to travel abroad?
- Would you like to have bread, oil and sugar on food tickets?
- Would you like to have only one state-owned TV station broadcasting two hours a day, offering strictly programs with Ceausescu?
- Would you like the Securitate opening your correspondence, listening to your phone conversations and bugging your apartment?
- Would you like to see food shops empty and well-stocked shops for the Nomenclatura?
- Would you like to wait for seven years to have a phone line installed in your home?
- Would you like to be obliged to live in drab and grey state-owned apartments sometimes with electricity only for two hours a day?

But such was the reality of Romania which people seem to forget when they are asked general questions about their perceptions of communism.

I wish to mention that I did not overlook the encouraging aspects of the aforementioned opinion polls because positive views on communism are also related to age. And I find it encouraging that among those who never had any direct experience with the communist regime and I am talking about those younger than 20 only 21 % consider communism a good idea. The fact that a majority of young Romanians seem to appreciate the privilege of growing up in a free and democratic society makes me optimistic keeping in mind that the future of their country will be in their hands.

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When we read the results of this opinion poll we have to keep in mind that Romania was one of the most brutal dictatorships in the socialist camp. I was reminded of this shortly after my arrival in this country.

It was on the 10th December 2010, the International Day of Human Rights, I had just arrived in Romania, that I visited the prison of Jilava. A documentary was screened describing the degrading and inhuman circumstances under which thousands of opponents of the communist regime had to suffer, the cruelty and brutality they were exposed to, most of them for many years. But the most moving part of that day was when I had the opportunity to talk to some former inmates of that prison. I was shocked by what they told me. They had survived but the scars that had been inflicted on them by the communists will remain for the rest of their lives.

I understand that one of the major targets of your institutions is to ensure a comprehensive educational and historic analysis of the working principles of communist secret police bodies based on scientific findings. It is not only the results of the aforementioned opinion poll that point out how important this work is.

Of equal importance is to ensure that the files of the former communist secret police bodies are handled and made available in keeping with the principle of the rule of law and to facilitate individual access to files and data containing personal information of those persons formerly suffering from repression by the secret police.

In this context an active multilateral cooperation is of utmost importance. However, not all the countries that once had a communist government, are represented in your organisation and I understand that this is due to the fact that in those countries institutions that are similar to yours do not administer the files of the former communist secret police bodies or do not even have free and unconditional access to them. This is from my point of you extremely regrettable and I can only express my hope that we can convince politicians in these countries to change the respective laws.

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Since the day on which we were invited to support this conference I have been looking forward to it and I am most grateful that the Rule of Law Program South East Europe of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation was granted the status of an observer.

In this sense I wish to thank all those who prepared this conference and contribute to its success and can assure you of the full support of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in the future.