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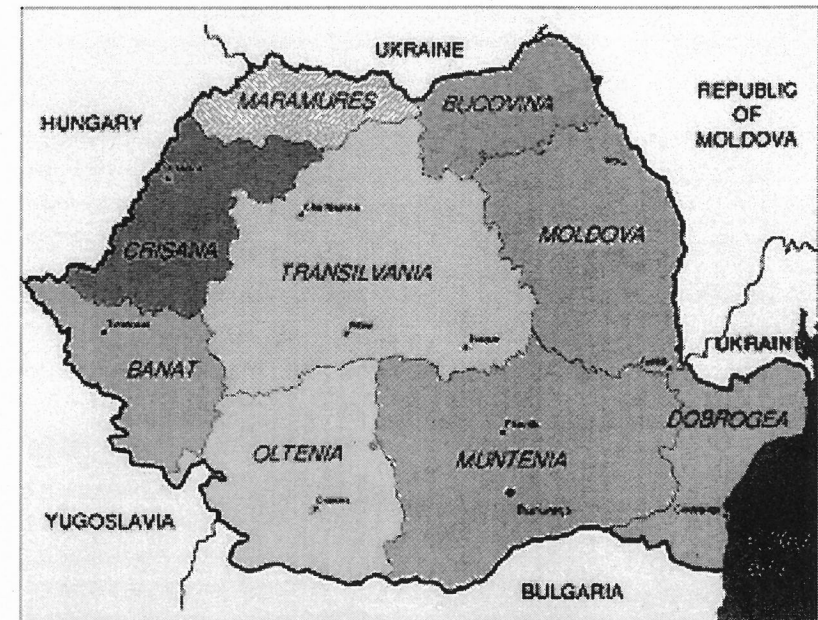
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Adrift On A Stone Raft: The Present Situation in Romania

based on a talk given at the CRCE by

George Ross



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**Adrift on a Stone Raft:
The Present Situation in Romania**

George Ross

Based on a talk given at the CRCE
on Wednesday 3rd March 1999

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The Constitution of the CRCE requires that its Trustees and Advisers dissociate themselves from the analysis contained in its publications but it is hoped that readers will find this study of value and interest.

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George Ross is a philosopher and mathematician. Born in Bucharest, he has lived in London for 35 years but was involved in the attempted reconstruction of Romanian political life after the fall of Ceausescu. He is the Vice-President of the British-Romanian Association and has written extensively on Romanian history and politics.

Adrift on a Stone Raft: The Present Situation in Romania

The recipient of the 1998 Nobel Prize for literature, the Portuguese José Saramago, has, almost suddenly, become a household name. Always engaged in the anti-Salazar left-wing movement and a card-carrying member of the Portuguese Communist Party since 1969, he would hardly be a focal point for the *bien-pensant* Romanian intelligentsia, were it not for his genuine talent, overriding concern about the corruptibility of human nature, and especially for his style, named 'magic realism', based on the use of fantastical metaphors, so attuned to the make-up of the Romanian psyche.

One of his novels, published in 1986, has Iberia drifting away from the rest of Europe. It is entitled *The Stone Raft*. Some Romanian thinkers have not been slow in observing that Saramago's metaphor is, at present, far more appropriate for describing the predicament of their country, seemingly drifting to nowhere and managing – only just – to stay afloat, for only God knows how long.

All serious students of communist, neo-communist, crypto-communist or post-communist countries and societies, if they really wish to understand anything at all, must begin by grasping two principles governing such structures. The first is that nothing – or hardly anything – is what it seems to be. We must realise that the appearance is only a *Potemkinade* and we must learn to lift the facade a bit, have a peep behind it and examine the reality that lies there. This is not easy: one needs insider knowledge, and a certain flair and experience that comes only with years of observation; besides, all sectors of the establishment conspire and contrive to prevent any outsider from gaining that empathy, perception and comprehension.

To grasp the second principle, one must remember that Lenin invented the organisational model of all totalitarian states and parties and established the fundamental dictum that governed such regimes: intrinsically, thoroughly ideological parties, as all Communist parties are, do not recognise any principle in politics. There is only one goal: power; everything else becomes just the means to acquire more power. Naturally, this real aim has always been concealed: after all, *Newspeak* was so constructed as to render heretical thoughts and questions unsayable and unthinkable. This must be borne in mind when attempting to make sense of what takes place today in the country in which Ceausescu's "sultanistic" legacy is still so strong and all-pervading.

A few thoughts on the historical background

This idea, that the engine of society is the will to power, is an influential one in the history of Western thought. The first to suggest that the political sphere (and the values it contains) is distinct from any other aspect of human culture, and impervious to ethical values, was Machiavelli – the founder of modern political philosophy. He was the first philosopher to attempt to control the future by embarking on a campaign of propaganda. But Machiavelli's scheme was too revolting in character and, to be accepted, it had to be modified. It was mitigated in a manner which was almost sufficient to guarantee the success of the primary intention by Hobbes.

Hobbes chose as his theme not the practices of kingdoms and states, but rather the duties of the subjects; hence what Hobbes did teach sounds much more innocent than what Machiavelli had taught, without necessarily contradicting Machiavelli's teaching. The pivot of Hobbes's political teaching is power. The meaning of Hobbes's correction of Machiavelli is "power politics".

After Hobbes, further development proceeded in two different

directions. Locke took over Hobbes' fundamental scheme and changed it in one point. He realised that what man primarily needs for his self-preservation is not so much a gun as food – or, more generally, property. Thus, the desire for self-preservation turns into the desire for property, for acquisition, and the right to self-preservation becomes the right to unlimited acquisition. The practical consequences of this small change are enormous. In the Anglo-Saxon world, and, in general, in the West, the resounding success of Locke may be contrasted with Hobbes's apparent failure. We can say that Machiavelli's discovery or invention of the need for an immoral or amoral substitute for morality, became victorious through Locke's discovery or invention that that substitute is acquisitiveness.

But another, alternative, current of ideas continued with the Hobbesian emphasis on power, by-passing Locke's felicitous mitigation.

Hobbes's view of society as consisting of individuals in conflict, motivated by their desire for power, was continued and expanded by his followers, notably Nietzsche, virtually all members of the Frankfurt School and some French gurus of the *soixantehuitards*, such as Foucault.

A new twist and slant to this theory was given by Johann Gottlieb Fichte, regarded as the first Romantic, at the beginning of the 19th century and developed by – amongst others – Carl Schmitt, arguably the foremost German authoritarian thinker of the 20th century. They replaced the view of society consisting of individuals, with the image of mankind consisting of large, homogenous building blocks, in a state of conflict, such as nations, social classes or religious faiths. It was this particular development, this understanding of humanity consisting of insiders and outsiders, of "us" and "them" which inspired, amongst others, Marx and Hitler, and prepared the ground for the fundamentalist, authoritarian and totalitarian doctrines that

have had their cataclysmic, bloody *dénouements* during the last hundred years or so.

One thinker to be fascinated by Machiavelli and Hobbes, who, by adapting their theories to what he perceived to be 20th century realities, had considerable effect on developments in Central and Eastern Europe was Antonio Gramsci, one of the most influential theorists of communism – and also, after 1924, the general secretary of the Italian Communist Party. Born in 1891, a prominent communist since 1911, he was arrested by Mussolini in 1926 (his trial took place in 1928) and died in 1937.

In 1929 he started to write the collection of articles and essays known today as the *Prison Notebooks*. There were thirty-three notebooks in all, smuggled, after his death, from the clinic in which he spent the last four years of imprisonment and sent by diplomatic bag to Moscow. One of the articles contained in this collection, about a hundred pages long, is entitled *The Modern Prince*. In the introduction, he says, referring to Machiavelli's *The Prince*:

Throughout the book, Machiavelli discusses what the Prince must be like if he is to lead a people, to found a new State. It has already been said that the protagonist of the new Prince could not in the modern epoch be an individual hero, but only the political party – which has the aim of founding a new type of State.

This Party, according to Gramsci – must be “totalitarian”: for Gramsci, although the concept implies “all-embracing and unifying”, it has not the terrifying implications it has acquired today or – as his communist editors put it – “the pejorative sense it has acquired in bourgeois ideology today”.

He goes on to describe this party, consisting of the mass of members, “the ordinary, average men, whose participation takes the form of discipline and loyalty, rather than any creative spirit or organisational

ability” and of what he euphemistically calls “the principal cohesive element”, endowed with “great cohesive, centralising and disciplinary powers”, or the “generals” as he calls them.

Practical application of Gramsci's theories

Power in the totalitarian society of communist type is vested in the Communist Party: often this leading role is sanctioned by the country's Constitution. But this is only the appearance. In communist societies there are other sources of power, more enduring and hardy than the Communist Party. In fact, of course, the real power does not rest with the ordinary mass membership – as Gramsci cheerfully acknowledged in *The Modern Prince* – but with the “great cohesive, centralising and disciplinary powers” of the Central Committee, the Secretariat, the Politburo, the Presidium. These organs are not democratically elected, but are nominated by the Leader of the Party, who appoints faithful and docile *apparatchicks* or stooges who, in turn, support the Leader and do his bidding.

These organs have considerable power. With the assistance of the Central Committee, Brezhnev deposed his predecessor, Khrushchev, and became the Party supremo – that occasion was, in fact, the first time transfer of power occurred in a non-violent way. With the help of his Central Committee, Ceausescu sacked, in March 1974, all the “barons” of his predecessor, Gheorghiu-Dej. His power became thus absolute.

Power in Communist States

The Romanian Workers' Party – like all other Communist Parties of Eastern Europe – was not a political party in the Western sense. It was an instrument for running the state and for controlling every aspect of society. The leading role of the party was proclaimed by

the constitution. This meant the subjugation of the state and society to the party. The congress of the party, summoned (approximately) every five years, elected the Central Committee. Attendance at party congresses was a sort of reward offered to the grass roots, for long service and unswerving loyalty. The Central Committee met a few times a year. Its most important task was to elect the highest body of the party, the Politburo or the Presidium, as well as the party secretariat. The latter consisted of 15 to 20 senior party officials. Each of them was in charge of a department. These departments were either “shadows” of governmental departments, such as agriculture, education, foreign affairs, or party-specific institutions such as cadres, personnel or the control commission. The secretariat was a parallel civil service or bureaucracy, supervising the application of party policy in government. The most senior official – the First, or General, Secretary – was the most powerful figure in the party - and hence in the country.

The legislature was a puppet. Parliaments were still “elected”, but each ballot paper displayed one single name on it. The parliament met a few times each year but had no power whatever.

The party power was equally strong in the judiciary. Trial by jury was replaced by the Soviet system of tribunals, in which a professional judge was “helped” by two lay “popular assessors”, who were the party’s representatives and whose role was to see that the official party line was applied.

The second source of power in the communist state was represented by the military, although various leaders never took the loyalty of the military for granted. The party controlled the armed forces, with each officer being shadowed by a political appointee. The political boss of the Romanian forces was Valter Roman, a former combatant in Spain, a leading light of the Communist International (Comintern) and one of Stalin’s henchmen.

On 22nd December 1989, during the Gorbachev-inspired *putsch*, Iliescu did not trust the Romanian armed forces, and requested Gorbachev to send the Soviet Army to Romania, to prevent the failure of the masterplan – like in Czechoslovakia. But proprieties had to be observed for the sake of the international public opinion. Iliescu had no official position to justify such request: Gorbachev insisted that the request must be made by the Chief of Staff. General Gușe refused to comply – and shortly afterwards was found – as we used to say in Romania – “suicided”.

The Power of the Secret Police

The third source of power was – and, alas, in Romania, still is – the most important. It proved to be the most enduring and hardy, primarily because of its clandestine character: the Secret Police, or, in Romania, the dreaded *Securitate*.

This organisation was not homogeneous. To begin with, a part of it worked very closely with the KGB and, of course, prominent members of the *nomenklatura* were KGB agents. Another important segment was more “nationalist” in character, loyal to Ceausescu and to his *camarilla*. What the world saw on television screens in December 1989, was the clash of these two factions, with the ensuing victory of the KGB-led and controlled part of *Securitate*.

Besides being split between these two masters, with the conflicting associated loyalties, the secret police was – and is – divided between several directorates or divisions, often in strife with each other. Such rivalry was deliberately fomented, to prevent any segment from becoming too powerful. Amongst its several divisions, the most important are:

The Department of State Security (*Departmentul Securității Statului* – *DSS*). This is the dreaded and infamous “*Securitate*”, which, after

1989, was renamed the Romanian Service of Information (*Serviciul Român de Informații – SRI*). Led, until recently, by Virgil Măgureanu, a former *Securitate* officer, appointed by Iliescu, it contains several divisions, each with a specific responsibility.

The Department of Foreign Information (*Deputamentul de Informații Externe – DIE*) has been renamed and is known at present as the Service of Foreign Information (*Serviciul de Informații Externe – SIE*). It was led from 1992 until recently by Presidential Councillor General Talpeș who replaced General Caraman. However, the latter, closely associated with Petre Roman, although now officially an outsider, still has great influence and control through his appointees. This is a very important secret service and the one least affected by the changes that followed the fall of Ceausescu in 1989. There are two main reasons for this. The first is that its agents had excellent cover and enjoyed first-class camouflage. They, therefore, remain unmasked. The second reason is that, since their activity consisted of espionage and diversion abroad, they have not committed, or been directly involved in, crimes inside the country. Thus, in Romania, they had attracted but scant attention and have, so far, escaped detection and identification.

The Directorate of Army Information (*Direcția de Informații ale Armatei – DIA*). has kept its name after 1989. Its role has been military espionage.

The “Planned” Revolutions

The year 1989 was, for some of the Soviet satrapies, though not, alas, for Romania, an *annus mirabilis*. The intended transformations had been carefully planned in the Kremlin. Gorbachev was a good communist: he wanted to rescue the system within which he was brought up and to which he owed his elevation and position, but was aware that, for this, wide-ranging economic reforms were

necessary.

Relics of Brezhnev’s “stagnation period”, like Ceausescu, Zhivkov or Honneker, had to be disposed of. The old dead-wood not only opposed any sort of reform: they represented – in Gorbachev’s view – a phase of communism that had now fallen into desuetude. They were far too compromised, their human rights record too appalling. In all the Soviet satrapies, the existing leaders were to be replaced with a more photogenic team at the top. A huge hoax was to be played on the world.

With exemplary discretion, accomplished stage management, impeccable timing, consummate aplomb and breathtaking cynicism, *coups d’état*, disguised as popular movements were carried out, if necessary with ruthless, unnecessary, avoidable human sacrifices. In most, if not all, satellite countries, the expert hand of the KGB had been at work. In all satrapies, the new *coryphaei* were moulded in the image of the Soviet leader.

Quite obviously, the new administrations, in order to have any credibility, could not be seen to have been imposed from outside, from the Kremlin. On the other hand, the new administrations had no *de jure* legitimacy, since their ascent to power had not been achieved through the ballot box, following a democratic procedure. Thus, a *de facto* legitimacy had to be manufactured: an uprising of convincing amplex had to be contrived and presented as expressing the will of the people. In some communist countries – Czechoslovakia is the prime example – the plan failed. In fact, it almost succeeded, when, at the last moment, Zdenek Mlynar, a former fellow student of Gorbachev’s, who was designated by the Soviet leader to assume power, declared that, after all, he had no interest in leading the Communist Party. The vacuum suddenly created propelled Václav Havel to the presidency and upset the Kremlin scheme.

In Romania, however, Gorbachev's plan was implemented to the letter. The man appointed by the Kremlin to take over when the moment became ripe to topple Ceausescu, was Ion Iliescu, former *grandee* under Ceausescu, also a former fellow-student of Gorbachev's. In the game of musical chairs perpetually being played by Ceausescu's entourage, Iliescu had been demoted to a place in the second echelon of the communist hierarchy. He accepted the rules of the game. He knew that he would be pulled in and out of Ceausescu's proximity. But he would use – and has used – this normal occurrence to reinvent himself and claim, in the process, the status of a “victim of the communist regime”.

The entire team of the new leadership was selected – and approved by Gorbachev – during the spring of 1989. The go-between was Silviu Brucan, a former editor of the communist party daily “*Scânteia*” (The Spark), former ambassador to the United Nations and incumbent of other important positions under Gheorghiu-Dej and, therefore, sidelined by Ceausescu. He was too old to take an active part and was content to play the role of king-maker and *eminence grise*.

On 22nd December 1989, a contingency plan was activated. The junta used an uprising in Timisoara, deliberately exacerbating it by provocation, skillfully distorted the reality and the new leadership sprung into action – fully armed and with a tremendous battlecry – like Minerva from Jupiter's head.

On that day Iliescu and his acolytes formed the National Salvation Front. The instantly coined sobriquet “The Front for the Salvation of Communism” was a far more appropriate expression of its structure, membership and methods. Ceausescu's judicial murder, by a kangaroo court, after a “trial” recorded, but never completely shown, was meant to prevent him from bringing down with him all his old comrades, who were determined – not altogether surprisingly – to save their skins. True dissidents were rapidly isolated

and marginalised. Iliescu had intended to get away with some sort of *Perestroika*. A limited programme of economic reforms was introduced, with as few political changes as possible. At least Iliescu had the honesty to declare, in December 1989, that, unlike Ceausescu, he would be true to the “noble ideals of socialism”.

Apart from the loathed and abhorred dictator, his immediate family and no more than a handful of his closest acolytes, the *nomenklatura* was left largely unchanged, if a bit reshuffled, but miraculously transmogrified overnight into staunch democrats and unflinching fighters for liberty. Romania had entered the neo-communist phase.

The Present Situation in Romania

The military does not seem to be involved in the power struggle in any overt way, but the Romanian press has suggested that the highly effective recent attacks by miners indicate that they received assistance from military experts. The trial of a group of generals involved in the still unresolved and unclarified crimes perpetrated in December 1989, but who have since left active service, does not seem to have caused tremors. Two generals, Victor Athanasie Stănculescu and Mihai Chițac, have been tried for murders committed during the December 1989 uprising in Timisoara. General Gușe would have joined them but he is dead.

The communist party no longer exists. Leninism is extinct as a teleological project. Nevertheless, the old gigantic networks of loyalties and influence survive. The former members of the *nomenklatura* do help each other, just as Nazi self-help structures functioned after the Second World War. Many of them still occupy important positions.

To an even larger extent, the former – and, of course, present – *Securitate* agents still wield enormous power and influence. This is

more difficult to pinpoint than the network established by the top *nomenklatura*. Of course, there has always been a great overlap between the *Securitate* apparatus and the membership of the Communist Party above the lowest level of “foot soldier”. This overlap of the two *nomenklaturas*, that of the party and that of the secret police, constitutes today a grotesque, cynical and rapacious amalgam, which received the label “*directocracy*”. This is where the real power is vested.

Iliescu and his acolytes ruled until the general elections held in November 1996, after which a minority coalition government was installed, in which the main partner was the revived National-Peasant Christian-Democratic Party (PNTCD). Former President Iliescu, slightly ahead in the first ballot, lost in the run-off, to his main opponent, the leader of the Democratic Convention, Emil Constantinescu, who became the new President.

The New Administration

Emil Constantinescu, President of Romania – Leader of the Democratic Convention of Romania (CDR). Former communist public prosecutor, former obscure scientist and academic (like Lady Thatcher, he has a degree both in law and in science – but here all parallels end), he is not only a former member of the Communist Party, but is the former Communist Party boss of Bucharest University under Ceausescu. Appointed, after December 1989, Rector (i.e. Vice-Chancellor) of Bucharest University. Hand-picked by the late leader of the PNTCD, Corneliu Coposu, to be the CDR candidate for the presidency. Since Coposu is now quasi-canonised, his spiritual testament was unassailable. Supported – to a large extent due to Coposu’s endorsement – by many *bien-pensant* intellectuals who should have known better, his election was greeted with paroxysms of ecstasy by his supporters, who wanted to see the back

of Iliescu. Since the election, however, he has steadily distanced himself from those who propelled him to the top, and has surrounded himself with members of the *directocracy*. Promises made during the electoral campaign that he would throw light upon the confused events of December 1989 and bring to book those guilty of massacre have not been kept and are unlikely ever to be. It would be no surprise if he were dropped as the Democratic Convention’s candidate at the next presidential elections.

The investigative press reported a plot, allegedly hatched by one of Iliescu’s trusty stout fellows, Viorel Hrebengiu, to insure the victory of the incumbent president in the run-off to the presidential elections held in November 1996. The story, alas, does not strike one as implausible in a Romanian context. At the National Centre of Statistics, the central computer had to receive and synthesise the results sent by each regional statistical bureau, which, in turn, obtained the data from the local voting centres in the given area. It is alleged that two computer programmes were prepared for this task: a straight one, openly prepared by the team of experts at the National Centre of Statistics and a second “doctored” one, biased in Iliescu’s favour, prepared somewhere abroad (can one buy such things in Soho?) and furtively brought by a trusted courier to Bucharest. All was *in situ* on 17th November. Apparently, at the last moment the stooge at the National Centre of Statistics was ordered by the head of *SRI* (and former *Securitate* agent) Virgil Măgureanu, to remove the “doctored” software and replace it with the straight one, thus ensuring Constantinescu’s victory.

It was a foregone conclusion that Măgureanu’s dismissal would be the first act of the new administration. Nevertheless, he was kept in office for many months, and this fact bestows some verisimilitude and plausibility upon the story or, at any rate, suggests that Constantinescu is, for some reason, either indebted to Măgureanu or afraid of him.

The suggestion made by prominent observers that a secret compact had been concluded between Constantinescu and Măgureanu prior to the 1996 elections is corroborated on a daily basis by the continuing preponderance of the *directocracy*, Romania remaining the only former Soviet satrapy in which no attempt has been made to unmask either the former *Securitate* officers and informants or the activities and methods of this infamous agency.

Petre Roman, President of the Senate – Leader of the Party of Democracy (PD), the senior partner of USD. The man who is a heart-beat away from the Presidency of the country. Son of the late Valter Roman, who was one of Stalin's most sinister henchmen, political boss of the Romanian armed forces, volunteer in Spain and a leading light of the Comintern. Roman junior – obviously, also a member of the Communist Party – enjoyed all the privileges of red princes, including that of being sent to study, model Gucci loafers, drive sports cars and chase women (in whatever order of priorities) in France. Later lectured at the Polytechnic University of Bucharest where, reputedly, he wanted to become communist party boss. It is alleged that Ceausescu personally vetoed this appointment, because the Roman family was too closely associated with his predecessor, Gheorghiu-Dej. KGB agent, appointed, at the putsch of December 1989, Prime Minister, he worked closely with President Iliescu and both were leading members of the National Salvation Front. Just as culpable as Iliescu for the criminal actions of the marauding miners, invited to Bucharest in January, February and June 1990, to quell the peaceful anti-governmental demonstrations, he fell out with Iliescu a year and a bit later, and created his own splinter political group, not because of differences of principles or even policies, but because of personal animosity between two highly ambitious people, with strong egos. Iliescu sacked him, with the support of the miners, called by the President in September 1991 for the fourth time to Bucharest and instructed to brawl, attack the building housing the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and

demand Roman's dismissal.

At that point, Roman proclaimed himself as part of the opposition. Presidential candidate in the first ballot, at the run-off he swung behind Emil Constantinescu, thus becoming the king-maker. His political party, the Democratic Party, withdrew its five members from the fragile government of coalition on 28th January 1998, although he still offers the government parliamentary support.

Radu Vasile, Prime Minister – Although his predecessor, Victor Ciorbea, resigned on 30th March, President Constantinescu appointed the new Prime Minister on 2nd April. Perhaps 1st April would have been more appropriate, but, for obvious reasons, it was decided to wait a day... He was confirmed by Parliament on 15th April. The Romanian press has suggested that he was a *Securitate* informer. Quite a few actual – or just departed – ministers were *Securitate* officers. Nevertheless, he is the scion of a family of old members of the National-Peasant Party (before it was abolished by the communists in 1947): his father served years as a political detainee. To his credit, Radu Vasile never joined the Communist Party – or was not accepted as a member – and, because of this, although an academic at his own *alma mater*, the Academy for Economic Sciences, where he taught Economic History, he was never promoted beyond the grade of Assistant. He has also worked as an economic journalist. He is not a very impressive speaker but he writes better than he speaks.

He appears lukewarm towards the West. At present, only 3% of Romanian exports go to Russia but Vasile seems keen to achieve a closer alignment with the Russian government and has attacked the previous Prime Minister, Victor Ciorbea, for having attempted to establish a closer rapport with USA.

Ion Diaconescu, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies – Leader of PNTCD, the senior partner in CDR. The only former political

detainee in the present leadership, with an impeccable pedigree, being the nephew of Ion Mihalache, the deputy leader of PNT until his incarceration – by the Communists – in 1947 and subsequent death in jail. A man of integrity – but, alas, about 80 years old – he was Coposu's deputy until the latter's death, some two years ago.

In opposition, he proved to be an able and respected leader, but in power he appears to be totally out of his depth, possibly because of his age. Many sympathetic commentators express great concern about the apparent confusion of the National-Peasant Party, its indecision and seeming lack of direction.

A shaky coalition and dynamic equilibrium

The government consists of a shaky coalition between several parties that vie with each other for influence, control and power. Most of the important *dramatis personae* of the new administration are communists who held significant positions in the *ancien régime*.

A state of dynamic equilibrium between various gangs of communist Mafiosi, of *Securitate* officers and informers, has been established, that results in a glutinous *status quo* that appears inexpugible and immutable and that is painfully obvious to any visitor from outside Romania, who has to deal with governmental (or quasi-governmental) institutions and officials at any level. Senior civil servants, directors of State-owned companies and enterprises, all of them former – and, probably, present – *Securitate* officers know only too well that their position is not quite as safe as they would wish it to be. They fear that the sword of Damocles might be wielded by Sweeney Todd.

The *Securitate* officers at present in the top tier would dearly like to get rid of those lower down the pecking order and vice versa. In

fact, all the *apparatchiks* would gladly stick a knife between the shoulder blades of their former brethren unto Marx and Lenin. But they dare not. All former communist barons know far too much about each other. Some, apparently, have stored their archives of compromising material about every leading figure in the Romanian hierarchy in Swiss safety deposit boxes, knowing that thus they became unassailable. This is why they are all locked-up in an inextricable poisonous embrace, gelled together in an unsavoury political aspic.

Western advisers given a new role

The consequence of this state of things is that today's top dignitaries, leaders and managers are now reduced to having to rely on outsiders to do their dirty work. Western advisers and consultants are frequently startled to discover that they are expected not only to provide ideas on the projects in which they are involved, but also, and especially, to act as hatchet men and provide hit lists, thus offering a much desired alibi to those in control.

Măgureanu and Talpeş were sacked only when Jim Steinberg, the deputy adviser for National Security at the White House, who accompanied Bill Clinton to Romania, stated on 14th July 1997, during the visit, the reasons why the United States decided to veto Romania's entry in NATO: "The Romanian secret services are full of former *Securitate* officers, who cannot be entrusted with NATO secrets". The then Prime Minister, Victor Ciorbea, solemnly undertook, in Brussels, before all the NATO Foreign Ministers, to "de-Sovietise" the country's secret services.

The first step was to remove the old *Securitate* agent, Măgureanu from his position as Head of *SRI* and to appoint in his place Costin Georgescu, who seems not to have had any links with the *Securitate*. But the *directocracy* could not afford to take any chances: after only

a few weeks, a former *Securitate* officer, Colonel Gheorghe Atudoroaie, was appointed as one of Georgescu's deputies - or the Head of the Western Zone. He was a former Deputy Head of the *Securitate* Timis District, who, in 1990, was arrested and tried for his brutal and criminal way in which he had tried to repress the Timisoara uprising in December 1989.

Măgureanu was offered an ambassadorship, which he turned down – he is biding his time in Romania, where he is now a Parliamentarian, head of a political party, and also runs a consultancy business.

His stable-mate, General Talpeș, the former Head of the External Service of Information, was offered several ambassadorships in important Western capitals. He chose to be appointed in the nearest capital to Bucharest – Sofia – from where, at the right moment, he could fly home in about 30 minutes.

His successor, the new director of the External Service of Information, Catalin Harnagea, seems to be clean. But his deputy, General Mihai Alexandru Tănăsescu, is a former *Securitate* officer, who acted as the ESI's agent in the States during the Ceausescu period and has earned a reputation as one of the most experienced and determined anti-NATO agents.

“Economic Reforms”

The programmes put forward during Iliescu's period were very consistent and against any proper reform, although Iliescu conceded that the service industry and commerce could be privatised. For example, about 3,000 out of a total of some 8,000 dental surgeries have been privatised.

But the outgoing government – and the *directocracy* with which it was so closely connected – was reluctant to lose central control and

did not allow much classical market economy, in which one produces a commodity more efficiently than one's competitors. It was more like a sort of Leninist capitalism, in which, in return for favours, one is granted an exclusive privilege by the state, while others cannot compete.

All sorts of scams were devised as part of a “Potemkin economy”, consisting of “private enterprises” backed by subsidised state establishments, the directors of the latter being also the owners of the former and with the resources of the latter being siphoned into the former. This led to a generalised pilferage of the state's assets. The underground economy of mafiotic gangs is estimated at about 40% of the economy.

On 5th November 1998, Emil Constantinescu presided, for the first time, at a meeting of the government. He declared that Romania was in “grave” crisis. Closing down the industrial giants that have never worked properly, let alone generate some profit, privatising the economy which, to be profitable, would have to lay off a large part of the work force which can find employment nowhere else, delayering the inflated state apparatus, with its vast public payroll, could generate very serious and dangerous social unrest. This prospect, understandably, frightens the rulers. They cannot afford to create unemployment on such a scale, and cannot afford to upset the *Securitate apparatus*, who constitute the cumbersome State bureaucracy and from amongst whom the leaders and managers of those enterprises are recruited. So far, the Constantinescu regime has treated with kid gloves all those members of *Securitate* who could – and probably would – play a decisive role in a crisis and would attempt to topple the administration. This is why, Iliescu – and now Constantinescu – preserved intact the Communist-Securist structures.

In fact, not only has the power of the *directocracy* continued unabated, but various measures have been taken to increase its

control and domination. For example, on 10th September 1998, the Senate adopted the law concerning the “Regime of Foreigners in Romania”. Amongst the stipulations of this law, one demands that any “physical or juridical person” who acts as a host to a foreigner, must announce his presence to the police within 48 hours; if the foreigner stays at a hotel, his presence must be announced within 24 hours. These were dispositions in force under Ceausescu, abolished after 1989: now they have been resuscitated. Moreover, foreigners are forbidden to involve themselves in any activity of a political nature, the sanction being a custodial sentence between 3 months and 2 years or a fine between 500,000 and 3 million lei (between £25 and £150). Similar sanctions apply to foreigners who finance political organisations, parties or manifestations. Of course, these measures are primarily directed at Romanians in exile, who may attempt to influence the course of events in Romania.

Enter the Miners – Again

The miners’ strike – and the fifth march towards the capital – which took place in January 1999, was intended as a warning to Constantinescu, who understood the message: the march was inspired by a certain sector of *Securitate*, and was politically motivated. The miners were armed, had received military training and tablets of a powerful hallucinogenic drug that, apparently, induce aggressive behaviour, were found upon those arrested. The tablets were all marked with the mysterious code L-452 and are not available commercially in Romania, not even on prescription.

Ilie Verdeț, former high dignitary under Ceausescu – now leader of the Socialist Party of Labour – threatened at the end of January that “blood would flow” if the miners’ leader, Miron Cozma, were to be jailed. The miners have extracted from the government a fund of \$200million for the development of the coal extraction in the

Jiu Valley, from the money allocated by the EU to restructure the economy, a salary increase of 10% and a promise to stop at once the downsizing of the work-force in the entire mining industry, at a total cost of some £400 million per annum – and this at a time when nobody wants any coal!

Miron Cozma has now been sent to jail for 18 years. The High Court passed the custodial sentence on 15th February and on 16th February, about 3,000 miners started a new march towards Bucharest – the sixth since 1989. Cozma, absent from his trial, was arrested during this march. The sentence refers only to his role during the September 1991 invasion, whose effect was the toppling of the Roman government.

Cozma’s political mentors and sponsors have reacted characteristically: Adrian Năstase – close ally of Iliescu – declared that Miron Cozma’s arrest was “a great set-back for the democratic process”. Corneliu Ciontu – the deputy leader of the extremist party Greater Romania – stated that “Cozma’s arrest was an abuse of power”.

Economic Collapse

To avoid similar potentially dangerous social unrest Constantinescu has allocated 400 billion lei (about £20 million) to increase workers’ salaries at one of Ceausescu’s white elephants, the gigantic industrial complex SIDEX at Galati, which was put on the market and which – not surprisingly – nobody wants to touch, for it has never made any profit. Yet the workers threatened to cause trouble if their salaries were not increased!

But the problems will not go away. Nor will Father Christmas (IMF, the World Bank and EU) subsidise Romania indefinitely. For almost ten years Romania has consumed more than it has produced – yet

the government cannot bring itself to introduce a regime of austerity that would bring back memories of Ceausescu's era. For the last ten years, first the Iliescu and now the Constantinescu administrations have done ... precisely nothing.

On Sunday, 17th February, Radu Vasile – the Prime Minister – in his address, with which he closed the debate on the 1999 budget, declared: “The country's treasury is empty. For years we have consumed more than we have produced. The budget is a reflection of this fact.”

The 1999 budget was approved by parliament on 16th February. But it had been fiercely fought, line by line and provision by provision. It is a tight budget, dictated by the need to meet IMF conditions. If its provisions are not fulfilled, Father Christmas will give no more and Romania may have to default on \$3 billion loan repayment due later this year. In December 1989, Iliescu took over a country with no foreign debts. Seven years later, he departed leaving behind a foreign debt of \$11 billion. It seems that over \$1 billion of the loan received has not been used. The reasons for this, according to the representative of the World Bank for Romania, François Etori, being bureaucracy, cumbersome legislation and lack of programmes. The reserves in the treasury today amount to \$1.9 billion: although insolvency is not imminent, the situation is very serious, indeed.

The estimated GDP for 1999 is 370,516 billion lei (about £18.5 billion), 5.5% below the value for 1998. According to the budget proposal submitted by the Government, the state budget for the current year has total revenues of 84,756.4 billion lei (about £4.250 billion) and spending is expected to reach 93,384.4 billion lei (about £4.669 billion) at the 2.4% limit of the budget deficit.

Attending the final session, Prime Minister Radu Vasile told the MPs who took part in the final ballot that “measures will be taken in the second half of this year that will ensure economic growth” by

supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, agriculture, services and the development of the infrastructure. “This budget does not meet needs but reflects the realities of this period,” the Premier said. He stressed that Romania had servicing payments worth \$3 billion of debts contracted during 1990-1996.

The plenum of the Parliament also endorsed the draft of the state social security budget. Deputies and Senators agreed the social security budget, which amounts to 37,264.3 billion lei (£1.863 billion) this year. It stipulates revenues worth 5,884 billion lei (£294 million) for the payment of unemployment allowance while expenses are put at 6,333 billion lei (£316 million). The 449 billion lei deficit (£22 million) for unemployment allowance fund will be covered from reserves, apparently accumulated during previous years.

Many parliamentarians did not like the priorities of the government. Out of 2,500 billion lei (£125 million) available for investment in various projects, 400 billion lei (15% of the total amount) have been allocated for the building of new headquarters for the Customs and 276 billion lei (11% of the total) for the building of new headquarters for the Directorate of Public Finance. For education, only 170 billion lei (7%) have been allocated and for construction of hospital buildings – 48 billion lei, or £2.4 million, or 2% of the total sum. This in a country where the average salary amounts to £90 per month (\$149) and the pensions vary between 300,000 and 700,000 lei per month, i.e. between £15 and £35 per month. In rural areas, pensions can be as low as 100,000 lei per month, i.e. £5 per month.

And what appears to be the administration's top priority? To build a brand new large Cathedral in the heart of Bucharest, the foundation stone – or rather the marking cross – of which was placed on Friday 5th February by the Patriarch of the Church, in the presence of the President, the Cabinet, leaders of the opposition and other dignitaries.

International consultants have estimated that at least \$100 billion are necessary to renew Romania's infrastructure. Where are such sums to come from?

The only way out of the crisis is to lure foreign investors to Romania. Yet this is not done. The peak of foreign investment was reached in 1994, under Văcăroiu's government, when it amounted to \$970 million. After that, there was a steady decline, year after year: in 1998, the figure was \$150 million.

“Ourselves Alone”

Economic autarky – or self-sufficiency – has a long history in Romania, originating in the 1870s-1880s, when it was powerfully expressed by the then leader of the Liberal Party and the first statesman of Modern Romania, Ion Brătianu, who coined the expression, which was to be very influential after the First World War, and even much later, “by ourselves, alone” (“*prin noi înșine*”), strongly opposing the foreign investment in the country's fledgling industry.

But, in addition to this long tradition – and much more relevant – the reason of this reluctance to bring foreign investors to Romania is that such initiative would undermine and damage the privileged position of the Communist – Securist establishment.

The industrial production of Romania for 1998 was 17% below that of 1997. Only the tobacco industry reported an increase in production compared with 1997. The value of industrial products in 1998 was 169,000 billion lei (about £9 billion) out of which the exported goods represented about 23%.

The inflation rate for 1998 was just over 40%, although the cost of a range of services, such as postal stamps, telephone, radio, gas and airfares has doubled. The cost of electricity has increased by 141%.

The value of the leu has nose-dived: two years ago, £1 bought about 5,000 lei; today it would buy 20,000 lei. The people don't trust the leu and everybody desperately tries to buy dollars. At present, unemployment stands at 10%, with a forecast of 20% by the end of 1999.

In early February 1999 Hans van den Broek, the European Commissioner for Foreign Affairs declared that the EU intends to lend Romania EURO200 million. He stressed that Romania finds herself in a very difficult economic and social situation and may well sink to Russia's level if reform is delayed.

On 11th February, Catherine Day, the Director of the European Commission for Relations with Central and East European countries declared, during a two-day visit to Romania, that the long-term objective of the European Union is for Romania to become a member. But the economic situation was causing great concern. She indicated that some EURO100 million could be directed from the PHARE funds to help the programme of reform, to help private small and medium-sized companies, regarded as essential for the establishment of social and economic cohesion. But she stressed that some companies would have to be restructured, some privatised and some closed down. She added that the European Union could offer help to those rendered jobless, by assisting with their retraining and by creating alternative work-places in the regions affected by such measures. However, Jolly Dixon, a member of this delegation, was rather vague when asked about the magnitude of the loan and about the date when it would be available, saying that no firm promises could be given until the global economic program of the government becomes known.

On 17th February, the Finance Minister, Decebal Traian Remeș, held the first discussion with an IMF delegation led by Emanuel Zervoudakis. The IMF delegation thought that the projected balance of payment deficit (2% of the GDP) was not credible. They believed

that 4% or even 5% was a more realistic figure. They knew, for example, that the budget proposal to raise the cost of petrol to 7500 lei (about 37p) per litre would be difficult to implement in the country with an average salary of about £90 per month.

Nevertheless, the delegation still seemed inclined to grant the next slice of the promised loan, awaited with bated breath in Romania, provided that the deficit does not exceed 2.4% of GDP and that inflation is brought down from the present 40% to 25%. But IMF also demands, as part of the package, the closing down of loss making enterprises, the shake-up of the banking sector, the acceleration of the process of privatisation and the continuation of a tight monetary policy.

But there is wide-spread scepticism whether the tough conditions could be implemented. The *directocracy* would oppose it, and there is also genuine concern that such stringent measures would generate social unrest, from which only the extremist parties would benefit. Without such measures being implemented, however, IMF help would dry up. The parliamentary opposition parties of all hues have accused the government of allowing the IMF to rule the country.

Political Collapse

There is widespread political apathy. For example, given the derisory participation in the election for the Mayor of Bucharest (34% of the electorate), the ballot, held on 25th October 1998, was declared null and void and was repeated on 8th November, when 38% of the electorate took part. A recent opinion poll indicated that over 60% of the population thinks that the present policies are wrong. The population has lost all hope. There is an all-pervasive pernicious scepticism, which undermines the morale.

The worst legacy of the communist era is not the ruined economy. It is not the poverty. It is the way in which half a century of totalitarian rule has warped the human psyche.

Václav Havel captured this mood in his famous letter to Gustav Husak (published in the volume entitled *Living in Truth*):

Seldom in recent times, it seems, has a social system offered scope so openly and so brazenly to people willing to support anything at any time, as long as it brings them some advantage; to unprincipled and spineless men prepared to do anything in their craving for power and personal gain; to born lackeys, ready for any humiliation and willing at all times to sacrifice their neighbours' and their own honour for a chance to ingratiate themselves with those in power.

A recent law has, in principle, allowed access to the files of the secret police, but only with the *Securitate's* approval, the files still being in its custody. A small group of valiant people around Senator Constantin (Ticu) Dumitrescu, the President of the Association of Former Political Detainees, is fighting a losing battle to allow free and unhindered access to the secret files.

The post-communist countries of Europe still struggle with the communist administrative ballast and are suffocated by their own past, Romania probably to a greater extent than any other country. All political parties, the entire political class, are infiltrated by the *Securitate*: according to some commentators, up to 70%. Many of those who in the past espoused the homogenising logic of communist ideology are ready these days to adhere to no less collectivist visions of society, viscerally inimical to the very idea of individual rights, diversity and difference. There are powerful anti-Western forces in today's Romania, in spite of everybody's eagerness to accept Western money.

The steady increase in influence of anti-Enlightenment, ethnocentric forces increasingly marginalises “Westernising” liberals and promotes the resurgence of xenophobia and extremist forces (the labels ‘right’ or ‘left’ are meaningless in this context). The fastest growing political force in Romania is the extremist political party Greater Romania, led by Miron Cozma’s political mentor, the demagogue Senator Corneliu Vadim Tudor. The inter-bellic sinister Iron Guard also intends to play an active part on the political stage, under the new name The National Union for Christian Renaissance.

Corruption and attempts to curb it

The generalised pilferage of the state’s assets, the underground economy of mafiotic gangs (about 40% of the economy), the crippling corruption at the top, the organised crime “have penetrated all quarters of the state, the former governments and parliaments, right to the close proximity of the former president of the country, the judiciary, police, the armed forces, the special [i.e. secret] services, the financial institutions”, as Emil Constantinescu, obviously in the know, announced on 8th January 1997, when he set up the new National Council Against Corruption and Organised Crime.

In an interview given about the same time Constantinescu acknowledged that these phenomena have lost the treasury \$1.2 billion in 1996 alone and constitute a threat to the national sovereignty of Romania.

But his campaign collapsed in ruins. Corruption is still rife and no layer of society is untainted by it. It penetrates the presidential entourage: two of Constantinescu’s advisers and even his son have been, allegedly, involved in a massive cigarette smuggling operation, that used for this purpose, a military airport – where there are no customs officials.

Václav Havel depicted this nighmarish – but all too real – society in the same celebrated *Letter to Gustav Husak*

...public and influential positions are occupied, more than ever before, by notorious careerists, opportunists, charlatans and men of dubious record; in short, by typical collaborators, men, that is, with a special gift for persuading themselves at every turn that their dirty work is a way of rescuing something, or, at least, of preventing still worse men from stepping into their shoes. Nor is it surprising, in these circumstances, that corruption among public employees of all kinds, their willingness quite openly and in any situation to accept bribes and allow themselves shamelessly to be swayed by whatever considerations their various private interests and greed dictate...

Future Imperfect

Without a thorough cleansing of the toxic residues of the communist system, Romania is lost. In particular, it is essential that the President frees himself from the clutches of the *Securitate* or, if, for whatever reason, this is an unlikely prospect, he must be replaced with somebody else, with a completely clean record. Of course, the members of the *directocracy* would oppose this tooth and nail.

In the witches’ cauldrons of misconceptions and misjudgements, no brew is more potent, heady and noxious than the belief that totalitarian systems are capable of being reformed from within and that, by waving a magic wand, the leaders of criminal regimes would be transmogrified into people driven by liberal and democratic ideals. As we know from the theory of logical systems, the analysis of a system can be performed only from outside it, and never from inside, for all such systems are either incomplete or inconsistent.

The acceptance of the *directocrats* by the West, the readiness, if not eagerness, of its central institutions, banks and chancelleries to prop them up and maintain them in positions of power and influence since 1989, has had calamitous results for the vast majority of the population in most East European countries where it is strongly believed that this arrangement constitutes one of the clauses of the agreement reached at the Malta summit by Gorbachev and Bush.

We must remember that an economy based on free markets can be created by fiat, from the top, but cannot be made to work by decree. Any form of social, political and economic organisation, in order to be successful, must evolve organically, as a subtle distillation and expansion of the web of inter-personal contacts and exchanges. It cannot work in a vacuum. It cannot work in countries in which such expressions of the civil society have been suppressed by oppressive regimes. To flourish it needs a substratum of shared values and a stable and secure moral landscape. And this is precisely what the former satellite countries – and in particular Romania – are lacking: this lacuna is the result of the continued presence of the *directocrats* in positions of power and control.

Moral Collapse

Without a system of shared moral values, free markets beget not liberty and prosperity but gangsterism, proliferation of mafiotic bands, and – for the vast majority of population – fearsome misery, which generates a new kind of oppression, not very different in its effects, from the previous terror of the police state. No people can be persuaded or compelled to embrace the needed essential ethical values by decree. A moral climate in society cannot be established by legislation, or by fiat. In countries in which personal integrity has been systematically and relentlessly eroded and corroded for half a century, in countries in which the pollution of the moral

landscape was central policy, in countries in which mendacity became the established filter on all communication channels, official as well as inter-personal, moral regeneration will not happen overnight. But the much needed new ethical climate will never be established without the overwhelming majority being persuaded that crime does not pay and that nobody will be allowed to profit from criminal actions.

This is where Romania's new administration betrays its inconsistency, its double standards, its deep-seated roots in, and indebtedness to, the former communist regime and hence, ultimately, its impotence: it is absurd to pretend that crime committed from tomorrow onwards will meet with retribution, but crime committed yesterday will not only go unpunished: it will not even be exposed. Confining past crimes to oblivion, which seems to be the intention of the new leaders of Romania, has not only the deleterious effect of undermining the process of moral regeneration: it will also sabotage any attempt to eradicate crime in the future. To be accepted and effective, any political nostrum must be consistent and holistic.

Without this, the greatest peril for the entire region is that a new generation will grow up nurtured in an official culture fomenting the tenet that crime pays and that profiting from it is quite acceptable. It will be a generation without an ethical compass: a cynical, unprincipled, opportunistic, amoral generation, wandering in a cultural desert, rejecting any system of values, accustomed to regard expediency, hypocrisy and mendacity, if not crime, as normal parameters of human behaviour and utterly unable to bring about the much needed regeneration.

In the meanwhile, Romania, that crucible of genius and disaster, will continue to stumble along from crisis to crisis, until there is either an implosion or a dramatic change at the top.