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INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

Under a Dacian Sea

by Chandler Rosenberger

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Dear Peter,

BUCHAREST-- We probably use the term "architect" a little too loosely. When we call a clever designer of a new health insurance scheme its "architect," we presumably mean that he or she has drawn up a plan others may choose whether to use, in the way that a person can decide if he will move into a building. But if we are talking about a government program applicable to all citizens, shouldn't we worry? After all, no one designs all of a nation's buildings. Design every living room on the landscape and you come perilously close to designing how everyone lives.



Unfinished Bucharest

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Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young adults to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. Endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, the Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

In an immigrant society such as ours back home, we often describe our constitution as the building into which all of us, or our ancestors, chose to move. Changing its precepts is as complicated as moving the cornerstones of a standing building; it can be done, but requires cooperation and engagement far more complex and enduring than the effort needed to win one election. Even the president cannot redesign our common home without running the risk of being challenged by the Supreme Court. However ambitious an "architect" he or she may be, we have "chosen" to live in the building as it is.

In our century, communists and fascists who took over nation-states found they were unrestrained by a legacy, however mythical, of free endorsement of the *status quo*. The collective governed had been defined by accident rather than by choice and the claims of the collective could be stronger than the claims of siblings on one another. Like it or not, "we" -- we Slovaks, we Magyars -- are in this together. And without that myth of free choice of the way things are, a single election, indeed a single seizure of power, could be described as "an expression of the collective will." This is what "we" have chosen. This is the direction "we" are going.



Ceausescu's National Theater

The further back one traces the collective, the nation, the stronger the mandate to shape it. I do not think it is any coincidence that China, one of the world's most enduring totalitarian states, is also one of the few that can boast 5,000 years of history. Rewrite Confucius' works thoroughly enough

and one has a mighty bulwark against bothersome human rights groups expounding the beliefs of a "different culture."

Just because no one has yet "designed" all of a nation's living rooms doesn't mean that some haven't tried, as even the briefest visit to Bucharest will show. Old Bucharest was the "Paris of the East" because it was built stone on stone, year to year, from the ground up and into a diversity as marvellous as that of its residents. But today hanging over even the best preserved neighborhoods are the hollow shells of a grand design mercifully incomplete -- Nicolae Ceausescu's mind-numbingly monotonous monument to himself, a new city entire.

To trample so freely over property and past, to drive out families with six-days' notice, then charge them for their new homes -- such a project would have been impossible for one armed only with an innocuous constitutional clause granting the state the right of "eminent domain." Ceausescu had much more than that. He had every lever of the totalitarian state, every microphone of the Romanian Communist Party. And he had his mandate, passed down not only from the party he commanded but from history itself, the inevitable historical process Karl Marx had "discovered."

Since the longer the history, the stronger the mandate, Ceausescu, like a pretender to some throne, drew up a national lineage dating back to the fall of the Roman Empire. He called himself the "greatest son of the Dacians," a people supposed to have occupied the land Romania now rests on but, practically speaking, one to which he had no more blood-ties than modern Greeks do to Pericles. Never mind. In August 1988, he and his wife Elena, attending a ceremony to mark the construction of yet another monstrosity (their Civic Centre) signed a scroll to be sealed up in its foundations. It read:

This 19th day of August 1988, in the 2060th year since the making of the centralized and independent Dacian state, the 44th year since the victory of the Romanian people's revolution of social and national liberation, and the 23rd year since the Ninth Congress of the Romanian

Communist Party, we have inaugurated the construction works on the Centre of National Councils of Revolutionary Worker Democracy, a new and monumental edifice rounding off the great foundations of this epoch of strong economic, social and cultural blossoming of our socialist homeland.¹

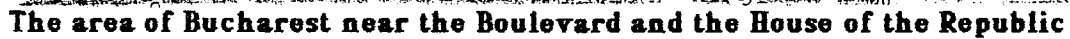
If one obliterates history to destroy a city, then one's successors will be left living not only in the rubble of a town but of a past -- a ruin of the ruins. Ceausescu's legacy extends from the destruction he wrought on Romania's landscape to the perversions he bent into Romania's understanding of itself. Communism and nationalism simply were not opposing poles; as the Polish intellectual Adam Michnik wrote, "Nationalism is the highest stage of Communism." Today, tensions are not high in the regions of Romania populated by Hungarians because some "nationalist genie" has been let out of the Communist bottle, but rather because too many Romanians behave as if the monuments Ceausescu left incomplete had been built by the indigenous "Dacian nation" he invented.

A walk around Bucharest

Old Bucharest, or what remains of it, is charming in a lively if cheesy way. With the exception of the glitzy electronics stores, their plate glass windows full of sleek black boom boxes, commerce hasn't yet settled down into staid, specialized shops, so every hole in the



Strada Lipscani in Old Bucharest



If you make your way across three lanes of traffic, as pedestrians regularly try to do, you have your first clear, if confusing, vista. Confusing because the view down the dried, artificial Canal of Independence is so overwhelming that all sense of scale dissolves. How large is the Unirea department store down there at the end? How far away? It's impossible

to tell. The store's facade of browned-out plate glass floats above the children sledding on the canal's concrete banks; the men and women scurrying across the open square beneath it are diminished by *its* size, and seem less like people walking in a city than like shellfish migrating across an ocean floor. The Unirea is itself dwarfed by the coral reef beyond, the unfinished apartment blocks lining the Boulevard to the Victory of Socialism, now renamed the Unity Boulevard.

If the scale of the buildings disorients one in space, their position relative to the rest of the city leaves one lost in time. The Boulevard cuts so savagely across the street plan of the humbler



The Unirea department store

old city that you can't help asking yourself which was there first. Could anyone really have consciously cut the tramline of George Cosbuc Street so insensitively as to make its cars trundle up to the Boulevard's edge, then swing 180 degrees around? Or were the streetcars introduced a millenium later by a smaller, bourgeois people, shy of the effort to walk, let alone build? It is no paradox that the legacy of a Communist should prompt such artificial Nietzschean nostalgia. In bombastic architecture, the Nazi and the Bolshevik meet. Writing about the Ceausescus, Mark Almond, an Oxford historian, makes the connection clear:

Hitler had talked about architecture as 'the word made stone,' the concrete realization of ideology in its most imposing form. Together with his court architect, Albert Speer, the Führer had devised 'ruin-theory' which demanded that the great Nazi buildings should be designed to impress the observer

even as ruins after thousands of years. Even in decay, Hitler's edifices were intended to recall his past might. Although nobody dared suggest to Ceausescu that he might be mortal or that the victory of socialism might not be permanent, the new Civic Centre in Bucharest had the air of being constructed as a vast set of archeological remains, whose scale and purpose would baffle future generations like the lost pyramid-cities of the Guatemalan jungle.²

As you walk west along the Boulevard, buildings with any individual quirks, such as art-deco roofs or arches stolen from Byzantium, slip behind a facade of incredible simplemindedness. There is only one balcony of wrought-iron rings after another; every entrance is distinguishable from the next only by different numbers daubed in red paint. Some entrepreneurs have tossed funky porticos over their doors but these little



Looking back down Unity Boulevard

touches of Beverly Hills remind one of the monotony rather than relieve it. These efforts, however brave, give no more sense of a revived civilization than a souvenir stand next to the Sphinx would. One is still left wondering who those Dacians were and whether they used slave labor or performed human sacrifice. ("They" did both, of course, as any survivor of the Ceausescus can attest.)

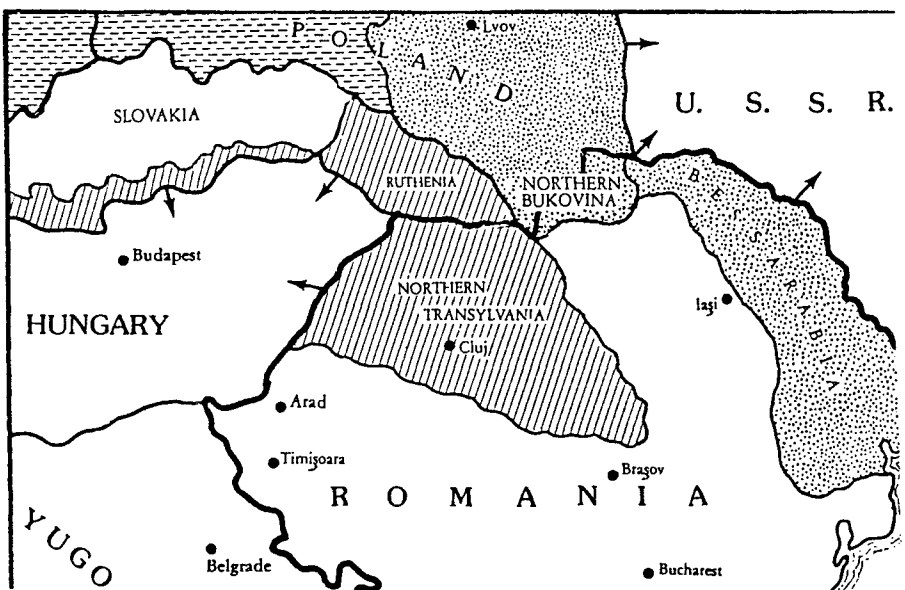
If Bucharest's new bourgeoisie have made little impact on its architecture they have made even less on its political scene. Romania's current president, Ion Iliescu, has been largely exposed as the leader of a

Communist coup against Ceausescu rather than a popular revolt.³ But two elections, presidential and legislative, have diluted the power of his National Salvation Front (now renamed the Social Democrats but referred to exclusively and appropriately as "the governing party.") Today he is challenged equally by former allies from the old regime as well as new democratic forces. Of the former, the most potent have been those quickest to use Ceausescu's legacy of Dacian nationalism -- The Party of Romanian National Unity (PUNR), the "Greater Romania" Party and the Romanian Party of Labor (PSM), direct heirs of Ceausescu's Communist Party.

Since the National Salvation Front split in March 1992, Iliescu's party has governed in silent coalition with the extreme nationalists. Opposed to privatization and market reforms, the coalition chose instead to whip up hysteria about Romania's large Hungarian minority in Transylvania, a region in the country's northwest. The leader of the PUNR, the largest of

the three, had turned his position as mayor of the Transylvanian city of Cluj into a personal platform for his national party. Although he has recently expressed some reservations, Iliescu has rarely chosen reform over nationalist rhetoric.

Although it has always had a Romanian majority, Transylvania, like Bessarabia, first became part of the Romanian state after the First World



The partition of Romania, 1940

War. Before 1918 it had been under the Chancellery in Vienna and allowed a diet composed mainly of Hungarian noblemen. After the 1867 division of the empire into Austrian and Hungarian halves, the Transylvanian diet voted for direct union with Hungary. The Romanians of

the region were then subject to the brutal Magyarization meted out to the Slovaks at the same time. All attempts to achieve some measure of Romanian autonomy within the kingdom were put down by force.⁴

When Hitler and Stalin carved up Central Europe in 1940, three-fifths of Transylvania, including Cluj, fell into the hands of the Hungarian fascist state. This so-called "Vienna Award" prompted outrage among Romanians and led to the collapse of a tottering monarchy and government; under its successor, the authoritarian general Ion Antonescu, Romania slipped into the Axis alliance. To compensate for its loss of territory in the northwest, the regime fought alongside Hitler's troops against Soviet occupiers of Bessarabia. But Soviet defeat of Antonescu's government in 1944 restored the 1940 *status quo* Bessarabia returned to the Soviet Union (see CRR-16) and Transylvania was given to Bucharest's communist-infiltrated government.

The communist government paid lip service to national minority rights but in fact swiftly undermined them. In 1959 it forced the Cluj's Hungarian-language university, Bolyai University, to merge with the Romanian-language Babes University and gradually whittled down the courses taught in both languages to those of literature and humanities. Romania's 1965 constitution, introduced in the year Ceausescu took over both state and party, guaranteed "education for nationalities in their own language," but conditions hardly improved.⁵ In 1985, for example, the Cluj county council began forcing three famous Hungarian lyceums -- Apaczai Csere Janos, Brassai Samuel, Bathory Istvan -- to take Romanian students. By 1990, were 50% of their students were Romanian.

These steps, taken in the late 1980s, coincided with Ceausescu's pursuit of virulent nationalism to prop up his regime. The Dacian myth came to the fore of his speeches, such as one quoted in a government book about Transylvania. Unlike the Germans or Hungarians, Ceausescu said, the Romanians of the region were 'auctothonous': "They did not come from elsewhere," Ceausescu said:

They did not fall down from the sky; they were born here, in this land, and they defended it with

their blood. . . In toughest times, their forefathers did not desert the land where they were born, but in brotherhood with it, with the mountains, fields, rivers and great woods, they unflinchingly remained in these parts, defended it with their being, their right to free existence."⁶

The fall of Ceausescu brought a brief moment of hope. One of first acts of Iliescu's National Salvation Front was to promise the Hungarian Foreign Ministry that "Hungarian cultural and educational institutions abolished by the Ceausescu regime will be reinstated." Hungary agreed to help cover restitution costs. Romanian students were shifted from the lycees to a new school based in the communist party's academy. Hungarian university education was partially restored. In 1991-2, of the 1,570 Magyars enrolled, 581 took classes in Hungarian; 118 of them studied maths, 79 physics. At the political level, Iliescu appointed Hungarian prefects to the two counties -- Covasna and Harghita -- which had a Magyar majority. (A prefect is a representative of the national government who oversees local administration. Although he is not allowed to overturn local decisions he can take a municipal government to court for violation of the constitution.)

The reprieve was short-lived. In local elections held in February 1992, a pro-Romanian backlash swept candidates of the fiercely nationalist Party of Romanian National Unity (PUNR) to office. In Cluj county, the PUNR won the mayor's office in six towns, including the city of Cluj itself. Gheorghe Funar, president of the PUNR, promised that as mayor of Cluj he would "make Romanians masters in their own home."⁷

Two factors gave this local reaction national significance. First, both the Hungarian minority in Romania and the government in Budapest made statements easily interpreted as irredentist. In September 1992, Hungarian Defense minister Lajos Fur said that in formulating strategy he would take the condition of Hungarians abroad into account. At its party conference a month later the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) endorsed "internal autonomy" (or, depending on the translation, "internal self-determination.") Secondly, Iliescu's party split, leaving him without a working majority in parliament.

Given the choice between working with the reform-minded opposition or the hardline nationalists, Iliescu chose the latter. He removed the two Hungarian prefects and instructed Grigore Zanc, prefect for Cluj county, to give Funar and other PUNR mayors considerable freedom. When the Hungarian villages of Dej and Turda sought to have their own mayors (rather than be subject to the Romanian majority of the existing administrative units), Iliescu's interior ministry rejected the request.

Iliescu also began using the nationalist rhetoric of the dictator he had executed, as I saw for myself in Slovakia on September 23, 1993. Addressing a Slovak parliament still dominated by radically anti-Hungarian parties, Iliescu resurrected some old fears. The leaders of some nations, he said, were using minority rights as a ruse to disguise their nationalist aspirations. "History has placed both our nations," he continued,

in a part of the world subjected to raids and sought after by plunderous and vicious empires. In the course of the centuries, we learned that keeping national independence is priceless . . . maybe this is one of the reasons that Romania and Slovakia have always been sympathetic to each other and have always shown each other mutual respect.

A Transylvanian identity?

If Bucharest will live forever with the architecture of an imagined kingdom, Cluj will always have the monuments of a more genuine and aesthetically pleasing past. There is the Hotel Continental, faded yellow and festooned with cupolas and Cupids. Across the main square stands a Gothic cathedral reminiscent of other provincial capitals (Kosice, Bratislava) of the former Hungarian kingdom. Whether under Hungarian or Romanian rule, Cluj benefited from the largesse and pride of its wealthy bourgeois merchants. Even the Baroque balustrades on porches of the mayor's office testify that here, once, buildings were individual and detail mattered.

Romanian nationalists have always dismissed the notion that Transylvania has some special identity within Romania. They are surely right to argue

that the region has always had a Romanian majority, even if it was not part of the nineteenth-century Romanian state. But questions of cultural faultlines, political or architectural, have little to do with population figures, however important the latter numbers are when drawing borders. How many Romanians lived in Transylvania has little bearing on whether it was (or is) different from the rest of the Romanian lands. The question, rather, is "What kind of place was the Transylvania in which those Romanians lived?"

Part of the answer is written in stone, in buildings that have a Habsburg feel, according to Robert Branea, a leader of the Hungarian Student's Union in Cluj. "Bucharest is Balkan," he said. "Cluj is Austro-Hungarian. While Cluj was linked to Vienna and Budapest, the rest of Romania was under the Ottomans. All that time, the Hungarian kingdom was linked to the rest of the world." Religious differences had also made Transylvania special. While the rest of Romania was Orthodox, a religion Branea dismissed as "linked to the east," Transylvania had strong Catholic and Reformed churches. That had made the region "more west european," Branea said.

But to point out Transylvania's distinct identity was not to long for a return to Hungary, Branea quickly added. Hungarian culture in Cluj had survived Ceausescu's attacks upon it specifically because Magyars, like the Dacio-Romanians of Ceausescu's rhetoric, felt the land was theirs. "I feel myself at home here," Branea said. "I don't feel like a minority. I am a Romanian citizen but my home is Transylvania. Our ancestors built this land together." A fluent Romanian speaker, Branea was also studying German, although many of the region's "Saxons" had fled to Germany. The language remained a part of the region's goulash of cultures, he said, from which one could pick and choose the best.

The Hungarian Student's Union headquarters, I found, fleshed out Branea's praise of Transylvanian openness. The brightly-lit office was decorated with postcards from around the world and posters advertising conferences abroad. On the shelves, above a beat-up cassette player, was the best collection I've ever seen of perhaps the most sought-after books in Central Europe -- guides to American universities and scholarship programs. While one student was sending off yet one more fax, another discussed the merits of Anthony Burgess. And if the students are hooked into the rest of

the world, they are just as open to their neighbors. The first person I spoke to at a party at their offices one night was Romanian. The next was Greek.

The students' complained that the PUNR authorities in Cluj have tried to cut the city off from the outside world. They have a point. Take, for example, Funar's decision two years ago to ban a meeting of Dutch and Hungarian human rights groups. Or his decree four days later that all gatherings had to be cleared in advance by City Hall, once the mayor's office had decided whether they might propagate ideas "contrary to principles of the Romanian constitution." A staff meeting of the Open Society Fund scheduled for April 30, 1992 was only allowed to go ahead once the charity allowed observers from "Vrata Romanescu," a radically-nationalist group, to attend.

Not all of Cluj's students felt Funar's decrees were absurd. Over at the Youth Organization of Romania Mare ("Greater Romania,") president Megdas Dorin complained that the working languages of the Open Society Meeting were to have been English and Hungarian but not Romanian.

"But it was a private meeting," I said. "What difference would it make?"

"If it were a private business meeting," Dorin replied, "it would have been O.K. But this was a meeting that concerned the Romanian population."

"How?"

"I don't know the reason that the mayor opposed the meeting," Dorin said, "but I trust his judgment. There were probably reasons more important than we could know about."

I had apparently interrupted some sort of business meeting of their own. Four of the group sat around the one piece of paper in the dusty room that I had not brought in with me. But they were happy to pause for a moment and discuss the mayor. I sat down, and, noticing that all wore their ski jackets, kept my coat on as well.

Rebuilding history

Another of the mayor's controversial decisions has been to spend millions of dollars building new statues of Romanian heroes and putting plaques on old town monuments to make clear the place of those portrayed in the Romanian national story. Take, for example, the statue of Avram Iancu, built next to the city's Romanian Orthodox church and unveiled in December. Cost -- 1.5 billion lei (1.15 million USD) and, according to Dorin, worth every one.

Iancu, a nineteenth-century Romanian nationalist, had campaigned for the rights of peasants of all nationalities but had done his best work for the Moti, the poorest Romanians, Dorin said. The statue of him is "an important symbol of the centuries-long fight of Romanians in Transylvania for their national rights," as well as a reminder of the poor conditions Moti still find themselves in, Dorin said. Lacking electricity and work, the Moti may well flee their homes in western Romania and leave the area depopulated.

Funar provoked even more controversy when he paid for a new plaque on an old statute, one of the Hungarian king Matyas Corvinus. The statue had (and still has) the king's name written in Latin, perhaps an appropriate compromise in a city torn between two modern languages. But beneath those brass letters now stands a plaque that makes his ethnic origin clear. "Glorious in wars," it reads in Romanian, "he was only defeated by his own people when he tried to subject the unconquerable Moldovans." The implication is that the king, who is supposed to have had a Moldovan grandmother, was as "Romanian" as, say, Funar himself.



Statue of Hungarian king Matyas Corvinus

Whether the king would have thought of himself as either "Hungarian" or "Moldovan" does not seem to matter. But the new plaque, like the statue of Iancu, fits into a vision of the region's history that I heard best expressed by a leader of the Romanian Party of Labor (PSM), the direct descendent of Ceausescu's Communist Party and a close ally of the "Romania Mare" movement.

Constantin Marincu, a member of the party's national board, told me the west ought to support Romania for exactly the same reason I had often heard we should work with the Serbs. The Dacian people, he said, had been protecting Europe from eastern hordes for 2,000 years. One of the those eastern hordes, he said, were the Magyars, whom the Dacians had defeated and then absorbed.

"The center of the Dacian state," he said, "was in the Transylvanian state 2,000 years ago. The Hungarians came here 1,000 years ago. They came from the east, from Asia, and the Romanians fought them until they went by to the north, into the Pannonian plain."

Ethnic relations today were troubled the Hungarian government's attempts to convince "Hungarian-speaking Romanians" that they were ethnic Hungarians, Marincu said. Among ordinary citizens, he said, they were few problems; trouble was stirred up at the political level, by the "extreme right-wing UDMR. They are something like the right-wingers in South Africa."

A nationalist cloak for corruption

No doubt there are extremists in the Hungarian camp; moderate Romanians complained particularly about the latest statements of the otherwise admirable Rev. Laszlo Tokes, the bishop who led the revolt against Ceausescu in Timisoara. But when Tokes ran for the presidency of the UDMR in November 1992 he was defeated by a more moderate candidate. And the UDMR representative I met, Cluj city councillor Zoltan Szasz, was only extreme in his hatred of how some Romanian politicians had used nationalist rhetoric as a disguise for their corruption.

Funar's party, Szasz said, was playing fast and loose with property laws. The building of the defunct Communist Youth organization was supposed, for example, to be turned over to new youth organizations. It had instead been turned into a shopping mall administered by a company with close ties to the PUNR. State support for low-income housing was instead being

used to build villas for PUNR and Romania Mare politicians. "There are underground links between certain economic and political powers," Szasz said, "and it is really hard to fight against these."

Worse still, Szasz said, many of nationalist leaders had been high-ranking communist party officials. "What makes me angry," he said, "is that they are using nationalism to legalize their old economic and political power."

But the most blatant example of links between corrupt politicians and dubious businesses stands smack in the center of town. How had that statue of Iancu been funded? Szasz and other opposition councillors had complained that 1.5 billion lei would be far better spent on public works projects. "With that kind of money," Szasz told me, "you could rebuild every road in town."

When pressed at council meetings, Funar said only that the statue would be financed by "extra-budgetary funds." When opposition politicians objected that democratic governments did not have mysterious off-budget accounts, Funar told them that Ioan Stoica, the president of the city's Caritas Bank, had donated the money. "He said, 'This is a deal between Stoica and me. It does not concern you,'" Szasz later recounted.



Statue of Avram Iancu

Cluj was until recently the home of the Caritas bank, perhaps Central Europe's most twisted experiment in finance outside of Belgrade. Caritas drew investors from across Romania by promising to repay eight times any sum deposited within one hundred days. *The Economist* calculated the bank's return rate at around 250,000 percent and pointed out that ordinary commercial banks, offering rates lower than the rate of inflation, could hardly compete.

It seems, however, that Caritas was no more a genuine commercial venture than Yugoskandic, the notorious Serbian bank that closed last year, leaving its depositors stranded. Although Stoica, Caritas' founder, vehemently denies it, his bank seems to have operated like a Ponzi scheme, paying returns with the money of new depositors. Such a scheme can only work as long as new deposits double every month.⁸

Cluj itself briefly enjoyed swimming in the cash that flowed into town. Funar endorsed the scheme as way of reducing unemployment. But the city's Johnny-come-latelies resent having taken a bath. And everyone, according to Szasz, suffered from the tangential crime -- burglaries, muggings, prostitution -- that swept into town with the fresh funds. Factory managers, seeing that their staffs were making fortunes off the scheme, cut back wages.

Caritas's fate at the time of writing was unclear. The bank was still making occasional payments but had lost the kind of blind faith among residents necessary to keep it afloat. Because the statue was built with the money of the collapsed bank, local wags have decided that Iancu's pose was chosen for modern, not historical, reasons.

"Why is Iancu portrayed holding a hand down toward passers-by?" the joke goes. "Because he's saying, 'Wait! You'll get back your deposits soon!'"

No one knows where Caritas' money has gone since it stopped operating regularly. Szasz noted, however, that a new commercial bank had opened within months of Caritas' collapse. Its board of directors is dominated by leading member of the PUNR, Szasz said. Its name is Dacia-Felix.

No more nationalism

The power of Funar's party seemed to have reached its apex at the time of my visit. Not satisfied with a free rein in Cluj, the PUNR had since March 1993 been pushing for a formal coalition with Iliescu's Social Democrats. In exchange for their support they asked for four ministries -- Defense, Education, Interior and Culture. Dismissing the PUNR as "xenophobic" and "intolerant," Iliescu's man in Cluj, Social Democrat executive secretary Alexandru Paunescu, said talks between the two parties had broken down. "It is inappropriate," Paunescu said, "that the mayor should try to use his local position as a national platform."

Instead, the Social Democrats had gone to war against the extreme

nationalists. Zanc, the Iliescu-appointed prefect, had finally taken Funar to court over his more extreme decrees. National financial police had begun to investigate the collapse of Caritas. And Iliescu's prosecutor general had started proceedings against the vehemently nationalist newspaper *Romania Mare*, the organ of the political party of the same name.

Back in Bucharest opposition parties treated Iliescu's new decency with suspicion. The president had milked anti-Hungarian sentiment for all it was worth, Liberal Party president Moria Rusu said, and these days found the diminishing returns were no longer worth the damage done to Romania's reputation abroad. "If someone is hungry," Rusu said, "he doesn't care what the Hungarians or Jews are doing."

And Iliescu's campaign against nationalists of Ceausescu's stripe had been a long time coming, Rusu said. Iliescu, a Moscow-trained communist, had been driven from the party along with other pro-Soviet apparatchiks after Ceausescu's break with the USSR following the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia. As he forged closer ties with China, Ceausescu had purged party and intelligence service ranks of sympathizers to Moscow. But they had returned along with Iliescu in 1990 -- some say with the help of the KGB -- and were taking their revenge. "That's why there is now a war between Romania Mare and Iliescu," Rusu said. "It's a fight between two branches of the secret police."

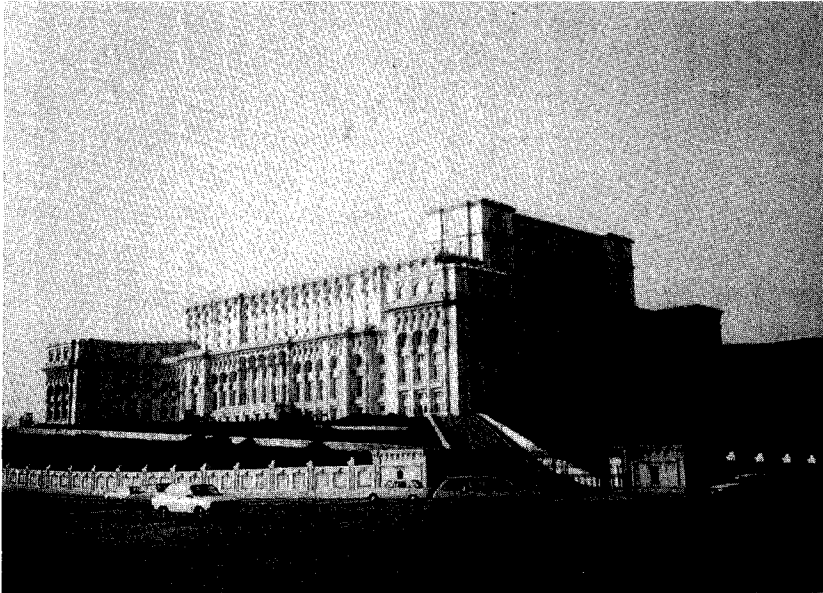
Others in Bucharest were worried what the choice of nationalist target indicated for the future. If Iliescu had wanted to disguise his fumbling economic record under a cloak of nationalism, said Peter Sragher, journalist at *Adevarul*, he could just have easily beaten the drum for reunification with the former Soviet republic of Moldova. But Iliescu's good contacts in Moscow made him not merely unable but unwilling to pursue that particular nationalist project. Having seized control of Moldova again (see CRR-16) and having curried favor in Serbia and Bosnia, Russia is now aiming for influence in the state that lies between Moldova and Russia's allies on the Adriatic, Sragher said.

Under a Dacian sea

The House of the Republic, which stands at the end of the Boulevard of Unity, is Ceausescu's version of the Great Wall of China. Second in size only to the Pentagon, it fills seven times the cubic space of the Palace of Versailles.⁹ Like the Great Wall, it was built largely by slave labor. Unlike the Chinese monument, however, it was not built by a tyrannical regime of

the distant past but by a dictator less than five years in his grave. That is what makes the comparison all the more chilling. In a sense, the Chinese communists have it easy; they start with a culture millenia old, then graft

their own ambitions onto it. Ceausescu's task was much more difficult; before he could claim a status above and beyond his western critics he had first to build a two-thousand-year-old "Dacian nation" on which to stand.



The House of the Republic stands as a reminder of how, even in failure, his invented inheritance outlives him.

Although impossible to use in its entirety, the building will soon house Romania's parliament, constitutional court and legal library. For years to come the country's politicians, be they pro-Soviet, pro- American, or whatever, will have to work around not only the scale of the building but the size of the myth embodied in it.

Most Romanians refer to Ceausescu's architectural legacy as "Pharonic," but I prefer to think of it as Romania's lost Atlantis. The Dacia cars that prod pedestrians have rounded

snouts like bass; the city's atmosphere is so polluted that you can hardly believe it is just air between you and the obsured wall across the street. Packs of cigarettes and pirated cassettes spill over sidewalk stands like cargo burst from sunken ships. And although the political sharks sometimes rise to the surface and greet democrats in the light of day above, they then quickly dive back down into their Dacian sea, into the subterfuge where they feed.



Yours,



Chandler

Notes

1. Almond, Mark. *The Rise and Fall of Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu* Chapmans, London. 1992. p. 157. Travelling to Romania without this book is pointless.
2. *ibid.*, p. 156.
3. I cannot do that story justice here. See Dr. Almond's book.
4. Jelavic, Barbara, *History of the Balkans: vol. 1 (Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries.)* Cambridge, (CUP), 1983.
5. *Struggling for Ethnic Identity: Ethnic Hungarians in Post-Ceausescu Romania*. Human Rights Watch, N.Y. September 1993.
6. Almond, p. 186.
7. Human Rights Watch.
8. "Ponzi by Any Other Name," *The Economist*, Sept. 18-24, 1993.
9. Almond, p. 153.
10. Almond, p. 156.