

## INTELLECTUALS AND POLITICS. The Obsession of a Phantasmagorical Betrayal

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### Abstract

The issue of the relationship between intellectuals and politics started to be more vividly discussed after '89 although it is more than two thousand years old. Having been recently liberated from a totalitarian political regime, which required each individual who belonged to this category to be "a good propagandist of Marxism-Leninism", Romanian intellectuals started to taste political freedom. However, if during the communist period they formed a common body, being subject to the same prohibitions, in democracy – as it had been expected – various differences of opinion and option in what regards the relationship with politics have started to emerge. It is an old story and this image of the intellectual who is deemed to have the duty of being apolitical originates in a poor understanding of Plato's philosophy. This understanding was theorised in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Julien Benda, author of the well-known work *The Betrayal of the Intellectuals*, who was also misunderstood. Hence, an entire tradition of stigmatising the intellectuals' involvement in politics emerged. I shall point out that Plato did not see any contradiction between the status of philosopher and that of politician and that the intellectuals and scholars accused by Benda have not betrayed anything.

After twenty years of democracy, the Romanian society is horrified by the fact that illiteracy and rudeness have entered the foreground of politics, or, as it is often said in other words, by the fact that the Romanian political space has been "vanghelised" or "becalised" – terms derived from the names of the most mediatised inept people in our political class, Marian Vanghelie and George (aka Gigi) Becali. There are numerous complaints related to the fact that we have a political class wherein such sinister characters hold top positions but, at the same time and paradoxically, an intellectual's entering politics is accompanied by a choir of wailers who cry out their disappointment with such a betrayal: "another one who has betrayed us, is there no one who cares about values, are they all willing to compromise themselves?". And again, new debates on the relationship between intellectuals and politics begin to precipitate - discussions which fade away progressively till the next "betrayal".

Thus, the intellectuals who get involved in politics are usually accused of a so-called betrayal of principles. A certain representation is active here and it depicts the intellectual as a vestal who guards the purity of moral principles and must not come down into the public market because she would dirty and soil them. I recognise in this position a scheme frequently used by politicians: they accuse their opponents of having betrayed the expectations of the electorate to which they have owed a duty; intellectuals accuse their fellows of having betrayed the principles to which they have owed a duty. There is a difference, however: the duty of politicians is sanctioned by the periodical contract embodied by the ballot; the one of intellectuals is only deduced from imagining a certain status for them. If in the case of the former things are clear, in the case of the latter a question emerges: who established the intellectual's duty not to involve in politics, a duty whose breach could be classified as betrayal?

It is an old story and this image of the intellectual who is deemed to have the duty of being apolitical originates in a poor understanding of Plato's philosophy. This understanding was theorised in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Julien Benda, author of the well-known work *The Betrayal of the Intellectuals*, who was also misunderstood. Hence, an entire tradition of stigmatising the intellectuals' involvement in politics emerged.

In any society, intellectuals are both involved and uninvolved in politics. Each of them has the right to make a choice in this respect and to manage his activity and career as he sees fit. But there is a problem when intellectuals who get involved, in one way or another, in public life or politics, being present in the mass-media, advocate the need for the intellectuals to be apolitical. If in the early '90s - when candidates in the general election showed off their apolitical character even in their discourses and electoral materials - such an attitude could be explained by their lack of experience in democratic affairs; after twenty years of democratic education it could be labelled as hypocrisy.

In this study I shall discuss at least two intellectual sources of the opinion trend which advocate the virtues of the intellectuals' non-political character. I shall point out that Plato did not see any contradiction between the status of philosopher and that of politician and that the intellectuals and scholars accused by Benda have not betrayed anything. The persistence of the opinion supporting the incompatibility between intellectuals and power may be included among the causes of some harmful phenomena

found in the current Romanian society such as: the crisis of the public space, the presence, in the foreground of public life, of some characters whose performance may be deemed amusing at the very least, the diminishing level of the public discourse, and so on.

### **Intellectuals in politics, from Plato to Benda. No contradiction, no betrayal**

An entire philosophical tradition saw Plato as the idealist par excellence, as the philosopher who would have asserted that the only reality is that of Ideas and that the life purpose of those who strive for perfection would be the preparation for death, because only after dying we would be able to contemplate the realities our soul longs for. A quote from *Phaedo* (Plato 1966, 68a) is often invoked to support this projection: „Would it not be very foolish if they [the real philosophers - a.n.] should be frightened and troubled when this very thing happens, and if they should not be glad to go to the place where there is hope of attaining what they longed for all through life—and they longed for wisdom—and of escaping from the companionship of that which they hated [namely the body - a.n.]?”. In order to back the same idea, other excerpts are also invoked, such as the one in *Theaetetus*<sup>1</sup>, where we are introduced to the “freeman” who does not participate in the life of the city and refuses to immerse in the pettiness of this world.

If we read these excerpts out of their contexts, we could believe that Plato does indeed set forth a philosopher who has retreated from the affairs of the city. I reject such a perception. It is enough to read *The Myth of the Cave* (Plato 1921, 173e-174a) up to the end to be persuaded by the philosopher’s political mission. There, Socrates wonders: “Well, then,” said I, “is not this also likely and a necessary consequence of what has been said, that neither could men who are uneducated and inexperienced in truth ever adequately preside over a state, nor could those who had been permitted to linger on to the end in the pursuit of culture—the one because they have no single aim and purpose in life to which all their actions, public and private, must be directed, and the others, because they will not voluntarily engage in

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<sup>1</sup> “But really it is only his body that has its place and home in the city; his mind, considering all these things petty and of no account, disdains them and is borne in all directions, as Pindar says, “both below the earth,” and measuring the surface of the earth, and “above the sky,” studying the stars, and investigating the universal nature of every thing that is, each in its entirety, never lowering itself to anything close at hand.” Plato, “Theaetetus”, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*.

action, believing that while still living they have been transported to the Islands of the Blest. [...] that we shall not be wronging, either, the philosophers who arise among us, but that we can justify our action when we constrain them to take charge of the other citizens and be their guardians." The philosopher's political mission is obvious here.

As I have previously shown in another study (Bocancea 2008, 261; Bocancea 2009, 176) where I have considered this problem at length, "we do not have a single portrait of the philosopher, but several, according to Plato's ages: in the dialogues of his youth he wants to define virtue, in *Phaedo* he asks himself about the immortality of the soul to find ontological support for his political project, in the *Republic* he governs, in *Theaetetus* he is quietly occupied with dialectics, and in *Laws* he acts like a priest. The entire evolution of the philosopher's portrait is closely linked to Plato's personal experiences and expresses his intentions at certain times of his life." The philosopher who is concerned only with reflecting on some theoretical problems is a character who appeared later on, in the post-Aristotelian philosophy schools. A thinker with such an ironical attitude to the model of the theorist who falls into a pit while looking at the stars could not have put forth such a model. The fact that philosophical concerns suppose a certain amount of abstention from some daily activities does not imply asceticism. As Guthrie (1999, 23) also noted, „it is too easily assumed that the Greeks, in their entirety, believed in an ideal of knowledge for the sake of knowledge, separated from practical objectives and that they despised useful arts". As I have previously shown, Plato was not visited by the Socratic Daimon which made the philosopher refrain from running the city's affairs, as "he was more interested in what he could do and acquire here than in what he should have expected after death: philosophy is not a preparation for death, as Socrates believed, but a preparation for life" (Bocancea 2008, 260; Bocancea 2009, 175).

Plato acknowledged a thing which is also true today: as a rule, the ignorant long for political power and get involved in this respect while those who possess knowledge (philosophers, in Plato's case) reject political involvement precisely because they know that it is not easy to manage public affairs. Thus, it is not the fact that they like or despise politics which separate the two, but the degree of knowledge: the ignorant long for power because they are fascinated by what they imagine to be its advantages; the knowledgeable know that the sacrifices a politician must make are greater than the advantages. This is why, recommends the philosopher, the city

must force the latter to accept power. Power must be given to the one who does not wish it not only because the risk of abusing it is diminished but also precisely because the ones who reject it do so while being well-informed. The principle of giving power to the ones who do not wish it has been labelled by Liviu Antonesei (1997, 19)<sup>2</sup> as “nonsense”, “childishness”: “Plato impelled us to entrust power to those who do not wish it, to push those who do not love power into public functions, into the affairs of the city... For over two years I have been wondering how such an obvious aberration, such «childishness» could have been having such a vigorous career. To ask a politician not to love power is just as if you asked the poet not to love poetry or the farmer not to be in love with his land”. Nevertheless, Plato did not ask the politician not to love power but the philosophers to use power even if they do not wish it. Plato wanted them not to be people who keep away from public affairs because they had a duty to the city – that of running it justly (Plato 1961, 520b-521c).

The idea of the philosopher as a person withdrawn from the city affairs has been imposed by a certain post-Aristotelian tradition. Aristotle is the one who presented Plato as a pragmatic idealist, and most of his readers believed him, reading the dialogues from the perspective of this recommendation. If Plato wronged the Stagirite by not letting him run the Academy, Aristotle paid him back and had his revenge in time by imposing the image of a „Platonised” Plato. And this image had a long career and now, when there is a discussion about theorists who practice knowledge for the sake of knowledge, Plato is invoked as their parent.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the author who brought back to life the image of such a character was Julien Benda, who, as Andrei Pippidi said, “would have wanted that the type of judgement he practiced be considered a late embodiment of the Platonic spirit in the very non-Platonic world of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (Pippidi, in preface to Benda, 1993, 14). It is obvious that the French essayist is seen as belonging to the Platonic tradition which would understand the intellectual as a persona separated from the practical universe. Here is how Benda (1993, 62-63) presented this character: the scholar is the person who “performs an activity which is alien, by its essence, to any practical purpose and which, finding joy in cultivating art, science or metaphysical speculation, in brief, in mastering a non-temporal asset, can almost say: «My kingdom is not this world»”. His opposition to

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<sup>2</sup> My own translation from Romanian.

political passions takes two shapes: the exclusive attachment to the selfless activity of the spirit and the preaching of an abstract principle opposed to political passions, in the attempt to rein these passions (a theoretical activity, even if it had practical consequences such as the birth of modern state). Although moralists did not rein the facts generated by the laymen's passions, they "*prevented them from making a cult out of them, from boasting about making them*". We may say that, owing to them, for two thousand years, humankind did the bad, but honoured the good".

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, such a character was accused of betrayal by Benda. We may believe that the author of the accusation positions himself in a non-temporal universe and in the area of political neutrality that he required from the ones he accused. But it is not so. Benda, just as the ones he accused, was politically involved, representing "the tradition of the republicans at the end of the second Empire to whom Renan had offered, after 1871, a program of «moral and intellectual reform» and who, after 1901, formed the radical party as a political expression of rationalism. During his entire life, Benda opposed Barrès and his formula of national socialism which gave birth to the French fascism" (Pippidi, in preface to Benda, 1993, 7). He continued to be a representative of the antifascist left-wing, claiming that the only acceptable ideal for a scholar is the ideal of the left-wing, different from that of the left-wing extreme and from the political practice of the left-wing (Pippidi, 1993, 11). Benda (1993, 55) criticised precisely the Herder-based nationalism, an ideology which stirred previously unheard of political passions. He accused the intellectuals who supported this ideology of having been an easy game to political passions generated by two fundamental urges: interest and vanity. These scholars would give the following response to this accusation: "we are not serving the spiritual but the temporal, a political party, a nation. Instead of defending them with our sword, we defend them with our writing. We are the *spiritual militia of the temporal*" (Benda, 1993, 86). This is something imagined by a member of the spiritual militia of the temporal.

As it can be easily observed, Benda condemned only the intellectual's involvement in the cause of a class, nation or race. The only exception where the intellectual may intervene is when he defends freedom: "They are among those who believe that Jesus allows using the sword to defend righteousness" (Benda 1937, 208), the essayist said. There is a problem here: which was the criterion according to which it could be decided whether the intellectual was right? Some intellectuals' (even within the left-wing)

impression of righteousness sent to death thousands of people. The interests and vanities of the scholars who “had betrayed” could be easily identified, but it was harder to identify the reasons why their accuser was able to descend from the non-temporality and purity of principles to use the sword.

I do not intend to judge here the rightness of Benda’s criticism against the nationalists and intellectuals who had attempted to form so-called “national sciences” but only to note the fact that his opinions are not those of a politically detached intellectual as he required from those he accused of having betrayed the principles. Besides this, I would also like to notice the selective manner in which the essayist presents the intellectuals: he labels as “exceptions” the intellectuals whose political involvement he cannot hide (such as Dante, Petrarch, and so on) and when he talks about those in the legion of Thomas of Aquino, Roger Bacon, Galileo Galilei, Montaigne, Pascal, Voltaire, Montesquieu, etc. he considers that they treated politics in a critical manner. As to those in the family of Rousseau, de Maistre, Chateaubriand, Lamartine and so on, he claims that when they assumed political passions they did it “with a loftiness of thought, with an abstract vision, with a disdain for the contingent which, in fact, exclude the name of passion” (Benda 1993, 63). The essayist judges the political passions of his predecessors with another measure than that applied in the case of his contemporaries. The stated reason for this is the following: the passions of the latter have taken on “all the characteristics of addiction: need for action, chase after immediate results, exclusive concern with the purpose set forth, disdain for arguments, excess, hatred, fixed ideas” (Benda 1993, 64).

Benda has no proof (and he could not have had) of the fact that the intellectuals involved in politics have not flown into what he identifies in the contemporaries he criticises. He could not have known what those personalities had done to impose their ideas because such things do not come through their treaties. Why was this visible in his contemporaries? Because they expressed themselves in the media. This is the key to the problem, the reason why Benda presents the intellectuals who lived before his generation as a group of individuals separated from the city’s affairs. Nationalism itself was not as disturbing as the ado which had accompanied this ideology. If Benda had belonged to the right-wing he would have probably accused the left-wingers of betraying the principles.

Benda observes transiently the feature which has led to the emergence of the distinction between the intellectuals of the past and those of the present, a distinction he explained by a betrayal: the exposure in the press. "The reader has already pinpointed a key factor of the evolutions we are highlighting here: the fact that the universality, coherence, homogeneity, permanence and predominance of political passions are due, to a great extent, to the actions of the cheap and daily political newspaper, as it is well known. How not to be concerned and not to wonder if the wars between people have only just begun, when you consider this tool used to cultivate one's own passions, a tool which has been recently invented by humankind or, in any case, has just been upgraded to a level of influence unheard of before, a tool to which they offer themselves wholeheartedly, each day, as soon as they get up?" (Benda 1993, 40-41). Further on he did no longer insist on this issue because he used this instrument himself. What Benda saw as a betrayal of the intellectuals was nothing but the effect of the industrial revolution and of illuminist policies (with phenomena such as alphabetisation or urbanisation), which led to the emergence of the mass as a political stakeholder. Intellectuals could address the public they had wished for. Treaties do not retain political passions but press articles written right in the middle of events do. Then, the need to make themselves understood by an alphabetised but semi-educated mass determined the intellectuals to resort to schemes able to cultivate attitudes rather than to invite them to meditate and to manufacture sophisticated arguments and counterarguments. Political passions could not take the form of addictions in salons or in books. If during his time there had been a large circulation daily newspaper, it is likely that Voltaire would have been one of its best pamphleteers. The press is the one which has taken the intellectuals to the streets, taking advantage of their desire to be listened to.

Another element: the scholars invoked by Benda were, for the most part, noblemen, members of a closed social class with inherited political rights, which did not wish to address the crowds. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, intellectuals had various social backgrounds and advocated political rights or exerted the political rights they had just won. The democratisation of political life made possible the emergence and the expressing of these intellectuals. They could not behave as noble intellectuals because they were another generation of intellectuals, with social and political obligations other than those of the Old Regime.

I notice that Benda was influenced by conservative projections despite the fact that he belonged to the Left. The stir caused by the intellectuals in his generation made him feel nostalgic about a scholar who had never existed and whose betrayal he lamented. Actually, intellectuals did not betray anything; they only started to benefit from the advantages of the modernisation to which both they and their predecessors had contributed.

Although at first sight it may seem that the neo-Marxist Karl Mannheim also believed in the existence of an intellectual class similar to that of Benda's scholars before the great "betrayal", when he talked about the "socially detached intelligence" he did not point to individuals who would have been virgins from the point of view of ideology but to those capable of considering political realities through the "total perspective" which he had proposed and which consisted in interpreting the existing programs of happiness (ideologies) by not seeking to accuse or to condemn those who supported them but to understand them better. However, the difference between these and others did not consist in that they had been living in a place sheltered from any social conditioning or ideology, but in that education and the specific of their concern would have allowed them to acquire skills of "interpretative understanding": "the likelihood of a mutual interpretation and understanding of the current trends of thought exists due to the presence of this relatively unattached social class which is open to a constant inflow of individuals from various social classes and groups and has an extremely large array of points of view" (Mannheim 1968, 67). So, we are dealing with a "relatively unattached" intelligence which does not have access to an absolute truth but to a historical one, wherein it may distinguish what it possesses because it is capable of self-reflection.

Even if we believed that Mannheim had imagined the intellectuals in a place of pure contemplation, sheltered from conditioning, they would not have escaped the paradox noticed by Clifford Geertz (1964, 48), consisting in the fact that in the total perspective advanced by the thinker, the term "ideology" itself has become an element of ideology, "becoming itself a part of the problem to which it refers". And even the statement that only the socially detached intelligence would have access to the truth (even the historical one) is an ideological statement. Just as for Georg Lukács (Mannheim's mentor) only the proletariat had access to the truth, for Mannheim only the intellectuals had this privilege (Huaco 1971).

To sum up, those who reject the intellectuals' involvement in politics invoking Plato misunderstood or deviated from the philosopher's message. How could one believe that the philosopher, who claimed that a good government of the city could only be achieved if the philosopher becomes king or if the king is interested in philosophy, could promote the intellectuals' retreat from the world? If we use Benda's words we could say that it is precisely those who believed this who have betrayed Plato's message. In what regards the French essayist, he judged his ideological opponents. The problem lies in those who read him without this methodological precaution and believed that the intellectuals he accused had actually betrayed something. Hence the question "intellectuals in politics?" could be answered: no contradiction in Plato, no betrayal in Benda. And Mannheim's "socially detached intelligence" is only relatively detached, just as detached as its own conditions allows it to be.

I close this first part with a statement made by Emmanuel Berl: "Politics encumbers the intellectual not as long as he thinks about it but as long as he does not think about it and he does not offer it the attention he pays to the other topics put forth by experience... Socrates did politics. Plato did politics. Spinoza did politics. It is my opinion that the greatest danger for the spirit is not the intellectuals' excessive leaning towards the forum. I am more afraid that politics could become, on the contrary, something where the spirit would not dare enter..." (Berl 1929, 23-25, 49-50).

### **Romanian intellectuals in post-communism. The persistence of an unfortunate tradition**

Before analysing the presence of the aforementioned tradition in Romanian society, I would like to precise that I define intellectuals based on Adrian Marino's formulation (1996, 149): "creators of spiritual values and those who express ideas in any form" <sup>3</sup>. I do not know precisely how comprehensive was this category in Marino's view. I believe things are clear in the case of creators (who are generally designed by the generic expression "intellectual elite"), but some confusion may appear in what regards those who express ideas. I see fit to put into this category all those who disseminate the symbolic assets of the creators through deliberate and conscious efforts, from university professors with no creations of their own to school teachers.

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<sup>3</sup> My translation from Romanian.

After '89, a part of the intellectuals got politically involved, becoming members of political parties, while others stayed in the civil society, which was either organised in some NGOs (the Civic Alliance, the Group for Social Dialogue, the Pro Democracy Association) or disorganised and easily flammable. Those who entered political parties established relationships with pragmatic politicians (either former activists formed at the only political school in communist Romania, the " tefan Gheorghiu" Academy, or politicians involved in politics in the interwar period, or people who understood quickly the way democracy works and started to do applied politics). Inevitably, various disputes emerged between intellectuals and these politicians. In 1996, Adrian Marino (1996, 151-152) grasped the difference between the "true intellectual" and the "mass politician", the two being divided by "radical incompatibilities" of structure, mindset, cultural level, language, social behaviour, etc. The intellectual is individualistic, reflective, criticising..., he behaves turbulently more than once, is egocentric, sometimes tense or even autistic. He is not even remotely acquainted with the notion of «party discipline»... Moreover, he often proves to be arrogant and even megalomaniac". The other element of the relation is thus described: "a man of action, not analysis or reflection. Intellectual complications annoy him because they produce dissension, fraction, impede quick decision-making in decisive circumstances". Three elements, Marino (1996, 152-153) believes, separated intellectuals from politicians at that time: "the natural reaction of the authentic politician" opposed to that of the intellectual, "the exchange and conflict of the generations" and "the difference between the radicalism of the old generation formed by political prisoners and the pragmatism of the new political generation, formed, willingly or unwillingly, under the communist regime without being, however, communist in structure or at least superficially communised".

In what regards the intellectuals' category I consider that in the twenty years since the Revolution the status and the relationships between them, regardless of whether they got involved in politics or activated in the more or less organised civil society, have been structured in pairs of *communist-dissident* (anticommunist or just anti-Ceaușescu) and *involved-apolitical* categories. The first antithetical category described everyone's status depending on what he had done during the communist regime. It included those who had collaborated with the regime, holding managing positions in the party and state apparatus and in educational or cultural establishments or those who had backed the propagandistic machine in the

journals which had created the ideological support of national-communism (i.e. characters such as Adrian Păunescu, Eugen Barbu or Corneliu Vadim Tudor and the journals which had supported proto-communism such as *Flacăra* and *Săptămâna*). The second term of the couple has been disputed by everyone. First, it was claimed by those who truly belonged to the dissidence, especially by the intellectuals grouped near the Europeanist journals *România literară*, *Secolul 20* and so on). Also, some intellectuals in the first category who, at least once in their life, had slightly rebelled against Ceaușescu took cover under its umbrella too, even if they were not anticommunists but just communists unhappy with the betrayal of communist ideals or the precarious conditions of living. Finally, all the agents of the party and state apparatus invaded this comprehensive concept, starting to describe their careers with its help, using the explanation “maybe it was hard for you, but think of how hard it was for us who were supposed to do you harm but sheltered you out of harm’s way!”. Thus, in time, this pair of categories started to lose its significance while Felix the cat begun to say that everybody meowed alike and Arpagic the cat was exposed as having written odes for Lenin and the Party.

The second antithetical pair (involved-apolitical) has remained more active as it has described the intellectuals’ present and future. Because the policy of a single party in the totalitarian system had done evil, politics itself was seen as a source of evil and getting involved in it was an unforgivable mistake. Apoliticism had become the intellectuals’ ideal, the badge which ensured their spiritual purity and public credibility. Communists with smiling faces who preserved power after the ado of December managed to fool most of the intellectuals who frantically closed themselves in a story in which they were the positive characters only because they were politically inactive. Apoliticism as a pledge of verticality was the name of post-revolutionary self-censorship under whose cover the “emanated” started to strengthen their recently re-legitimated power. Those who chose to get involved introduced themselves as sacrificed on the shrine of public good, paying the price of preserving the purity of those who were apolitical.

Romanian society witnessed and is still witnessing a strong trend which advocates that intellectuals should keep away from politics, being influenced, as I have said, by an erroneous lecture of the Platonic message and the hasty lecture of Benda’s error. This is advocated not only by the former communists who wanted no redoubtable opponent in elections but also some renowned intellectuals. The great tradition of the intellectuals

with brilliant political careers has been forgotten. We hardly ever talk about the public good brought by exceptional intellectuals such as Titu Maiorescu, Petre P. Carp, Nicolae Iorga, Virgil Madgearu, Constantin Rădulescu Motru, Dimitrie Gusti, Petre Andrei and so on. As if they never existed. After '89, some intellectuals involved in the Legionary Movement, such as Nae Ionescu, Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, Constantin Noica, Petre ũ ea, and others have been paid a great amount of attention. Having recently escaped from communism, our intellectuals started to study those who had supported fascism and ignored those who had done politics in democratic parties.

For that matter, what does it mean to get involved or be apolitical? I fairly agree with Adrian Marino's (1996, 121) formulations, who showed that being political implies "two categories of fundamental options", namely: "a precise position on the fundamental alternative of the political system" (dictatorship-democracy, totalitarianism-pluralism, communism-liberalism, left-centre-right) and "the concern and commitment, practical or in principle, with and to the issues of the Romanian society and political life, the support for one or another of the solutions and programs of the present or future structural problems of this society". According to this definition, the intellectuals who had activated in NGOs did politics too, mainly because they claimed right from the start that they were anticommunists. However, if we considered other societies which got out of communism in '89, we could accept the idea that the intellectuals who had activated in these organisations which did politics on the field of the civil society came into politics later on. I state this thinking about an episode recently narrated by Liviu Antonesei (1997, 43), in which Adam Michnik told the members of the Group for Social Dialogue that the establishment of the association which intended to "enlighten the citizens" was something that should have been done during the Ceaușescu regime and that the moment had come for politics to be done in Romania because you cannot change a thing unless you do politics (i.e. engaged politics, did within the structure of political parties). The intellectuals of that time did not understand his message and soon retired from the FSN after it was announced that it would take part in elections as a political party.

Twenty years of transition have brought events that overturned the very well structured reality of the two pairs of categories. It turned out that many of those who introduced themselves as dissidents had been collaborators of the Security, that those who were sacrificed on the shrine of

politics prospered and that apoliticism did not save anyone. Hence, over time, especially after the frenzy of exercising the right to talk freely about politics was gone, for Romanian intellectuals political involvement became a loss of time or a sure way of getting compromised. This option produced a chasm between the intellectual and the politician and the two roles which could be played by the same man started to be perceived as opposite.

Here is how Andrei Pleșu (2010) sees the identikits of the two characters present in the public opinion: the intellectual has come to be considered “a mere barrel organ player who plays words, a dull utopian with no practical sense, easily manipulated (based on naivety or interest), a scribbler who is always inclined to please the power players”. Too “theoretical”, arrogant, incapable of expressing in plain words (“elitist”) and thus unable to win the elections, ridiculous in his helplessness when it comes to “making money”, having the gift of the gab but lacking actual solutions. He does not know a thing about “real life” and “politics”, he is a show-off, unpatriotic, a pitiable combatant, well-bred when it is not the case, doubtful when it is the case, a specialist of various howlers, stubborn, a perjurer, opaque to complicity, subversive. Here is the image of the politician: “a clever boy who knows his way around”, who has “the gift of the gab”, a guy with a bad record who wishes to become a big shot, full of guts and money, master of “connections” and “arrangements”, star of the party and the beer buddy of those who might come in handy, in love close to tears with his “fatherland” and ready to plunder it shamelessly. He is a man with “a downward manner”, with no “whims”, who practices all the traditions of his forefathers, from Santa Clause to folk customs. He is a churchgoer (within electoral limits), a nationalist (in essence) and a Europeanist (on the surface), he is well versed (but rudimentary) in demagogy, „popular” (only in the nouveau riche manner), mindful of his family and greedy when it comes to “collateral” little pleasures.

These representations have been created mainly by the intellectuals who, when they got access to means of mass communication, began to thrash politics and show their disdain for everyone and everything. The large public understood that such whimpers are not useful in government, reaching a point where it became to lean towards uncultivated but savvy characters. All educated people know the law according to which the public space never stays empty. When the intellectuals retired from the FSN, the “leeches” threw a party. While the intellectuals waited for the masses to rise up to their expectations, the masses voted those who took a

step forward and made the simplest thing: asked for their ballot. And they gave it to them.

This situation emerged as a result of the unfortunate tradition I have presented in the first part of this article. It is enough to see the declarations made by some distinguished intellectuals to identify striking similarities with Benda:

1. just as Benda, they set forth the model of an intellectual whose involvement is labelled as "betrayal";
2. just as Benda, they judge from an ideological position: traitors are those who are unlike me and who are driven by interests and vanity.

I shall illustrate all these realities with the declarations of some Romanian intellectuals who are very visible and who preserve this tradition, unfortunately, precisely in a society and period when the intellectuals' capability is much needed in the running of public affairs.

In an interview for HotNews.ro-RFI, Gabriel Liiceanu (2010) said: „I always dream of being able to see about my job, my books, my philosophy, the writers and thinkers I love and to evade in all imaginable ways from a world which makes me uglier each time I see it”. On the same website, Liiceanu gave the following answer to the question put by a reader regarding the intellectuals' involvement in politics: “An intellectual entering openly the political stage loses at once his intellectual «tenure» for a very simple reason: politics means constant compromise while the life of an intellectual supposes a constant reference to a system of values... When you do politics, you must lie fluently, must make arrangements which overturn your intimate principles... If all the intellectuals became politicians, society would lose the landmarks which help it function. Someone must remain free of party discipline in order to say what many people are thinking – that a thing is just or unjust, that a declaration is deceitful or not, that a society under a certain political regime goes haywire...” Thus emerges a definition of politics as a place of all evils wherein the intellectual who makes the bad move of involving in it cannot elude corruption, the necessity of lying fluently and of submitting to the depersonalising party discipline. And the intellectual appears to be an individual whose freedom from party discipline would be a guarantee for preserving the landmarks of a society which could not function otherwise.

The idea of the incompatibility between the status of intellectual and that of man of power is also supported by Michael Shafir (2010), who said that when you become a politician you suspend yourself from the state of intellectual. In his view, intellectuals and politics must function separately, as intellectuals should be, to use Sartre's expression, "the watchdogs of democracy".

This projection is also supported by Daniel Barbu<sup>4</sup>, who insists to back it with a scientific argument. The question "the intellectuals' entering politics is a good thing, isn't it?" is answered by Barbu: "No, it isn't, because here is involved what Roberto Michels called, a hundred years ago, «the iron law of oligarchy», that is, any kind of human group has a leadership and nothing is run democratically. And, if you want to enter into the game of that company, entity, you become subject to this iron law, you do not defend values and principles anymore but you try to maintain your position within the organization and it becomes your only purpose".

I wonder: did Maiorescu, Carp, Gusti or Andrei lose their "intellectual tenure" by getting involved in politics? Did they keep silent, gagged by the "iron law of oligarchy" when they saw that society went haywire? A brief analysis of these distinguished intellectuals' political performance proves the contrary. The fact that they did politics did not make them lose their critical conscience but, on the contrary, due to it their message could be heard in political institutions and even in front of the parliament and thus it had a greater impact. This is why some of them lost their lives, because they were a real danger to those who lived in error. If Iorga, Madgearu and Petre Andrei had been satisfied only with writing treatises in order to analyse the errors and horrors of the legionaries, they would have probably lived happily through old age, hoping that the next generations would find out what beautiful minds they had while their colleagues got killed. But, also because their political status allowed it, they could take a stand in favour of the mortals who were their contemporaries and not in favour of the idea of man or individual projected into eternity. The theoretical productions found in treatises may have an effect in time, if a next generation discovers them by chance and takes them into consideration. But the present needs constant public attitudes, which may be more efficient if the intellectual involved is himself a part of the mechanism of power.

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<sup>4</sup> Interview taken by Costi Rogozanu in 2010 (my translation from Romanian).

The intellectuals constantly concerned with public affairs or who belong to the scope of power have a better chance of being listened to than those who, once in every four years, call upon action or sign a petition. The former have the possibility to launch debates all the time, even inside the parties wherein they activate. The latter will be answered "good morning, welcome among us!" and then they will be sent back to their ivory tower. Such gestures full of grandiloquence do not have a great impact: politicians look at them with condescending smiles while the mass considers them little touching moments which are not worth a red cent.

Ideological judgement is also present among the intellectuals discussed above. In the same interview, Daniel Barbu criticises the intellectuals who supported president Băsescu, explaining their gesture as follows: "Some of them are also businessmen and were offered fiscal amnesties, as in Gabriel Liiceanu's case, others received public offices or became dignitaries; they do not hold the status of intellectual any more. The intellectual must nevertheless be independent; he cannot be a minister as well as an intellectual. [...] One must choose. The intellectual must be independent because he does not need functions or businesses..."

Benda too stated that the intellectual may be politically involved only under two circumstances: he must not be a public servant of the state and must limit his political intervention to a single episode (Benda 1937, 30-33, Benda 1928, 30). If we were to respect Benda's prescription in its entirety, all Romanian intellectuals would have to keep silent.

Besides the pecuniary interest they have pursued, another reason why Daniel Barbu believes that some intellectuals support current president Traian Băsescu would be strictly related to one's ideological positioning: "They are, in a very indirect but explicit manner, the followers of the Criterion generation from the '30s. That is, they have allied with Traian Băsescu due to a lack of democratic sense. They loathe democracy... They cannot say bluntly «we loathe democracy, Romania cannot be governed unless by us. And we have found a president who does not leave us out in the cold and makes us feel important. Iliescu and Constantinescu let us out in the cold»".

If we recall well, former Romanian president Emil Constantinescu had not neglected the intellectuals who chose to support Traian Băsescu later on. It

had been known that they had done everything in their power to bring Constantinescu at the Cotroceni Palace. The former president seems to have forgotten this and accuses them of opportunism (Gândul, 14 June 2009)<sup>5</sup>: “Some of these intellectuals discovered the benefits of opportunism, which mean jobs, not necessarily well-paid, but generating advantages in their respective areas”. Could it be that when they supported the Democratic Convention the intellectuals were not opportunistic? Why would they be now? Is it because they support someone who does not enjoy Emil Constantinescu’s appreciation? The former president’s accusation goes further than indicating opportunism, reaching a point where he uses charges which are close to offence: “Of course, in Romania, things are understood better not through political or sociological analysis but through psychological or even psychiatric analysis. We talk about aspects such as «the fascination for the low-bred», which has been present in Romanian intellectual areas for a long time, and the revival of an abnormal form of cult for one’s own humiliation in the service of a personality with a frenzy which frightens me”.

The intellectuals quoted above use a form of discourse which is similar to that of the politicians they scorn so much. None of them explains the political option of their colleagues by a conviction or by the desire to contribute to the running of public affairs and none respects their right to be wrong. The causes why some intellectuals support Traian Băsescu are, in their opinion, their chase after money and public offices.

I do not intend to analyse here whether some intellectuals’ supporting or contesting Traian Băsescu are right or wrong, but only to signal the fact that (maybe without being aware of it) those who pretend to be critical consciences have overt ideological approaches, just as politicians have. It would not be a problem if their attitude did not make them miss the real important topics only because, in their public appearances, regardless of the topic approached in the beginning, these “critical consciences” still arrive to mutual accusations regarding involvement or non-involvement or the membership in a party or another, attitudes specific to politicians.

To those who present the intellectuals as beings living beyond good and evil, inhabitants of a universe which becomes sacred only by their mere presence, I propose to pay attention to what intellectuals do during the

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<sup>5</sup> My translation from Romanian.

“electoral campaigns” taking place in the faculties, institutes or in the editorial teams of the journals or publishing houses wherein they operate as employees. They will certainly see that, just as politicians, they use their entire political arsenal to win offices or to support their favourite in the competition to win an office. Just as in a political party, in the intellectuals’ communities there are also groupings, regroupings, betrayals, misleading information, sales, purchases, negotiations, compromise, offences and dirty stuff. The rest is discourse. A discourse through which intellectuals introduce themselves as special people demanding to be treated specially by others when, actually, they are just like everybody else.

The mass-media take advantage of this conflict as they obtain high ratings while entertaining such disputes. Politics, science, religion and even justice are done in the mass-media. It would not be a problem even they were done by specialists in the field. However, we see that in the Romanian mass-media, sport commentators give lessons in political science, artists are asked to comment football matches and members of various NGOs become specialists in finance and health. Among them reign TV producers or moderators, who have answers for everything and are specialists in every possible field. The need to speak in plain words is covered by people who have not studied enough the problems to which they refer. In fact, there is the following situation: those who have studied enough have a problem when it comes to communicating with the public while those who do mass communications master only “schematic abstractions”, to use Adrian-Paul Iliescu’s expression (2005, 32).

The error Romanian intellectuals persist in is that most of the times they appear in the public space they introduce themselves as intellectuals, judging political life from the perspective of this status, that is, expecting to receive public reactions of admiration just because of this reason. As Adrian-Paul Iliescu (2010)<sup>6</sup> notices, during the past twenty years, there has been a kind of self-sufficiency in what regards the role played by the intellectuals as they have introduced themselves as superb while the mass has been unrecoverable. Such an attitude opens a communication chasm between them, politicians and the people who support them. By attacking virulently the behaviour of some politicians, they come to offend the mass which supports them and thus, instead of attracting it, they reject it.

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<sup>6</sup> My translation from Romanian.

It is a worrying fact that, while some well-known intellectuals say that intellectuals should refrain from doing politics, in our society, professionalism and morals are in great demand in politics. Jean-Loup d'Autrecourt (2010, 26) noticed that the Romanian youth (especially those in the university centres he visited) are worried that Romania passes through a moral crisis: "Are young people aware of some major difficulties in what regards collective responsibility. What does it mean? Contrary to what detractors say (dozens, hundreds of articles of systematic defamation in the "cultural" press), we are dealing here with a moral conscience understood as a basis for politics, that is, for a kind of behaviour praiseworthy from a political point of view, the common interest in collective good. I dare say that it exists, that it is strong but it is obscured by scribblers, by run-of-the-mill intellectuals, by word makers, by former writers-approved-by-the-party who are now "writing freely" just as they did when they were censored, so I wonder what that censorship meant. Was there something to censor in the case of those who practiced themselves self-censorship?"

Adrian-Paul Iliescu (2010) noticed the fact that, after the Revolution, many intellectuals wanted to transform their cultural prestige into political prestige, being persuaded that it is enough to have knowledge in order to be recognised and respected in society. That they placed themselves in an error is proven by the mistrust with which Romanian society regards intellectuals today, considering them people without solutions, concerned only with what interests them, with things nobody needs. It has come to this point because intellectuals themselves considered that the only condition to their gaining their status was excelling in a field, cultivating what Aristotle called the dianoetic virtue. If they had learned the lesson of the Stagirite up to the end, these intellectuals would have found out that a fulfilled man is the one who also cultivates ethical virtue, that which is not learned: "The virtues therefore are engendered in us neither by nature nor yet in violation of nature; nature gives us the capacity to receive them, and this capacity is brought to maturity by habit. [...]. The virtues on the other hand we acquire by first having actually practiced them, just as we do with arts. We learn an art or craft by doing the things that we shall have to do when we have learnt it... Similarly we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts", Aristotel said (1998, 1103a-1103b). Maybe the return to those said by the Ancient could convince the intellectuals who refuse to get involved that the seclusion in an ivory tower does not make you more virtuous and does not legitimate the accusations you bring to those who do get involved. Only by

probing your relation with the political power you can find out whether you are vicious or virtuous, corruptible or incorruptible; otherwise, you remain a person who has never passed through the test of vice in order to prove his virtue.

I believe that political involvement is one of the intellectuals' moral duties, at least as it is for any responsible citizen, regardless of the socio-professional category to which he belongs. I do not think that their involvement would be the necessary and sufficient condition for the establishment of heaven on earth, I do not consider immoral those who do not get involved but I do not agree with the idea that they would be a special category in relation to political power. I simply say that it is a mistake (when it is not plain hypocrisy) for public, visible intellectuals to advocate apoliticism, to militate against everything within the scope of politics (men, actions, ideas, etc.) or to accuse of betrayal the intellectuals who get politically involved. In what regards character, intellectuals are just as the other citizens, and we can find in their community honest people as well as rascals, as everywhere else. What sets them apart from others is their level of knowledge and, sometimes, their discursive abilities. These elements could be advantages in a political activity – it depends on what each person intends to do with them and on the character of each. However, I believe that these advantages do not give them the right to despise those who get involved in politics or the politicians who come from outside this honourable caste. Here, I share Andrei Pleșu's idea according to which "true intellectuals and true politicians do not define themselves by mutually excommunicating themselves even if now and then each category tends to caricaturise the other" (Pleșu 2010).

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