



Ioan Oltean: DNA was the main instrument of destruction of the country

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The former PDL leader is at the end of a nightmare. After having been excluded from the political life and subjected to public obloquy, the accusation brought by the National Anticorruption Directorate against Ioan Oltean ended with the file being discreetly closed for lack of evidence. After 5 years...

THIS WAS A STRATEGY TO DESTROY THE POLITICAL CLASS

We are at the end of a 5-year period during which you were haunted by the DNA prosecutors' accusation that you received 600,000 euros as bribe, in the yard of a church in Chitila. The case was closed for lack of evidence in July

2020. How did you feel?

It was a strange feeling, difficult to define, because after five years of carrying a burden like a boulder, when you put it down you have the feeling that it is still there.

When this boulder was placed on my shoulders, there was a huge scandal. For three weeks I had been the subject of debates and comments on all television channels. I was basically lynched. Literally. Now, five years later, when the same prosecutors, the same institution that requested my arrest, find that "the crime did not take place", two or three lines get written in the press, and the televisions ignore the subject. No one commented or brought forward my rehabilitation. But now I have this feeling of contentment and the satisfaction of the very few who have always believed in my innocence.

I have the joy of looking my daughter in the eye. She told me over and over again that she did not believe the accusations against me, but I have suffered because I was not able to confirm her trust by any hard evidence. Now she said this to me: "But, Father, I have always believed that you are innocent, so this is no news to me!"

In the public eye, I am still the same "corrupt" man, the same man who "stole a pile of money"; because I did not get the chance to go to every single television station and say that I am innocent, and show the *nolle prosequi*.

How do you explain that a case relied solely on a denunciation made by an arrested priest?

I believe that a strategy to destroy the Romanian political class was in place at that time. I was not the only one who was politically persecuted. Had I been the only one, I would have said that it was an incident. Justice can make unintentional errors. The years 2011-2015, even 2016, were, however, the years when a political class was destroyed. Today, you will not be able to find in the Romanian political structure a man with solid professional training received before 1990. It was certainly a directive set forth by a specific person, to destroy politicians that had dignity, intellectual and professional competence, who were patriots and true leaders. That happened in my case. I was one of the oldest members of the Romanian Parliament. I had been a member of the Parliament for 22 years when my arrest was requested. I was the President of a very good county organisation. They had no other chance of removing me from politics than by fabricating a case against me and making a criminal out of me. That is when I was forced to step aside and try to defend my dignity in court.

I HAVE NEVER BEEN TO CHITILA

How did your life change after you were accused?

There is a saying "What doesn't kill you, makes you stronger!". Personally, I am convinced of the truthfulness of that saying. It was a nightmare, knowing that everybody has already convicted you. I was publicly judged based on a complaint made by a priest who, at that time, was an inmate at the G?ie?ti prison. I was found guilty even before I was brought to court, and I was subjected to public obloquy before any piece of evidence against me was even produced. Society convicted me as soon as my arrest was requested. On that day people said to themselves: "This guy is guilty, he is corrupt, he is a criminal, he stole public money...".

For me, who had thought myself to be different and not at all belong in the corrupt category, that came as a shock. I knew I had never committed that crime. I had never been to Chitila. And there is no chance one can get a pile of money in the yard of a church in Chitila, unless one goes to that town at least once. I felt embarrassed going out in the street, even though I knew I was innocent. Everybody pointed at me: "Did you see Oltean, the criminal?". I was in the airport once and someone asked: "How come they haven't convicted you, how come you are still free?". Can you imagine how strong you have to be in order to put up with and accept such reactions from the society? Many things have been said about me very lightly. People I did not expect it from convicted me a priori. Not to mention the press. The journalists had a negative role in providing false, inaccurate information not only in my case but also in other people's case, without even the benefit of the doubt.

Why do you think we are programmed to convict a priori, without waiting for the actual judgment? Accusation equals conviction...

Moreover, suspicion equals evidence of the guilt and, thereby, conviction. Professor Corneliu Bîrsan, former Romanian judge with ECHR, very beautifully and accurately observed that we Romanians do not have the culture of doubt. Doubt does not only mean uncertainty and postponement, but it signifies deep and honest reasoning. I

know it is far easier to convict. Having doubts means putting one's mind to work, judging, analysing information. Unfortunately, people are eager for the sensational, for blood. Such wish, which is born from the frustrations of a society scared of the risks posed by freedom, but also of being governed in lie, which has been the practice of many politicians during the past decades, was fully exploited.

How did your indictment report end up in the press, with recordings and details of your private life, which were not at all relevant for the criminal case?

It is a known fact that during the criminal investigation everything is secret, and the case file becomes public only when it is referred to the court. Up to that point it is only the parties, through their lawyers, and the prosecutor investigating the case that have access to the case file. However, when I came out of DNA's headquarters, on 25 November 2015, the press knew more than I had learnt from the prosecutor. Nobody was declared responsible for this anomaly. Nobody can have access to the information in the criminal investigation case files which is not meant for the public. This was only possible with complicity by the prosecutors who carried out the investigation. If they were penalized when, by disclosing information, they allow the trial to be held in the street, where there is no jurisdiction, no right to defence, many injustices would be avoided. This dealing was not stopped, because nobody wanted to stop it.

The DNA prosecutors asked the judges for your preventive arrest, but not your detention.

It was for the first time that they requested the arrest directly, without detention first. Usually, such actions are cumulated: the person is detained for 24 hours and then the arrest is requested. When my case was assigned to judge Horia Selaru from the High Court, everybody told me that he would allow the arrest, because he was close to Laura Codruta Kovesi. However, he was fair to me. He dismissed the request for my arrest filed by the prosecutors and allowed my conditional release pending trial.

My lawyer advised me not to challenge that decision, but this would have meant admitting that I was guilty. I challenged the sixty days later, that measure too was removed.

MY WIFE WAS THE VICTIM OF WHAT HAPPENED TO ME

How was your family's life during these years?

It was a nightmare for my family as well. My wife, a truly remarkable person, unfortunately passed away. She is one of the direct victims of what happened to me. She knew me, she trusted me. My daughter was affected as well. They both fully felt the discomfort: my daughter – at school, my wife – in society. "She is the criminal's wife, she is the corrupt politician's wife!" – that is what she heard passing by various persons.

They were certainly victims of this miserable story fabricated by DNA against me, but they continued to support me emotionally. During this insane period, they never questioned my innocence and honesty. And that was a tremendous help to me.

Did your colleagues support you or, on the contrary, did they keep their distance?

You know how it is! One has many friends when things go well. I am one of the most disappointed politicians, at least as concerns the reaction of the people who were close to me. They distanced themselves from me, they stopped calling me.

Some of them explained later that since my phone was allegedly under surveillance, they were afraid that a call would lead the prosecutors to them. Childish explanations, which made me sick. I preferred not to call them and to share my suffering only with my family.

It is Sadoveanu, I think, who said that "Friends are like parasols, they only turn up when the sun rises". I had the confirmation that this is true. When the sun sets, there are no friends around you ...

It was empty all around me at that time. There was nobody at all!

EMIL BOC BELIEVED IN MY INOCENCE

Are there any colleagues who, nonetheless, stayed by your side and who you would like to mention?

I would like to mention just one – Emil Boc. He was firmly convinced that I was innocent, and he supported me not just emotionally, but in every way. He never refused to meet me, talk to me, answer my calls. He is a moral man, a very good man. I must admit, and it gives me great pleasure to say, that he was among the first persons to whom I announced the closing of the case. He was glad to hear it!

They say that there are no morals in politics. I say that there are morals, to the extent that there are moral people. A man who is moral in his private life, cannot be immoral in politics. After people learned that my criminal investigation case file was closed, most of the persons who called me to express their joy were representatives of other parties, not of my own party. My opponents were gladder than my colleagues. And that says something...

Who will give you back the lost years, your reputation and the money spent on lawyers?

Nobody. Those five years were a nightmare. I lost several positions: vice-President of the Chamber of Deputies, vice-President of the party at national level, President of the county organisation. I resigned from all these offices and surrendered to the justice system. I was the most long-lived organisation President in the country. I had been holding a managing office in the party for 25 years. I lost all of these. I could not run for these offices anymore. I have not held any office since then. I have lost friends. My wife got sick in the meanwhile and passed away.

I have lost everything there is to lose in this world and everything that gives one their comfort. I kept my wits about me, though, and I thank God for that. I have not lost my mind, and you should know that this is not easy. I was followed everywhere. I could not even eat. When I left for the court, I took my suitcase and prepared myself for getting arrested. I knew that if the ruling was that requested by DNA, I would go directly to jail. Emotionally, I gathered all my strength, I told my family that I was alright and I left.

If one can sue somebody for money, with minimum chances to convince the court, one can never get back lost moments of life...

Are you considering suing the prosecutor who handled the case for damages?

At this time, I admit that I have not thought about it. I want to regain my emotional stability. I have never been driven by revenge, by the desire to punish those who distanced themselves from me or persecuted me... The wish to recover at least the money spent on lawyers is, in itself, absolutely natural, but I have not made a decision about that. What interests me is the fact that, emotionally, I cannot fix the suffering, no matter what happens in this world. Because of what happened, all that I have accomplished in 23-24 years in the public life, in my profession, is ruined. It is absolutely impossible to rebuild.

KOVESI SIGNED THE INDICTMENT REPORT AND THE ARREST WARRANT

How do you think that the prosecutor who caused this entire human and social drama feels?

The hearings that I was called to were few, since my case was very simple and there was no need for me to go to hearings often. It is difficult to understand what the case prosecutor was thinking, how he could set me up like that and what kind of conscience he has. What conscience can he have if he destroyed another person's career and life, by a completely baseless action?!

But do you think that he did this on his own, especially that the indictment report was confirmed by the President of the section?

No. Two years ago, journalist Sorina Matei broadcast a research, on the B1 TV channel, revealing that for a year they had been forcing the preparation of my case, redrafting it several times, until it had a somewhat acceptable form so they could prove me guilty. They did all this and then ended up closing the case. From the bottom all the way up to the case prosecutor, there was an entire team. The document issued for my arrest was signed by DNA's chief prosecutor, i.e. Laura Codruta Kovesi. She signed it. The scheme was implemented from bottom to top, from top to bottom.

"The political class, investors and intellectuals – all destroyed. Systematically"

You are not the only leader who was “disfigured” by an entire propaganda that shaped the image of a corrupt public figure. Can we talk about a system created to destroy the Romanian elite and which did manage to achieve its purpose?

Yes. A system that systematically destroyed everything of value in Romania. I don't want to dwell on that, because this would mean a debate with arguments, but, following a mere analysis by someone who has gone through this and who knows the evolution and the members of the Parliament, I know how valuable men have been erased from the Romanian politics. I have also witnessed the big Romanian investors disappear from the private market. I saw how the intellectual elite was wiped away, excellent professors and doctors. There are three categories, the most important ones: the political class, businessmen and intellectuals of the other fields of activity. The rest is an indistinct bulk easy to manipulate. This is what is happening now. In my opinion, this was a very detailed strategy, which some people even applied.

Was DNA the instrument for applying this strategy?

I believe it was the main instrument, but not the only one. I would not want to name the other ones.

Do you think that Traian Basescu is among those guilty of building this system? Do you feel responsible, as head of PDL, which practically created and then perfected this system?

I definitely have my share of guilt. After Adrian Nastase and the governing party of 2000-2004 established the PNA, we were in the next government and we provided this institution, by the laws we passed, with the instruments that allowed them to do what they did. When we improved the legislation in the hopes that it would meet the requirements of the fight against corruption, we did it in good faith, trusting that the justice system would work as it should. But that didn't happen. In 1997, when Valeriu Stoica, Minister of Justice at that time, proposed the law on the improvement of judges' status, we were the first to support it whole-heartedly, convinced that judges are a very important segment of the Romanian society and that we must give them what they deserve – salaries, privileges, immunities, so they could do their job, free from any frustration or worry. Making their positions inamovable was one of the decisions we supported, although now I think that it should have been preceded by lustration. Personally, I consider that the abuses were not generated by the law per se, but by those who applied it. Maybe the law was not perfect, but abuses are made by people and not even the best of laws can stand against the bad faith of those called upon to protect it.

These are abuses from an era when the President of the country was able to stop them and when a party that had governed the country for 10 years could have eliminated such abuses! All this system for exterminating the true political class, the valuable leaders, was made just like that, as if the President of the country and the governing party – PD did not see what was going on?

Abuses did not happen only when PDL was governing, but also when PSD was. When a PSD politician would get arrested, everybody else gloated. When someone from PD or PNL got arrested, the PSD was happy. This is what things looked like in the Romanian politics. Nobody was stopping the Parliament from amending the law and creating a framework to prevent any kind of abuses. But it didn't. It was everybody's hope that the abusive system would work only against the others. For this, we are all guilty.

But who was stopping Traian Basescu?

Traian Basescu was the President of Romania. He could not change the law. The law could be amended by the Parliament, but they did not wish to do so, neither wing did.

So is the Parliament responsible?

In a way yes, because, among other things, the Parliament did not even pass a law on magistrates' liability. This law too, in my opinion, was absolutely mandatory. We do not have it to this day. Sure, there is a silver lining between dominating judges by threatening punishment and holding them liable only for their abuses. If we can apply penalties to stop them from making abuses, this is perfect, but, if the punishment is so severe that they are dominated and their decisions are controlled by fear, that's no good. There are few things in the current legislation to be remedied or added, as concerns magistrates' liability. The problem is that the laws are not applied. Have you ever heard of any judge on trial for unjust repression? There are plenty of other negative examples for prosecutors that we could give.

RARES BOGDAN GOT ABSOLUTELY MAD AGAINST ME

What reports against you surprised you the most? Are there persons who disappointed you?

There have been many reports that amazed me and hurt me deeply. I did have positive experiences, such as, for instance, the fact that Victor Ciutacu was reserved during the criminal prosecution, he was the only one who, when the case was closed, commented on the decision of the court and made it public.

On the contrary, I was shocked and deeply hurt by Rares Bogdan's attitude. I had been under the impression that our relationship was a fair one, but when I was accused by DNA, he set out to make a scene, he got absolutely mad onscreen at Realitatea TV, calling me "the scoundrel from Bistrita", "Crocodile", "Nelu the Mexican" and so on. To say all these things, with so much hate, to someone who was already going through an ordeal... that was so incomprehensible and inhumane to me.

I was also very unpleasantly surprised by something Cristian Tudor Popescu said. I had thought that he was, however, a journalist who I did not think was capable to stoop to the level of a modest tabloid guy. He was wondering, apparently baffled, "how did not God strike him dead in the churchyard?". Now, after the DNA prosecutors themselves came to the conclusion that I did not commit the offence they accused me of, I sent him the Ordinance for closing the case, accompanied by the following message: "Dear Mr. Popescu, this is why God did not strike me dead! Because I was innocent!"

And he told me: "Dear Mr. Ioan Oltean, you may have noticed that I do not believe in what is called God. Therefore, those words did not come from a faithful Romanian casting the blame on you. That was a sarcastic comment on God and the Church as moral pillars. I probably succeeded". Well, you can assess that answer yourself. I can only hope that at least other prosecutors and judges will bear in mind, from now on, what it means to destroy an innocent man's life.

When all is said and done, I am left with this bitter taste, a feeling of sadness, and above all the human loss... My wife did not even get to witness the case being close...

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