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## Romanian Reform: The First 200 Days

BUDAPEST, Hungary

June 1997

By Christopher P. Ball

*A nation's policy forms an integral whole. Foreign policy and domestic policy are closely linked together, they condition each other.*

—Ludwig von Mises, 1949

On the third of November, 1996, Romanians embarked on the first genuine post-Ceausescu era of national reform by electing a new president, Emil Constantinescu, and giving his party, the Romanian Democratic Convention (CDR, to use its Romanian acronym) control of Parliament. The new team has been in power for something over 200 days, and it's time for a report card. I begin by assessing the CDR record in foreign policy.

From the beginning, the CDR government placed entrance into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) high on its overall agenda and first on its foreign-policy agenda. This has resulted in numerous meetings with leaders of NATO-member countries and constant public pleas for inclusion whenever CDR officials were given the opportunity to speak in international fora. It has also figured prominently as a major popular unifying force, maintaining public support for the new government. Polls show Romania with the highest level of popular support for both NATO and EU membership in the region.

Romania's improved neighborly relations during this time have naturally followed, since having 'friendly neighborly relations' is a U.S. prerequisite for NATO membership. Most important are Romania's relations with Ukraine, Moldova and Hungary.

## UKRAINE

Romanian-Ukrainian relations were previously strained by Romania's claims on Ukrainian territory seized by the USSR in 1940 and placed under Ukrainian control. It is there that 400,000 ethnic Romanians still live.

On 2 June 1997, Romania and Ukraine overcame their differences and signed a basic treaty. The treaty confirms all existing borders between the countries, thus resolving the territorial dispute without citing it explicitly. It also grants extensive rights to each nation's minorities (ethnic Romanians in Ukraine and ethnic Ukrainians in Romania), and includes an explicit reference to EU Recommendation 1201, which guarantees collective rights and ethnically based autonomy in line with the principles of self-determination as defined by international law.<sup>1</sup> Moscow

<sup>1</sup> Recommendation 1201 of the Council of Europe, under Article 10, states that "[e]very person belonging to a national minority, while duly respecting the territorial integrity of the state, shall have to have free and unimpeded contacts with the citizens of another country with whom this minority shares ethnic, religious or linguistic features of a cultural identity."



and Washington praised both countries for signing the treaty.

In addition to the friendship treaty, the two countries settled other issues of dispute and laid the groundwork for future cooperation on many fronts. "Among these [issues were] the non-deployment of offensive weapons by Ukraine on the Black Sea Serpent Island, navigation on the Chili branch of the Danube River delta [which serves as the border between Ukraine and Romania] and the delineation of the continental shelf around Serpent Island."<sup>2</sup>

Originally Romanian, Serpent Island was seized by the Soviet Union and given to Ukraine. President Constantinescu's predecessor, Ion Iliescu, wanted to reclaim the island, but the CDR government was prepared to give it up in the name of international amity. The island is little more than a large, barren rock. During communism's heyday, the Soviets built a military base

on it. The base is now Ukrainian.

On the economy-improvement side, the countries agreed to establish a "triangular association" between Ukraine, Poland, and Romania (possibly adding Hungary at a later date) and establish a trade-enhancing "Euro-region" including Ukraine, Moldova and Romania.

## MOLDOVA

From 1812 to 1856 Russians occupied the eastern portion of Moldova, which they named Bessarabia. After Bessarabia was returned to Moldova in 1856, Moldova and Walachia were united to form the Kingdom of Romania in 1859. In 1878 Russian forces reannexed Bessarabia, which remained part of the Russian Empire until 1917. In March 1918 the Bessarabian legislature voted in favor of unification with Romania, and at the Paris Peace Conference in 1920 the union was officially

<sup>2</sup> RFE/RL NEWSLINE. Vol.1, No. 36, Part II, 22 May 1997.

recognized by the United States, France, Great Britain, and other Western countries.

The new Soviet government did not accept the union, and in 1924 a Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Republic (ASSR) was established within the USSR on the border of Romania. In 1939 Bessarabia was granted to the USSR in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Soviet-German agreement on dividing Eastern Europe. Although Romania declared its neutrality in September 1939, the USSR forced it to concede Bessarabia, and Soviet forces occupied the region in June 1940. At first Soviet authorities continued to call the new territory Bessarabia. But on August 2, 1940, the Moldavian SSR was proclaimed, and the former Moldavian ASSR abolished. The Moldavian SSR was reoccupied by Romanian forces from 1941 to 1944, when Soviet forces again retook the territory. It remained part of the USSR until the collapse of Communism.<sup>3</sup>

Initial treaty discussions between Moldova and Romania came to a halt during 1996 under the Iliescu government and were resumed only in April 1997 when the Moldovan government announced that it wanted to conclude a basic treaty before the NATO expansion decision in July. A basic treaty was, however, not signed between the two countries within the first 200 days of the CDR government.

Prior to the resumption of treaty discussions, the two countries agreed that Romania should be Moldova's gateway to the EU and Moldova would become Romania's gateway to CIS countries. In this spirit, two cooperative treaties were signed between the countries' Ministries of Justice and Culture. Further agreements were signed providing free-trade zones in border regions, dealing with environmental protection and general education issues, as well as commercial arrangements. Finally, as mentioned above, Moldova and Romania agreed to establish a "Euro-region" with Ukraine to promote economic development and free trade.

## HUNGARY

Disputes between Hungary and Romania have come and gone for ages and since I have already dealt with many of them in earlier reports I will not rehash here. Despite the weakness of the basic treaty signed between the countries before the CDR government took power, relations between these rivals greatly improved during the CDR's first 200 days.

The level of cooperation between the leadership of each country is unprecedented. I feel the most telling signs of improvement were visits by the Romanian Prime Minister to Hungary and the Hungarian

President to Romania and the achievements made during those trips. It is on these that I will focus.

On 12 March, Prime Minister Victor Ciorbea became the first Romanian premier to visit Hungary since 1989. This was his first trip abroad as Prime Minister and he emphasized the fact by saying "it is proof of how important we regard our bilateral relations and what enormous importance we give to the active partnership with Hungary."<sup>4</sup>

Prime Minister Ciorbea announced a "new chapter" in relations between Hungary and Romania. Symbolizing this was the inclusion in his delegation of Romania's new Minister for Ethnic Minority Affairs, Tokay György, an ethnic Hungarian. While in Hungary, Ciorbea said that high on his agenda was boosting bilateral economic ties and support of each country's bid to join NATO and the EU. To further this agenda he publicly announced that the new government agreed to protect Magyar rights in Romania, including the right of Romanian Hungarians to use their mother tongue in education and official dealings (later made into law, see below). He also addressed a group of 100 Hungarian businesspersons and urged them to invest in Romania.

At the formal level during Ciorbea's visit, the two countries' Prime Ministers signed agreements strengthening economic, transportation and foreign-policy ties, and agreed to establish a commission to monitor the implementation of the basic treaty.

Hungarian President Árpád Göncz's visit to Romania was more formal and symbolic than was Ciorbea's trip to Hungary. He spent much of his time visiting cities in Transylvania, where Magyars constitute a majority. Nevertheless, President Göncz publicly commented that Hungary considered it vital to its national interests that Romania join NATO and said that Budapest would do everything possible to see that membership happened in the 'first wave' of expansion. Prior to this particular statement, the Romanian and Hungarian Defense Ministers sent a joint letter to the French and German Defense Ministers asking for support in setting up a Hungarian-Romanian rapid-reaction force according to the model of the German-French military agreement. Throughout the proposal, both Hungarian and Romanian ministers emphasized that their countries were partners, not competitors, in their respective accession bids.

Also during President Göncz's visit, Romanian President Constantinescu proposed trilateral cooperation between Romania, Hungary and Austria to improve security in Central and Eastern Europe. The proposal was received warmly by the Hungarian side, but no further action was taken during the 200 days under discussion.

<sup>3</sup> Microsoft Encarta 96 Encyclopedia.

<sup>4</sup> OMRI Daily Digest. No. 50, Part II, 12 March 1997.

# CONSTANTINESCU PRESEDINTE



**CHEIA E LA TINE !**

The reciprocal visits by the leaders of each country were extremely important symbolically. To see the Hungarian President in a Magyar-Romanian village, joining in local celebrations (see "MINORITY POLICY" below) and accompanied by Romanian government officials was something previously unimaginable in Romania. Equally unthinkable would have been a Romanian Prime Minister visiting Hungary with one of his ethnic-Magyar Ministers. Both of these actions showed that the new Romanian government was not interested in playing nationalistic games with ethnic issues. Coupled with this was the fact that little time was wasted on ethnic issues and the leaders spent most of their time on 'business' in economic, security, environmental and broader foreign policy areas.

Perhaps most telling was the response of the Romanian nationalists themselves. The CDR government has received harsh criticism on account of both the Ukrainian and Moldovan treaties. For example, the chairman of the Greater Romanian Party (a nationalist party), Corneliu Vadim Tudor, called the Romanian-Ukrainian treaty "the most serious act of national treason in Romania's modern history."<sup>5</sup> Such criticism has been typical of the nationalists

throughout the CDR government's brief administration. During President Göncz's three-day visit nationalist protests were also staged. The CDR government has carried on without being held up by such games.

## MINORITY POLICY

Up to this point, I have referred to the new Romanian government as either the Constantinescu or CDR government. This is, to be honest, slightly misleading. The new government is actually a three-party coalition including the Democratic Convention of Romania (CDR), the Social Democratic Union (USD) and the Romanian-Hungarian Democratic Union (RMDSZ).

The new government struck an obvious and initial blow against the nationalists by including the RMDSZ in its coalition. The RMDSZ only took a few more seats in parliament (about 6.5 percent) than the nationalist Greater Romania Party (about 4.5 percent). The USD and CDR could have chosen this smaller, nationalist party as its third coalition partner and hoped thereby to secure "populist-nationalist" support. It did not.

As a coalition partner the RMDSZ received two ministry positions, in Tourism (Akos Birtalan) and in National Minority Affairs (György Tokay). Also, in two of the three counties where Magyars are a dominant majority (Maros, Hargita, and Covasna counties) there are now Magyar prefects, something previously allowed for by law, but not put into practice. Prime Minister Ciorbea has stated several times that the RMDSZ's participation in the government coalition is necessary and useful and contributes to internal stability. During Ciorbea's visit to Hungary he even participated in the 149th anniversary celebrations of the 1848-49 Hungarian revolution, something considered treasonous by Romanian nationalists. He also sent a letter to the Magyars celebrating the same anniversary in Romania. In Romania, the celebration was attended by government officials. In the past, this celebration has met with hostility by the Romanian government and Romanian nationalists<sup>6</sup>.

Beyond these initial actions, the government almost immediately began formulating minority-pleasing legislation on local administration and education. Both laws have been long requested by the Magyars in Romania and both have now been passed by Parliament. Where the minority is 20 percent or more of the local-population, the local-administration law allows bilingual streets signs (i.e. in Romanian and Hungarian) and the use of one's mother tongue in dealings with local government officials. Subject to the same 20 percent-of-population requirement, the education law lifts restrictions on instruction in the minority language in schools.

Perhaps of equal national significance, and just as

<sup>5</sup> RFE/RL Newswire Vol.1, No.24, Part II, 5 May 1997

<sup>6</sup> See: OMRI DAILY DIGEST, No. 53, Part II, 17 March 1997.

strongly attacked by nationalists, has been the government's actions with regard to Bolyai-Babes University located in Cluj-Napoca. In 1958 Ceausescu merged Romanian-language Babes University with the Hungarian-language Bolyai University (named after János Bolyai, the Hungarian mathematician who discovered non-Euclidean geometry at the same time, but independently of, Russia's Nikolay Ivanovich Lobachevsky). This move was clearly anti-Hungarian when it was made and the restoration of the *Hungarian Bolyai University* was one of the first demands of the Magyars in post-Ceausescu Romania.

The new government initially agreed, but later renegeed on its promise. Due to the legal autonomy of universities in Romania, a governmental decision concerning an already-existing university can be blocked locally, but the Magyars were given permission to open a separate, new university. Finally, after months of debate, the Romanian, Hungarian and German (the three official nationalities of Transylvania) segments of the Babes-Bolyai University agreed to set up departments in each of the three languages, but remain one university. This has been seen as a loss by many politically-active Magyars in Romania<sup>7</sup> and still remains a contentious point between the minorities and the Romanian-majority government.

The new government has also made advances in policies relating to Romania's Jewish population. In another historical move, President Constantinescu acknowledged Romanian holocaust crimes in 1940 and sent words of remorse to participants in Holocaust Day ceremonies in

Bucharest's main square. This was the first such statement by a Romanian official since WWII. The new government also recognized the illegality of Jewish-property confiscation during Fascism and Communism, and drafted legislation to restore it. Restoration began with six buildings in Bucharest, and the Jewish community set up a nonprofit organization to administer the return. Foreign Minister Adrian Severin commented, "the restitution of Jewish property is a necessary act of justice that [will] help Romanians come to terms with their history."<sup>8</sup>

These developments have not gone unnoticed. Upon assessing Romania's progress since the November elections, the Council of Europe (CE) ended its special monitoring of Romania's implementation of the human rights commitments to which it agreed upon joining the CE. Monitoring will resume within one year, however, if Romania doesn't modify penal-code provisions against homosexual offenses (passed in 1995 under President Iliescu) and implement new legislation dealing with xenophobia and intolerance as well as return Church property confiscated by the Communists.<sup>9</sup> Subsequent to the withdrawal of CE special monitoring the Romanian Parliament elected its first Romanian Ombudsman.

The OSCE (Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe) High Commissioner for National Minorities also praised progress in Romania and said that his meeting with RMDSZ leaders was "the most encouraging" he has ever had in Romania. He added, however, that tensions still remain between the Romanian majority and the Gypsies. □

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<sup>7</sup> The restoration of the Bolyai University was a major point to be included in the Hungarian-Romanian Basic Treaty, but was removed during negotiations.

<sup>8</sup> See: RFE/RL NEWSLINE, Vol.1, No. 3, 3 April 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Restoration of confiscated church property was another point originally included in, then taken out of the Hungarian-





## Fellows and their Activities

**Adam Smith Albion.** A former research associate at the Institute for EastWest Studies at Prague in the Czech Republic, Adam is studying and writing about the republics of Central Asia, and their importance as actors within and without the former Soviet bloc. A Harvard graduate (1988; History), Adam has completed the first year of a two-year M. Litt. Degree in Russian/East European history and languages at Oxford University. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

**Christopher P. Ball.** An economist, Chris Ball holds a B.A. from the University of Alabama in Huntsville and attended the 1992 International Summer School at the London School of Economics. He studied Hungarian for two years in Budapest while serving as Project Director for the Hungarian Atlantic Council. As an Institute Fellow, he is studying and writing about Hungarian minorities in the former Soviet-bloc nations of East and Central Europe. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

**Chenoe Egawa.** An enrolled member of the Lummi Indian Nation, Chenoe is spending two years living among mesoAmerican Indians, studying successful and not-so-successful cooperative organizations designed to help the Indians market their manufactures, agricultural products and crafts without relying on middlemen. A former trade specialist for the American Indian Trade and Development Council of the Pacific Northwest, Chenoe's B.A. is in International Business and Spanish from the University of Washington in Seattle. [THE AMERICAS]

**William F. Foote.** Formerly a financial analyst with Lehman Brothers' Emerging Markets Group, Willy Foote is examining the economic substructure of Mexico and the impact of free-market reforms on Mexico's people, society and politics. Willy holds a Bachelor's degree from Yale University (history), a Master's from the London School of Economics (Development Economics; Latin America) and studied Basque history in San Sebastian, Spain. He carried out intensive Spanish-language studies in Guatemala in 1990 and then worked as a copy editor and Reporter for the *Buenos Aires Herald* from 1990 to 1992. [THE AMERICAS]

**Marc Michaelson.** A program manager for Save the Children in The Gambia, Marc has moved across Africa to the Horn, there to assess nation-building in Eritrea and Ethiopia, and (conditions permitting) availing and unavailing humanitarian efforts in northern Somalia and southern Sudan. With a B.A. in political science from Tufts, a year of non-degree study at the London School of Economics and a Master's in International Peace Studies from Notre Dame, he describes his postgraduate years as "seven years' experience in international development programming and peace research." [sub-SAHARA]

**Randi Movich.** The current John Miller Musser Memorial Forest & Society Fellow, Randi is spending two years in Guinea, West Africa, studying and writing about the ways in which indigenous women use forest resources for reproductive health. With a B.A. in biology from the University of California at Santa Cruz and a Master of Science degree in Forest Resources from the University of Idaho, Randi is building on two years' experience as a Peace Corps agroforestry extension agent in the same region of Guinea where she will be living as a Fellow with her husband, Jeff Fields — also the holder of an Idaho Master's in Forest Resources. [sub-SAHARA]

**John B. Robinson.** A 1991 Harvard graduate with a certificate of proficiency from the Institute of Kiswahili in Zanzibar, John spent two years as an English teacher in Tanzania. He received a Master's degree in Creative Writing from Brown University in 1995. He and his wife Delphine, a French oceanographer, are spending two years in Madagascar with their two young sons, Nicolas and Rowland, where he will be writing about varied aspects of the island-nation's struggle to survive industrial and natural-resource exploitation and the effects of a rapidly swelling population. [sub-SAHARA]

**Daniel B. Wright.** A sinologist with a Master's Degree in International Relations from the Nitze School of Advanced International Studies of the Johns Hopkins University, Dan's fellowship immerses him in southwest China's Guizhou Province, where he, his journalist-wife Shou Guowei, and their two children (Margaret and Jon) will base themselves for two years in the city of Duiyun. Previously a specialist on Asian and Chinese affairs for the Washington consulting firm of Andrae, Vick & Associates, Dan also studied Chinese literature at Beijing University and holds a Master of Divinity degree from Fuller Theological Seminary of Pasadena, California. [East Asia]

**Teresa C. Yates.** A former member of the American Civil Liberties Union's national task force on the workplace, Teresa is spending two years in South Africa observing and reporting on the efforts of the Mandela government to reform the national land-tenure system. A Vassar graduate with a juris doctor from the University of Cincinnati College of Law, Teresa had an internship at the Centre for Applied Legal Studies in Johannesburg in 1991 and 1992, studying the feasibility of including social and economic rights in the new South African constitution. [sub-SAHARA]

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