

SYMBOLIC RESOURCES AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN PUBLIC COMMUNICATION. CASE STUDY ON THE INTERPRETATION OF ARTISTIC CREATION IN THE CONTEXT OF LEGIONARY MEMORY

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Abstract>

This paper analyzes the public communication generated by the performance of the song „Avem o țară [We have a country]”, during the event dedicated to the Day of the Military Clergy, held at the National Cathedral, and the way in which this artistic creation generated divergent reactions and positions in the public sphere.

The research uses content analysis of institutional, media and political discourses and is based on concepts from public communication, symbolic communication and framing theory. The results show that the public meaning of the creation was not determined exclusively by the content of the lyrics, but by the identity attributed to the author, by the institutional context and by the historical memory associated with the Iron Guard movement. The reactions in the public sphere were structured through different interpretive frames that placed freedom of expression, cultural heritage and the responsibility of historical memory in opposition. The study concludes that the use of controversial symbolic resources in institutional communication can generate reputational risks and conflicts of interpretation, which highlights the importance of evaluating the symbolic context and of managing public communication.

Keywords:

Public communication, symbolic communication, anti-extremist legislation, freedom of expression, Iron Guard ideology.

Introduction

The starting point of the research is the event held at the National Cathedral on 30.10.2025, on the occasion of the Day of the Military Clergy, where the Tronos Junior choir of the Patriarchal Cathedral performed a musical piece set to the lyrics of the poem „Avem o țară [We have a country]”, in the presence of representatives of the Romanian Army, the Minister of

Defense, members of the Royal Family, the Chief of the General Staff, and military priests. The song generated reactions in the public sphere regarding the connection between the Romanian Orthodox Church and Iron Guard ideological lineages, through the attribution of the lyrics to the poet Radu Gyr, a follower of the Iron Guard movement.

The objective of the research is to analyze the way in which the author's identity influences the public reception of a work without explicit extremist (Iron Guard) content, in the context of freedom of expression and of the anti-extremist legislation in Romania. Another objective is to identify the communication risks and the symbolic perception generated by the use of controversial cultural resources in institutional communication.

Methodology

The study approaches the qualitative content analysis of the discourses that appeared in the public sphere, on the platforms of certain institutions or taken over by the press.

The research questions address the frames of interpretation, the legal limits and the effects of public communication: How does the tension between freedom of expression, historical memory and anti-extremist legislation manifest itself in the public reception of authors who were part of the Iron Guard movement and were convicted? To what extent can the use, in a public institutional event, of a literary text with a controversial author be interpreted as a communication and public relations problem?

The hypotheses assess the risk of public communication in the context of symbolic association with the ideology sanctioned by legislation: If, in a public event/on television/on media platforms, the creation of authors who were active in the Iron Guard movement and were convicted is used, even if the text does not promote the ideologies prohibited by legislation, then a communication risk may arise through the negative symbolic associations that the creation may produce in public perception. If, in the contemporary public sphere, the use of a creation without an explicit extremist (Iron Guard) message remains protected by the principle of freedom of expression, then the symbolic perception of a work may be influenced by the ideological identity of the author.

Framing theory

The controversy regarding the performance of the song „Avem o țară” can be analyzed through framing theory (Entman, 1993: 51-52; Goffman, 1986: 8-11), which means selecting certain aspects of perceived reality and interpreting/evaluating them through social and cultural frames. The mass media and public actors select and emphasize certain aspects of reality, constructing interpretive/competing frames (Goffman, „competing frames”) through which the public understands an event. Thus, the controversy does not concern exclusively the text of the poem, but the interpretive frame in which it is placed, as a religious or patriotic expression or a sign of Iron Guard memory. The competing frames in our case are: historical, legal, literary, institutional (public relations/communication), media and political.

Historical frame: the Iron Guard ideology

Ideologies are shared social belief systems that influence the production and interpretation of discourse, structure the way in which the members of a group interpret social events, and orient communicative practices (Van Dijk, 2011: 380). Media texts function ideologically within social control and social reproduction, but they also operate as cultural goods on a competitive market (Fairclough, 1995: 47).

The Iron Guard ideology is a form of interwar Romanian fascism, self-declared as „fascism” by its followers („Codreanu saw himself, together with Hitler and Mussolini, as part of an international fascist triad”, Schmitt, 2025:340, „The paramilitary activity of the Iron Guard also corresponded to the model of Italian and German fascism”, Schmitt, 2025. 332), characterized by ultranationalism, antisemitism, Orthodox mysticism, the cult of sacrifice and death, and the promotion of political violence as a means of national regeneration. (Chioveanu, 2012: 47-48; Rusu, 2018:125-149; Săndulescu, 2004: 349-361; Cârstocea, 2017: 163-195):

„...Western researchers who have examined the Romanian Iron Guard have seen in it the expression of an exotic ultranationalism, fermented within the frameworks of an „Oriental despotism”. The key aspect of this exoticization of the Iron Guard was the mystical spirit of Orthodoxy with which it was saturated to the extreme, which formed a contradictory pair with the apology of crime and the feverish cult of political violence”. (Rusu, 2018:127)

Oliver Jens Schmitt wrote that it was precisely the amalgamation of the theoretical-fascist and the historical-religious dimensions that produced the self-understanding and the organizational model of the core of the Legion:

„an Orthodox order of chivalry with a pronounced mysticism and a communal life practiced as a „Legionary family”, and, for the broad circle of followers, a secular organization with increasingly strong social-revolutionary characteristics, militantly antisemitic in the rural regions and predominantly nationalist-Orthodox in the towns”. (Schmitt, 2025: 333)

Fascism and religion mobilized the public around rituals and words, instilling the cult of sacrifice and death, Romanian fascism being a form of clerical, theological fascism. (Chioveanu, 2012:48). While Italian fascism sacralized the state, the Iron Guard did not use this type of idolization, yet both forms of fascism consolidated their legitimacy through the use of religious ceremonies and rituals, abusing symbolic language: „trust”, „martyr”, „sacrifice”, „mission”, sacralizing a totalitarian politics. (Chioveanu, 2012: 50)

Moreover, Schmitt acknowledges that, within the Orthodox tradition, such a movement was unusual compared to the Catholic West, being supported by

„numerous priests, monks and hierarchs, and never having been condemned in toto by the Romanian Orthodox Church, which, after 1918, was seeking a mass base in a mass society” (Schmitt, 2025: 333).

Radu Demetrescu Gyr was the best-known poet of the Iron Guard and the regional leader of Oltenia, with „a life focused entirely on politics” (Schmitt, 2025: 203), promoting in his works the image of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the leader of the Iron Guard movement:

„The Iron Guard ideologue and poet Radu Gyr composed a poem that expresses the cult of heroism in a language with typically Iron Guard accents, combining mysticism with chiasm and making Codreanu's death the starting point of a new measurement of time.” (Schmitt, 2025: 321); *„Codreanu and those around him... won over to their side writers and composers, ..., for example, Radu Gyr”.* (Schmitt, 2025: 342)

At the same time, Schmitt captures the religious symbolism in the verses of Radu Gyr:

„Codreanu is connected with fundamental elements of Christianity, he is associated with central elements of Christian theology: resurrection, salvation, wellspring”. (Schmitt, 2025: 322)

From a theoretical perspective, public discourses can have ideological effects, even when they are not explicitly political.

Legal frame

According to the documents from the Archive of the former Securitate, administered by the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives, in Sentence no. 62 of 30 March 1959 of the Military Tribunal of the 2nd Military Region, it is mentioned that 14 persons were convicted, among them Radu Demetrescu Gyr. The defendants had “carried out activity against the people's democratic power”, had continued to act subversively as Legionnaires even while in captivity, had established connections with Legionnaires from various localities with intense fascist activity through the drafting and dissemination of materials with fascist doctrinal content:

*„Demetrescu Radu Gyr, an old Legionnaire with the rank of commander, whose poems written during his detention as well as after his release from prison were reproduced and disseminated, being considered the main materials for Iron Guard indoctrination... established connections with several notorious Legionnaires and, during the meetings, recited his poems to them, recording some of them on magnetic tape with a view to their dissemination”.*¹ (Spiridon, 2013: 76)

According to the fact-checking media platform Veridica.ro, Radu Gyr was not convicted for a poem or for being anti-communist, but was convicted as a Legionnaire four times under three different regimes: in 1938, during the royal dictatorship of Carol II; in 1941, under Ion Antonescu; in 1945, after the installation of the communist regime, for war crimes and fascist-Legionary propaganda; in 1959, for fighting against the communist regime,

¹ ACNSAS, fond Penal, dosar nr. 276, vol. 10, ff. 278-289.

being sentenced to death and then having the sentence commuted to 25 years of hard labor, being released from prison in 1964 through Decree no. 310.

Sentence 809/2011 of the Bucharest Tribunal implies that Radu Gyr was rehabilitated only for the poem „Ridică-te Gheorghe, ridică-te, Ioane! [Rise up, Gheorghe, rise up, Ion!]” and that he must not be rehabilitated for war crimes, because the decision of the People's Tribunal of 1945 was not political in character:

„Radu Gyr was rehabilitated only for the poem „Ridică-te, Gheorghe, ridică-te, Ioane!”, a fact also exploited by neo-Legionnaires and right-wing extremists, who, however, do not also mention the fact that he remains guilty of war crimes, the court considering that the 1945 sentence cannot be the object of rehabilitation”².

Emergency Ordinance no. 31/2002 prohibits organizations, symbols and acts of a fascist, Legionary, racist or xenophobic character.³ Likewise, Laws 217/2015 and 157/2018 prohibit organizations and symbols of a fascist, racist or xenophobic character and the promotion of the cult of persons guilty of committing crimes against peace and humanity⁴.

The Vexler Law 168/2025 broadens the framework of the existing laws and tightens the penalties, explicitly referring to the prohibition of maintaining in the public space statues, commemorative plaques, streets, squares or other public places that bear the names of persons guilty of committing crimes of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, or who led Legionary, racist or xenophobic organizations. For example, there are currently legal actions related to the name of Radu Gyr street and to the „Octavian Goga” County Library, the Cluj-Napoca City Hall being sued in

² „Dezinformare: Radu Gyr a fost condamnat la moarte doar pentru o poezie” [Disinformation: Radu Gyr was sentenced to death only for a poem], *Veridica.ro*, <https://www.veridica.ro/fake-news-dezinformare-propaganda/dezinformare-radu-gyr-a-fost-condamnat-la-moarte-doar-pentru-o-poezie>, accessed in May 2026.

³ Ordonanța de urgență nr. 31/2002 privind interzicerea organizațiilor, simbolurilor și faptelor cu caracter fascist, legionar, rasist sau xenofob [Emergency Ordinance No. 31/2002 on the prohibition of organizations, symbols, and acts of a fascist, Legionary, racist, or xenophobic nature], Portal Legislativ – legislatie.just.ro, <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocument/34759>, accessed in May 2026.

⁴ Legea nr. 217/2015 pentru modificarea și completarea O.U.G. nr. 31/2002 [Law No. 217/2015 amending and supplementing Emergency Ordinance No. 31/2002], Portal Legislativ – legislatie.just.ro, <https://legislatie.just.ro/public/detaliudocument/170057>, accessed in May 2026.

this context.⁵ In 2025, there were parliamentary initiatives and public campaigns for the repeal of the law, which argue that the law would affect freedom of expression, including in the cultural field.

In May 2026, the PSD, AUR, SOS and PACE parties voted, in a first stage, in the Human Rights Committee of the Senate, for the repeal of law 168/2025, the debate being marked by the lack of clarity of the law from the perspective of the right to information, access to culture and freedom of expression, and by controversies „regarding the risk that great Romanian authors might be censored in school textbooks or by publishing houses”⁶.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates in art. 19:

„Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”.

Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights guarantees freedom of expression, but also refers to the cases in which this freedom may be restricted and sanctioned by law, such as the cases in which national security, territorial integrity or public safety, human dignity and the rights of others may be affected.

The Constitution of Romania (art. 30) protects freedom of expression, including artistic and religious freedom, but also provides limits in the case of incitement to hatred, defamation, discrimination, instigation to war, and public violence. In other words, freedom is not absolute, but must be understood in complementarity with social responsibility and with moral and legal norms.

⁵ Andreea Voicu, „Emil Boc nu va schimba numele străzii Radu Gyr: schimbarea nu poate fi fundamentată pe percepții publice sau interpretări istorice subiective” [Emil Boc will not change the name of Radu Gyr Street: the change cannot be founded on public perceptions or subjective historical interpretations], *Gândul*, <https://www.gandul.ro/politica/emil-boc-nu-va-schimba-numele-strazii-radu-gyr-schimbarea-nu-poate-fi-fundamentata-pe-perceptii-publice-sau-interpretari-istorice-subiective-20880342>, accessed in May 2026.

⁶ „Mecanismul prin care Parlamentul poate anula interdicțiile pe simboluri fasciste. Experții în drept descifrează scandalul legislativ al momentului” [The mechanism by which Parliament can repeal the bans on fascist symbols. Legal experts decode the legislative scandal of the moment], *Adevărul*, <https://adevarul.ro/politica/mecanismul-prin-care-parlamentul-poate-anula-2529698.html>, accessed in April 2026.

Literary frame: the poem „Avem o țară” and the symbolic resources

Symbolic communication is a central element of public discourse, which includes historical and religious myths and rites, and mobilizes collective beliefs, values and emotions. Thus, „symbolic efficacy”, „the social role” (Coman, 2024: 213), „the symbolic device” or „the social form” (Lardellier, 2003: 71-72) are some of the characteristics of rites, through the functions of cohesion, reflection and control of change. The symbols contained in rites reveal certain aspects of reality, belong to the substance of spiritual life, are current and have an eternal function (Eliade, 2013: 9-11). The event at the Cathedral of the Nation is a rite of celebration that appeals to symbolic devices, accumulating a symbolic capital legitimized by institutional frameworks. Public discourse acts through institutional authority that influences the way in which the transmitted messages are perceived in the public sphere, and their interpretation and symbolic efficacy depend on their recognition by the audience and on the social and cultural context in which they are produced. (Bourdieu, 2013: 170); (Bafană, 2025: 84).

The lyrics of the poem „Avem o țară” contain strongly nationalist-religious and patriotic themes; they present symbolic resources referring to saints, dungeons, prisoners and martyrs, in a procedure of historical and religious intertextuality: „the cross and the altar”, „holy wayside shrines”, „the brave Dacians”, „the covenant written for centuries”, „holy”, „the holy hierarchs”, „Iancu and the martyrs”, „oil lamps”, „relics”, „prisoners”, „heroes”, „the hope of an eternal dream”, „the country” as a symbolic entity, „of Orthodoxy”, „the land of crucifixion”, „holy Transylvania, the land of crucifixion”, „Brâncoveanu”, „Horia broken on the wheel”. Intertextuality is an essential characteristic of all texts, which evolve in connection with previous discourses. Thus, through the reuse of cultural patterns, the communication process is not limited only to the transmission of simple messages, but reinterprets the meanings already existing in society (Roșca, 2006: 25) and produces „operations of transsemiotization” (Boutaud, 2004: 64).

We find in the verses of the poem nationalist and religious symbols, associated with the sacred, taken from historical frames, which are expressive discursive constructions, generate emotions and can define the reconstruction of identity through the remembrance of the past and identification with it.

Thus, a „symbolic transfer” (Bafană, 2025: 88) is produced through rhetorical figures („votive lamps burn”) and Christian icons, archetypal images of sublimation, such as the archetype of the historical hero, the savior, the martyr, the mother-homeland as a sacralized entity, and the divinity: „the brave Dacians”, „immortal men”, „martyrs”, „We have at Putna the one who stood... a shield to Orthodoxy”, „will overturn five centuries of earth”, „in order to guard”, „a paradise of saints put to death in dungeons”, „Holy and alive in spirit”, „the sacrifice”, „let us defend”, „heroes”, „cry out from the graves”.

The poem has no explicit references to prohibited political symbols that incite hatred or promote an extremist ideology prohibited by law. The controversy over the use of the verses can also be analyzed in the context of the rise of propagandistic, populist and sovereigntist discourses that have taken over these historical and religious symbols in the pre-campaigns and electoral campaigns of recent years: „the images of certain rulers and Romanian poets placed on the AUR party's posters, the presence of Christian iconography with the Nativity of the Lord, the flag of the Dacians, the crucifix”, the repeated invocation of the divinity in order to manipulate identities (Bafană, 2025: pp. 87-106). Moreover, the investigation by the media platform Info-Sud-Est, „George Simion și neolegionarii din Dobrogea [George Simion and the neo-legionnaires in Dobrogea]”, revealed complicity at the political and religious level, including the presence of Iron Guard symbols in the public sphere⁷. We also recall the extremist discourses of MEP Diana Șoșoacă, president of the SOS party, who invoked the poet Radu Gyr and Corneliu Zelea Codreanu („I will go all the way, just as all the heroes of the Romanian nation went. (...) I can pronounce as many times as I want the name of Marshal Antonescu, of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, of the Iron Guard movement, of Ceaușescu. They are part of our history and we will never disown them, with their good and their bad”⁸, „From this moment, Romania

⁷ Redacția, „VIDEO George Simion și neolegionarii din Dobrogea – documentar *Info-Sud-Est*” [VIDEO George Simion and the neo- legionnaires of Dobrogea – an *Info-Sud-Est* documentary], *G4Media.ro*, <https://www.g4media.ro/video-george-simion-si-neolegionarii-din-dobrogea-documentar-info-sud-est.html>, accessed on May 2025.

⁸ Alexandru Vlaicu, „Reacția Dianei Șoșoacă după ce a fost acuzată de 11 infracțiuni” [Diana Șoșoacă’s reaction after being charged with 11 offences], *Libertatea*, <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/reactia-dianei-sosoaca-dupa-ce-a-fost-acuzata-de-11-infracțiuni- 5458749>, accessed in May 2025.

is finished, there is no longer a state, there is no longer anything. I can only say long live the Legion and the Captain, who were killed by the same kike power that has acted now as well. Shame on everyone”⁹), being accused of four offenses for publicly promoting the cult of persons convicted of committing crimes of genocide against humanity and war crimes, and of fascist, Legionary, racist or xenophobic ideas, conceptions or doctrines¹⁰. In this context, the case exceeded its initial cultural and religious dimension, becoming part of a broader dispute concerning historical memory, national identity and freedom of expression.

Public communication: the institutional frame

In public communication, the senders correlate the transmission of information, sharing, pooling, understanding, interaction and reception with the „public sphere”, defined as „a space of communication of the ideas and projects that arise from society and that are addressed to the decision-makers in the institutions of society” and „a cultural/informational repository of the ideas and projects that feed public debate”. (Castells, 2008: 78-79). Louis Quéré calls the public space „a medium of simple mutual observability” (Quéré apud Chambat, 2002: 67); following the Chicago School, it is „the place where signs and cues are made available to its occupants in order to decipher their internal states and to make their attributions reciprocal”, including communication, socialization and public expression (Quéré apud Chambat, 2002: 67). The public sphere is the interface between civil society and the state, visible or open to all, a space of dialogue and the place where public opinion is formed (Habermas, 2005: 80-81;140-141), consolidating

⁹ Dora Vulcan, Anca Grădinaru „Parchetul General s-a autosesizat după declarațiile antisemite ale Dianei Șoșoacă. Contestația eurodeputatei, respinsă de CCR” [The Prosecutor General’s Office opened an investigation on its own initiative following Diana Șoșoacă’s antisemitic statements. The MEP’s challenge rejected by the Constitutional Court], *Europa Liberă* România, <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/diana-sosoaca-urmarita-penal/33149421.html>, accessed in November 2025.

¹⁰ Alexandru Mihăescu, „Institutul «Elie Wiesel» a sesizat Parchetul General după ce Diana Șoșoacă l-a invocat într-un comunicat pe poetul legionar Radu Gyr” [The «Elie Wiesel» Institute notified the Prosecutor General’s Office after Diana Șoșoacă invoked the legionary poet Radu Gyr in a press release], *G4Media.ro*, <https://www.g4media.ro/institutul-elie-wiesel-a-sesizat-parchetul-general-dupa-ce-diana-sosoaca-l-a-invocat-intr-un-comunicat-pe-poetul-legionar-radu-gyr.html>, accessed in May 2026.

democracy and freedom of expression and building community identity. In his research, Mihai Coman brings several theoretical perspectives on the importance of religion in the public sphere, among them that of J. Habermas, who argued that religion cannot be excluded from the public arena for ethical, but also political, reasons (Coman, 2020: 168).

Regarding the singing of the poem „Avem o țară” during the event dedicated to the Day of the Military Clergy, the National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania „Elie Wiesel” requested that the competent institutions take up the matter ex officio, on the basis of GEO 31/2002:

„A hymn for the military clergy by a high-ranking Iron Guard militant, in the new National Cathedral, there where we also find saints whose lives were linked to the Iron Guard, is a shocking instance of extremist propaganda. We consider that the Ministry of Defense, the Royal Family and the BOR should already have clearly distanced themselves. The fact that the Church proudly posts this event conveys an entirely different message. Will the symbolic violence of extremism make a good match with Orthodoxy?”. (Alexandru Florian, director of the National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania „Elie Wiesel”)

In this framework, the meaning of the song is not derived exclusively from the content of the verses, but from the identity of the author and the historical memory associated with him. The communication of the „Elie Wiesel” Institute highlights the Legionary biography of Radu Gyr, his convictions and his role in the Iron Guard movement.

From the perspective of public relations, institutions that face a crisis situation must know how to manage the crisis or to use correct crisis management, which includes crisis communication, the communication between the organization and its publics, through which to reduce the dangers related to the damaging of the organization's image and to eliminate the risk and uncertainty caused by negative events. (Coman, 2004: 234-235). Effective crisis management implies transmitting the press release that explains the situation precisely, with complete information and the assumption of responsibility, in order to gain the public's trust (Coman, 2009: 112-118). Correct information means documentation and the verification of all sources before presenting the discourse on the respective subject in the

public sphere. (Bafană Tocia, 2020: 31). After the publication of the attacks, the Romanian Orthodox Church (BOR) issued a press release in which it distanced itself from any cult or homage paid to totalitarian ideologies, in content or intention, and from any ideological or political affiliation, using „the strategies of denial” (W. L. Benoit apud Cristina Coman, 2006:140):

„the text of the poem that formed the basis of the aforementioned performance does not in any way promote elements of any totalitarian political doctrine. Therefore, the context of the song's performance excludes any tendentious interpretation. The attempt to associate the Romanian Orthodox Church with extremist ideologies is completely groundless, especially since the Romanian Patriarchate has repeatedly expressed its firm distancing from any kind of movements that promote hatred and violence, xenophobia and racism, which are contrary to Christian teaching and faith.”

The press release of the BOR reduced the legal risk, but it presented a risk of defensive perception („we do not promote totalitarian doctrines”); it did not communicate the real author, becoming uncertain and ambiguous. The question arises: If the authorship is uncertain and contested, why was the response formulated in an ideological register? On the one hand, the public controversy was built on the attribution of the text to Radu Gyr. On the other hand, the BOR responded through a press release focused on distancing itself from totalitarian ideologies, rather than through the direct and firm clarification of the text's authorship. In addition, the press signaled, with arguments (screenshots), that the attribution of the verses „Avem o țară” to Radu Gyr appeared even on the BOR's own media channels, such as Trinitas TV, the television of the Romanian Patriarchate.¹¹

In November 2025, on the YouTube page of the Trinitas television, the following text appeared: „Radu Gyr brought through his verses „the Light between the black walls of the communist prisons”¹²; the content was

¹¹ Cristian Matache, „Catedrala și fantoma lui Radu Gyr. O confuzie care spune prea multe despre noi” [The Cathedral and the ghost of Radu Gyr. A confusion that says too much about us], *Puterea.ro*, <https://www.puterea.ro/catedrala-si-fantoma-lui-radu-gyr-o-confuzie-care-spune-prea-multe-despre-noi/>, accessed in November 2025.

¹² „115 ani de la nașterea lui Radu Gyr” [115 years since the birth of Radu Gyr], *Trinitas TV*, <https://www.trinitas.tv/115-ani-de-la-nasterea-lui-radu-gyr/>, accessed in November 2025.

subsequently deleted. At present, numerous cultural and religious websites attribute the verses of the poem „Avem o țară” to Radu Gyr.¹³

Vasile Bănescu, former spokesperson of the BOR and member of the CNA, criticized the use of Radu Gyr's verses („Gyr-area unei ideologii anticreștine? [Embracing an anti-Christian ideology?])”, even though they are not explicitly political¹⁴.

„The festive cultivation, in the ecclesiastical space, of the memory and texts of intellectuals who once fell into the temptation of Iron Guard or communist ideological demonism does enormous harm to the Church”;

„an extremist, antisemitic and violent ideology, which rapidly degenerated into crime, even if the text is not an explicitly political one”;

„the conductor of a church choir which, contextually, represents the oldest and most venerable historical institution of Romania, should take for granted awarding maximum attention to discerning and choosing the pieces performed in the very National Cathedral”.

The former spokesperson of the BOR did not contest the value of the text or its legality, but rather the cultivation of the memory of Iron Guard intellectuals, the danger of extremism through symbolic association, and the failure to assess the reputational risks.

Media frame

The democratic public sphere is strictly linked to the functioning of the mass media, which contributes to the promotion of pluralism, diversity and an agenda oriented toward the public interest, which draws on the press releases of institutions but also brings arguments from credible sources,

¹³ Radu Gyr, „Avem o țară” [We Have a Country] (text reproduc online), <https://poezie.ro/clasici/radu-gyr/poezie/avem-o-tara>, <https://poetii-nostri.ro/radu-gyr-avem-o-tara-poezie-id-19334/>, <https://poezii.org/poezie/Radu-Gyr-8/Avem-o-tara-483.html>, <https://ortodoxiatinerilor.ro/avem-o-tara-de-radu-gyr/>, <https://marturieathonita.ro/avem-o-tara/>, accessed in April 2026.

¹⁴ Maria Ionescu, „Reacția lui Vasile Bănescu după ce în Catedrala Neamului a fost cântată o melodie pe versurile legionarului Radu Gyr: «Face un enorm rău Bisericii»” [Vasile Bănescu’s reaction after a song based on the verses of the legionnaire Radu Gyr was performed in the People’s Cathedral: «It does enormous harm to the Church»], *HotNews.ro*, <https://hotnews.ro/reactia-lui-vasile-banescu-dupa-ce-in-catedrala-neamului-a-fost-cantata-o-melodie-pe-versurile-legionarului-radu-gyr-face-un-enorm-rau-bisericii-2100114>, accessed in November 2025.

„information being in itself a public good” (Petre, 2019: 102-103). In both informative texts and opinion texts, the journalist must position himself correctly in relation to the readers and to professional norms, objectivity representing not only respect for the deontology of the profession, but also a minimum moral hygiene of the media professional (Codău, 2018: 118-119).

From different perspectives, several media platforms in Romania have published articles on this subject, with reference to specialized sources, historians, literary critics and archival documents, while also presenting editorial verifications regarding the authorship of the verses „Avem o țară”.

Europa Liberă does not address the controversy over the song, but rather the broader phenomenon of the public rehabilitation of Radu Gyr, with an emphasis on his political biography, his involvement in the Iron Guard movement, his antisemitism and his collaboration with the Securitate, using as sources archival documents, historians and literary scholars:

*„One of the strongest public memories linked to him is the death sentence of 1959, in a political trial in which the verses of a poem – „Ridică-te, Gheorghe, ridică-te, Ioane!” – were used as evidence of „armed insurrection” and „plotting against the social order” against the communist regime”.*¹⁵

Digi 24 has as its dominant frame the institutional reaction of the BOR, objectively presenting the perspective of the Patriarchate from the press release, which criticizes the erroneous attribution of the verses and rejects the association with extremism.¹⁶

HotNews published the BOR's reaction and criticized the non-attribution of the verses: „However, the Patriarchate does not say who the author of the verses is or where they come from”. The publication quotes

¹⁵ Oana Despa, „Fenomenul Radu Gyr: trebuie sau nu separat poetul de legionarul colaborator cu Securitatea? O discuție necesară” [The Radu Gyr phenomenon: should the poet be separated from the legionnaire who collaborated with the Securitate? A necessary discussion], *Europa Liberă* România, <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/fenomenul-radu-gyr-trebuie-sau-nu-separat-poetul-de-legionarul-colaborator-cu-securitatea-o-discutie-necesara/33620532.html>, accessed in April 2026.

¹⁶ „Reacția Patriarhiei după scandalul piesei pe versuri de Radu Gyr cântate în Catedrala Națională: «o asociere lipsită de temeii»” [The Patriarchate's reaction after the scandal of the song based on Radu Gyr's verses performed in the National Cathedral: «an association without grounds»], *Digi24*, <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/reactia-patriarhiei-dupa-scandalul-piesei-pe-versuri-de-radu-gyr-cantate-in-catedrala-nationala-o-asociere-lipsita-de-teimei-3484257>, accessed in November 2026.

Dragoș Ursu, a historian at the National Museum of the Union in Alba Iulia, who maintains that „Radu Gyr is not the author of the poem *Avem o țară*”.¹⁷

Evenimentul Zilei built the referential dimension around the idea that the attribution of the verses to Radu Gyr is false and that the scandal was generated by erroneous information, mentioning that the poem does not appear in the established editions of Gyr's work and that it is a monastic creation. The publication quotes several sources in order to prove the authorship of the verses:

„Dragoș Ursu published a „fact-checking memorial” accompanied by a photograph from an album with the authorship assumed by the Diaconеști Monastery”, „In parallel, editorial verifications show that „Avem o țară” does not appear in the volume „Radu Gyr – Opera poetică [Radu Gyr – the poetic work]” (ed. George Stanca, Vremea, 2010) and is indicated as „anonymous, of monastic inspiration, wrongly attributed to Gyr” in the anthology „Poezia din închisorile comuniste [Poetry in communist prisons]” (coord. Fr. Gheorghe Calciu-Dumitreasa, Reîntregirea, 2007); „Similar testimonies appear in „Femei în temnițele comuniste [Women in communist prisons]” (Aspazia Oțel Petrescu, 1996), and the magazine „Rost [Purpose]” (no. 23/2004) explicitly places the origin of the text in the monastic milieu (Vladimirești/Pasărea), not in Gyr's manuscripts.”¹⁸

Puterea.ro criticizes the institutional negligence of the BOR and states that the poem is the creation of the nuns of the Diaconеști Monastery, „published in a volume of carols in 2007”, without indicating the title of the volume, the publishing house or any specialized source confirming the authorship of the verses. On the other hand, a good observation of the

¹⁷ Andrei Georgescu, „Patriarhia spune că versurile piesei «Avem o țară», cântată de un cor de copii în Catedrala Neamului, au fost atribuite în mod total eronat legionarului Radu Gyr” [The Patriarchate says that the lyrics of the song «We Have a Country», performed by a children's choir in the People's Cathedral, were entirely wrongly attributed to the legionnaire Radu Gyr], *HotNews.ro*, <https://hotnews.ro/patriarhia-spune-ca-versurile-piesei-avem-o-tara-cantata-de-un-cor-de-copii-in-catedrala-neamului-au-fost-atribuite-in-mod-total-eronat-legionarului-radu-gyr-re-2100321>, accessed in November 2025.

¹⁸ Marian Dinu, „Poezia «Avem o țară» nu este a lui Radu Gyr. Cum a fost terfelită sărbătoarea de la Catedrala Națională cu un fake news” [The poem «We Have a Country» is not by Radu Gyr. How the celebration at the National Cathedral was sullied by fake news], *Evenimentul Zilei*, <https://evz.ro/poezia-avem-o-tara-nu-este-a-lui-radu-gyr-cum-a-fost-terfelita-sarbatoarea-de-la-catedrala-nationala-cu-un-fake-news.html>, accessed in November 2025.

publication is the fact that the Trinitas TV platform attributed the authorship of the verses to Radu Gyr, offering as arguments screenshots from the Patriarchate's page:

„An old confusion, perpetuated even by the television of the Romanian Patriarchate, Trinitas TV, which had previously broadcast several performances of the song, all having Gyr's name as author in their description”; „What began as an artistic moment dedicated to the Day of the Military Clergy turned, in just a few hours, into a textbook case of manipulation, institutional negligence and the way in which the ideological past of an era continues to haunt the present”.¹⁹

The same publication, Puterea.ro, highlights, in a balanced manner, the fact that the author cannot be removed from Romanian literature, but neither can he be rehabilitated through *„church songs or military choirs. As a poet, he must be studied, not venerated. As a symbol, he must be understood critically, not invoked sentimentally”*.²⁰

Political frame and the interpretation of the legislation on combating extremism

In the table below, we have selected the discourses of the political parties AUR, PSD, SOS and USR, which expressed their opinion in the public sphere through their representatives, regarding the Vexler law. The comparative analysis of these frames shows that the political debate has legal but also symbolic objectives, becoming a competition between regimes of interpretation of the past and of the limits of expression in the present. The discussions were amplified by the positions of certain political actors who contested the appropriateness or the scope of the legal restrictions on Iron Guard symbols. We also observe, in the case of the PSD's communication, that political framing does not always overlap with institutional behavior.

¹⁹ Cristian Matache, „Catedrala și fantoma lui Radu Gyr. O confuzie care spune prea multe despre noi” [The Cathedral and the ghost of Radu Gyr. A confusion that says too much about us], Puterea.ro, <https://www.puterea.ro/catedrala-si-fantoma-lui-radu-gyr-o-confuzie-care-spune-prea-multe-despre-noi>, accessed in November 2025.

²⁰ *Idem.*

AUR	PSD	SOS	USR
The AUR deputy, Mihail Neamțu, refers to freedom of expression and criticizes „symbolic censorship”: „ <i>The answer to totalitarianism, to fascism, to communism is freedom. The answer to this accumulation of hatred, whether in the form of Nazi discourse or in the form of Bolshevik discourse, does not mean more censorship, but critical thinking, pluralism, debate</i> ”. ²¹	The PSD votes for the repeal of the law, although there is a discrepancy between Grindeanu's discourse and the political action; we observe the separation between the rhetorical level and the decision-making level: „ <i>I am not aware of any such thing. If things stand in this form, rest assured that we will defend them urgently in the Chamber. It is not something I would accept; it is probably an oversight</i> ”. ²² (Sorin Grindeanu)	The SOS party rejects the normative interventions perceived as extreme or as restrictive for national identity. S.O.S. deputy Tudor Ionescu: „ <i>A draft law that seeks to restrict freedom of expression, a draft law that has already created unnecessary tensions in Romanian society</i> ”. ²³	The discourse of the USR member supports alignment with European standards and the combating of extremism. At the same time, it maintains the legal framework. „ <i>Today we witnessed a grave moment for Romanian democracy. The PSD voted, alongside AUR, SOS and PACE, in favor of repealing the anti-fascist law in Romania</i> ”. ²⁴

²¹ „Scandal la adoptarea legii Vexler în Parlament. Inițiatorul spune că a fost îmbrâncit, deputații s-au jignit, iar în sală s-a urlat” [Scandal at the adoption of the Vexler law in Parliament. The initiator says he was shoved, MPs hurled insults, and there was shouting in the chamber], *Antena 3 CNN*, <https://www.antena3.ro/politica/scandal-la-adoptarea-legii-vexler-in-parlament-initiatorul-spune-ca-a-fost-imbrancit-deputatii-s-au-jignit-iar-in-sala-s-a-urlat-770688.html>, accessed in December 2025.

²² Alex Tudor, „PSD a întors armele. Senatorii social-democrați nu au mai votat pentru proiectul care abrogă legile antifasciste” [The PSD reversed course. The Social Democrat senators no longer voted for the bill repealing the anti-fascist laws], *Cotidianul*, <https://www.cotidianul.ro/psd-a-intors-armele-senatorii-social-democrati-nu-au-mai-votat-pentru-proiectul-care-abroga-legilor-antifasciste/>, accessed in May 2026.

²³ „Scandal la adoptarea legii Vexler în Parlament. Inițiatorul spune că a fost îmbrâncit, deputații s-au jignit, iar în sală s-a urlat” [Scandal at the adoption of the Vexler law in Parliament. The initiator says he was shoved, MPs hurled insults, and there was shouting in the chamber], *Antena 3 CNN*, <https://www.antena3.ro/politica/scandal-la-adoptarea-legii-vexler-in-parlament-initiatorul-spune-ca-a-fost-imbrancit-deputatii-s-au-jignit-iar-in-sala-s-a-urlat-770688.html>, accessed in December 2025.

²⁴ Știri Senat – informare privind dezbaterea legii Vexler [Senate News – briefing on the debate of the Vexler law], Senatul României – [senat.ro](https://www.senat.ro/StiriSenatDetaliu.aspx?ID=062FA5DF-41F0-42CA-9ADB-2DECD9D1962A), <https://www.senat.ro/StiriSenatDetaliu.aspx?ID=062FA5DF-41F0-42CA-9ADB-2DECD9D1962A>, accessed in May 2026.

Conclusions

The public and institutional reactions highlight the existence of different perspectives: some emphasize the cultural-religious dimension and the protection of freedom of expression; others place the emphasis on the responsibility of historical memory and on the risks of symbolic legitimization. The tension between freedom of expression, historical memory and anti-extremist legislation manifests itself especially at the level of symbolic interpretation and of public perception.

The controversy was not generated by the existence of extremist content in the verses, but by the symbolic association between the text, the author and the institutional context of the event, and by the political context of the populist discourses of the electoral campaigns of recent years. The public reactions must also be understood in relation to a broader context of political polarization, in which accusations of extremism and disputes over democratic values have occupied a central place on the public agenda.

The symbolic perception of a work is influenced by the ideological identity of the author, but the use of a creation without an explicit extremist message remains protected by the principle of freedom of expression. The case is a possible problem of public communication and public relations, in the sense of an insufficient assessment of the communication risks and of the symbolic perception in an institutional event with an identity-related charge. The public controversy was also amplified by the ambiguity regarding the authorship of the text, given that the institutional reaction focused mainly on distancing itself from totalitarian ideologies and less on clarifying the origin and the attribution of the work, as some media platforms that tried to verify the authorship of the verses also observed. The attribution of the poem to Radu Gyr on media platforms belonging to the BOR, such as Trinitas TV, generates a lack of coherence between the official message and the contents broadcast in the affiliated media space.

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