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Although the historic moment of the death of Stalin on 5 March 1953 and its aftermath have been well-researched in the field of Sovietology, *De-Stalinising Eastern Europe: The Rehabilitation of Stalin's Victims after 1953* unravels one of the most poorly discussed and overlooked issues – that is, de-Stalinization policy. Despite the lack of literature and official historical sources, this extraordinary collection of essays brings to light the plurality and all controversial aspects of rehabilitating Stalin's victims. The timeframe covered starts from the "Beria Amnesty," which occurred after Khrushchev's secret speech at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956, and extends up until Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* era. As the title states, the contributions in this book chronologically point out the main issues of post-Stalin rehabilitation as they relate to a wealth of legal cases and judicial concerns within the Soviet Union and its "sphere of influence" in Eastern Europe. More precisely, the volume is dedicated to a thematic report on how Stalin's political heirs transformed the rehabilitation procedure into a political instrument and an empty slogan, in order to maintain their power position and activate a "class struggle" within the Party, rather than unmasking the gross violence unjustly inflicted upon thousands of Soviet citizens during the Stalin era. Along with personal and family stories of Party members as well as ordinary citizens, each essay lays out a three-pronged overview examining *when* the rehabilitation was launched in order to trigger a change, *how* the post-Stalin nomenklatura paradoxically succeeded in remaining in power, and *why* attempts to achieve recognition against unjust actions failed accordingly.

As Iryna Ramanava demonstrates by quoting one of the kolkhoz directors, "…what happens if they are all set free? What we are going to do?,"[1] the rehabil-

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[1]   Iryna Ramanava, "The Amnesty and Rehabilitation of Victims of Stalinist Repression in Belarus," in McDermott, Kevin, and Matthew Stibbe, eds., *De-Stalinising Eastern Europe. The rehabilitation of Stalin's Victims after 1953* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 224.

itation policy could potentially have compelled the entire post-Stalin apparatus to effecting a real reconstruction of the public realm. Instead, it became another instrument of power for the post-Stalin apparatus, whose members, paradoxically, perpetuated Stalin's crimes upon having to face those who had formerly been blacklisted and were now rehabilitated, deported and now returned, and imprisoned, now amnestied. In addition, the introduction to the volume outlines the lacunae of the Soviet law system and its incapacity to deal with such new judicial procedures between 1953 and 1964. In this regard, editors Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe point out that the term *rehabilitation* was technically foreign to the Soviet law system and never applied in previous legal cases. As time went on, the Soviet scenario did not change – in contrast to what is described by McDermott and Klára Pinerová in their contribution on Czechoslovakia, where claimants achieved rehabilitation in the form of an amnesty. This created a misconception of the rehabilitation process, as previous sentences were annulled instead of being kept and judicially recognized as an unjust instrument of Stalin's terror policy. In his contribution, Igor Cașu also pays attention to how the concept of rehabilitation challenged the Moldovan Soviet law system and was eventually accepted with the judicial connotation of amnesty, release (*osvobozhdenie*), and pardon (*pomilovanie*).

Thus, Marc Elie depicts rehabilitation as an "unachieved policy," far from being successfully implemented, and therefore a phenomenon of Stalin's legacy. Indeed, in his argument about rehabilitated former Gulag prisoners, Elie unveils, first, the propaganda around which the re-examination of legal cases was conducted, and second, how the rehabilitation was applied purposefully slowly and carefully by Stalin's heirs, in order to avoid unpleasant consequences. According to files describing former gulag workers' socio-economic difficulties, which was the most widespread problem within the Soviet welfare system, a wide range of varied and intersecting aspects came into play. While the lack of a housing reallocation program and limited mobility was the start of the challenging environment for returnees, they also felt unwelcomed in their attempts to (re)join workplaces, because of appearing suspicious in the eyes of local workers and neighbours as a consequence of the misleading rehabilitation process.

Above all, however, Elie reviews the failure to restore justice vis-a-vis Stalin's atrocities, which persisted until his death in 1953, and how any rehabilitation carried out was only to politically ensure a power position against party-opposition members. In this regard, Julia Rajk's and Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu's legal cases are just two examples. Andrea Pető historicizes Julia Rajk's rehabilitation battle by combining the hidden power struggle in Hungary with her attempts to restore the "good name" of her comrade and husband Lázló Rajk, whose contribution to the Communist cause ended with a death penalty in 1949 because he was considered an agent of the Yugoslav leader Tito. Given the tense relations between the USSR and Yugoslavia, Pető's contribution points out the moral aims of rehabilitation in order to restore the reputation of those who had suffered political persecution. Thus, Julia Rajk's struggle, gripped by a "language of grief," is a self-portrait that

simultaneously takes place on several fronts and describes both classic and unique aspects of moral rehabilitation that occurred in Central Europe. In 1954, after reclaiming her Party membership – together with Rajk's rehabilitation and subsequent permission to bury him and restore his surname to their son – her political activism focused on creating a new sustainable model for young comrades against secrecy, and on improving unclear mechanisms under which rehabilitation procedures were conducted.

Similarly, even the legal case of Lucreţiu Pătrăşcanu, one of the founders and most important political figures among Romanian Communists, became a source of confrontation in Romania before and after his death sentence and execution. The latter, which took place on 17 April 1954 despite Pătrăşcanu's constant work and relevant achievements for the Party, was carried out due to his extreme "nationalistic theories" that were publicly expressed across the historically Hungarian-Romanian constituency of Transylvania during the election in 1946. Indeed, while Pătrăşcanu honed his political platform and his motto "Before being a Communist, I am a Romanian" gained popularity, [2] the Stalinist apparat was trying to repress ethnic tensions with Hungarians by ideologically constructing a Moldavian-opposite identity to Romania's. As Igor Caşu argues in his contribution, Moscow's strategy regarding ethnic ties in the cross-border region was highly managed, in order to divide and conquer the neighbouring Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldavia and similarly inter-ethnic regions, such as Bessarabia. For instance, this was proven by prosecuting the Soviet leader Grigorii Ivanovich Stary-Borisov, whose promotion of the Latin alphabet in Moldavia was understood immediately as a threating attempt of a suspicious "Romanianizer"[3] to culturally connect Moldavia and Romania by moving the Moldavian dialect closer to the Romanian language instead of staying Cyrillic, i.e., closer to Russian. In Romania, Pătrăşcanu was compelled to self-criticize his statements, and was immediately afterwards sentenced to death, his theories "counter-revolutionary" accused of negatively increasing ethnic tensions. In the Pătrăşcanu case, Calin Goina points out that the clearest factor behind his imprisonment and following execution was the transition of leadership between Gheorghiu-Dej and Ceausescu. Aware of Pătrăşcanu's political strengths and appeal to the Romanian population, Gheorghiu-Dej used the Soviet criticism against him to trigger a trial. Only fourteen years later, in line with Ceausescu's "New Path," a special commission was appointed to address Pătrăşcanu's case and to unmask the irregularities from the arrest up to the execution. However, as Goina clarifies by quoting the Roman philosopher Constantin Noica, Ceausescu's "New Path" has to be considered an "opening which closes,"[4] since the rehabilitation process was established behind closed

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[2]   Calin Goina , "Rehabilitation in Romania: The Case of Lucreţiu Pătrăşcanu," in *Ibid.*, 138.
[3]   Igor Caşu, "The Fate of Stalinist Victims in Moldavia after 1953: Amnesty, Pardon and the Long Road to Rehabilitation," in *Ibid.*, 190.
[4]   Calin Goina, in *Ibid.*, 146.

doors and without either moral or legal reparations for former prisoners. In striking similarity to Khrushchev, whose rehabilitation policy did not go beyond its propagandistic slogan, Ceausescu formed a collective investigative rehabilitation commission with the intention of shaping a collective memory to use against Moscow and thereby interrupting all political ties with the previous Romanian apparat and the Soviet Union.

Throughout the essays, the political role and public profile of former prisoners, those rehabilitated, and returnees take a central position. For instance, in the Czech Republic today, the collective perception of former Czech prisoners has shifted from "victims" to "those who struggled" against Communism. This prompted McDermott and Pinerová to re-examine the rise of Czech-Slovak community tensions, along with the "class struggle" inside the Party, during the periods after the death of Stalin (1956–60), throughout the de-Stalinization interval (1961–62), and after Antonin Novotny yielded the reins of power to Alexander Dubček, whose so-called "Prago-centrism" and reforms were externally curtailed by the Soviet occupation in August 1968. In particular, McDermott and Pinerová dedicated their essay to an analysis of how rehabilitation, characterized by political cynicism and careerism, was constrained to ensure the integrity of the State above all, and how amnesty meant only an official interruption of the sentence, which was aimed at punishing a "premeditated criminal act" and which remained pending. Within this, the idea that "once an enemy, always an enemy"[5] became widespread across the country, and a socio-cultural vacuum formed around returnees, where no one trusted the amnestied and disturbances in many regions arose accordingly, such as in eastern Bohemia. Unsurprisingly, tensions were also widespread in other Soviet republics, such as Ukraine and Moldavia. For instance, Oleg Bazhan notes that the return of rehabilitated persons gave rise to disturbances among Ukrainian local authorities that refused any kind of employment to returnees; meanwhile, Caşu argues that the Moldavian crime rate was partly fuelled by amnestied persons in urban areas, where phenomena alike illiteracy contributed to anti-social behaviours such as hooliganism and alcoholism.

Post-Stalin rehabilitation in East Germany and Poland showed both similarities and differences. While the right of return from far eastern regions of the Soviet Union was granted (arguably) to applicants from both countries, the kind of mutual relations that Moscow established with Berlin to solve practical and other issues did not exist with Warsaw. Although procedures for return were considered completed in 1962 by the Soviet authorities, Matthew Stibbe argues about the mechanism through which the rehabilitation was carried out in Eastern Germany. On the one hand, returnees were not easily given exit visas from the Soviet Union and related important documents for going back to Germany, and once repatriat-

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[5]   Kevin McDermott K., & Pinerová Klára, "The Rehabilitation Process in Czechoslovakia: Party and Popular Responses" in *Ibid.*, 122.

ed from the Soviet camp system, they were considerably shocked from trying to understand the GDR as their motherland. On the other hand, German ex-Nazis, alleged former Titoists, and centre-right politicians who had suffered persecution since the 1930s were able to restart their lives in complete anonymity, with jobs and higher Party-controlled positions awarded in exchange of their silence. Stibbe notices here that returnees' grief and sorrow, shaped by their experiences of persecution, were twice forgotten: firstly after their return to Germany and secondly in the euphoria following the collapse of Communism and reunification of the country in the 1990s.

Likewise, in Bulgaria a rehabilitation process was launched for repatriating those persecuted by Stalin's men in power from Soviet labour camps. In his historical essay, Jordan Baev overviews the rehabilitation process during the Beria period, Khrushchev's era of stagnation, and Gorbachev's liberalization – historically parallel to the last Communist mandate of Todor Zhivkov. Baev recalls George Dimitrov's campaigns in favour of anti-fascist and communist Bulgarians imprisoned in Soviet Union during his term as secretary of the Comintern (1935–43); despite being useless, he expressed to Beria his disappointment with the fictitious offences that brought those Bulgarians to be considered aligned to the so-called the "Trotsky-Zinoviev-Bukharin Opposition Party" and consequently purged between 1948 and 1950. After the death of Stalin, the large number of people who were still forced to remained in the Soviet labour camp system demonstrated the failure of the rehabilitation in Bulgaria. Baev tries to list them as follows: leaders of the "old bourgeois party," former loyal officers in the pre-1944 army, police and state officers, and anarchists and right-wing members of the Agricultural Union, together with "Macedonian terrorists."[6] Similarly to other Eastern European rehabilitation processes, in Bulgaria the latter took place very far away from the light of public scrutiny and media coverage, without achieving even a sufficient level of moral rehabilitation for former prisoners. Important to mention, however, was the period between the closure of the Belene labour camp in 1959 and the Amnesty Act on 8 September 1964.

In his assessment of rehabilitation in the Ukrainian SSR, Oleg Bazhan lays out the most grotesque aspects and all rehabilitation-wide matters of Stalin's terror policy and his post-1953 legacy. Besides the rehabilitation of gulag workers, whose everyday lives were privately and publicly ruined due to their deportation, he addresses certain matters (also discussed by Igor Caşu in his essay about Moldavian kulaks' long path to rehabilitation) related to transferring all properties back to the peasantry (after confiscation), whose landowners had been unjustly subjected to deportation or imprisonment. Within the framework of an "unachieved policy," as Elie defines it, this specific aspect interplayed negatively in Soviet Ukrainian society, since judicial diatribes confused the real number of Stalin's victims and complicated their legal claims for

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6   Jordan Baev, "De-Stalinisation and Political Rehabilitation in Bulgaria" in *Ibid*., 156-157.

return. In addition, as Bazhan states, former heads and members of national-
ist underground movements and gangs were released from departure in 1959,
even though a wealth of preventive measures brought the party leadership to
begin new resettlement to gulags and other places of repression once again.
Lastly, Bazhan pays also attention to the cruel treatment that Crimean Tatars
have been subjected to, and the further paradoxes of their rehabilitation pro-
cess. After having been unjustly scattered far away from their historical lands
of origin, Crimean Tatars were denied to the right to return home, since their
minority status across the Soviet Union impeded the possibility to recognize
the mass deportation and to seek for return through rehabilitation. Thanks to
all of these, this contribution gives the volume historical relevancy in com-
parison to today's Ukraine political crisis over disputed borderlands, such as
Crimea and Donbas. In the other neighbouring country, Moldavia, Caşu tries
to uncover one of the most under-researched topics in today's historiography.
Rather than chronologically, he tries to thematically define the post-Stalin re-
habilitation's long path process during the Soviet period.

The last two chapters of the volume are dedicated to the long and tortuous
process of rehabilitation of Soviet Latvia and Belarus, which in this issue is ad-
dressed in tandem with related concerns; together they are the least investigated
in modern historiography. As clearly noted by both authors, thanks to foreign
Sovietologists' and historians' interest and research conducted so far in Western
Europe, nowadays it is possible to overview the Latvian and Belorussian reha-
bilitation procedures since the period of the "Beria Amnesty." In order to do so,
Irēna Saleniece employs the method of reconstructive cross-analysis" to bring to
light rehabilitation issues in the Latvian SSR through the usage of diaries, mem-
oirs, and even dialogues between interviewers and narrators. Similarly, Iryna Ra-
manava uses a wide range of oral history sources in her contribution to replace
the lack of official documents and resources, due to a confusing code of silence
that stopped the rehabilitated and witnesses from speaking up about their expe-
riences in Belarus. Here, she points successfully out the Soviet Belarusian sys-
tem's lacunae, namely the lack of precise measures by which to differentiate those
who deserved rehabilitation from those who were potentially connected with
nationalists. Because of that, while many legal cases were not completed, others
remained untouched. Instead of the classic historical approach, then "What I saw
with my eyes" is the narrative *topos* of both chapters. Against a wall of silence,
Saleniece gives particular relevancy to the seldom-mentioned issue of post-1953
rehabilitation and to the Siberian "special settlement" where suspicious Latvians
were forcedly deported. Despite the lack of statistics and data, she estimates that
180,000–190,000 Latvians out of 2 million have been persecuted, killed or forc-
edly deported. In addition, like Iryna does in her contribution to Belarus, Sale-
niece analyzes how only Latvians whose legal cases attested any connections or
previous engagement with nationalist movements were allowed to return home,
while others were obliged to remain in their place of deportation. In re-collect-
ing memory, she firstly describes the limbo in which many Latvians were living

between acquired trauma and nostalgia, and secondly, she notes the Latvian returnees' sadness because of the poor conditions created by collectivisation of agriculture, taxation[7], illegal occupation and party expropriations.

In conclusion, this collection of essays is in line with the very developed and rich historiography widespread in post-war societies that have dealt with large-scale violence after the Second World War. Therefore, the volume brings the entire region of the so-called former Eastern Bloc to face itself through the prism of transnational justice, while comparing it with the rest of the other regions that are still in transition after the demise of their authoritarian regimes, such as Africa and Latin America.

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[7]   Irena Saleniece, "Latvian Deportees of the 1940s: Their Release and Rehabilitation" in *Ibid*., 212-213.