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Ceausescu: America's Most Favored Tyrant

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For many Americans, Romania's Nicolae Ceausescu is the leader of the plucky little country that defied the Soviet boycott of the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. For the U.S. government, he presides over the communist country whose "most favored nation," or MFN, trade status should be renewed when it comes up for its annual review. In Washington's misguided view, MFN status can help improve human rights in Romania and encourage a degree of political independence from Moscow.

But for Mr. Ceausescu, the 1975 granting of MFN status crowned 10 years of intense propaganda and influence operations aimed at realizing his grand plan of strengthening Romanian communism by getting financial and technological help from capitalism.

Devotion to Stalinist Marxism

In October, Rep. Chris Smith (R., N.J.) and Sen. Paul Trible (R., Va.) introduced legislation that would deny Romania MFN status for six months. However, even this modest step is opposed by the State Department. In fact, during his visit last month to Romania, Secretary of State George Shultz said that "[The U.S.] would like to see trade [with Romania] flourish to the extent that it can. I believe that it can increase more in the future—and I hope it does."

Meanwhile, average Romanians—who receive few, if any, of the benefits of MFN status—face another bitter winter without adequate heat or light. The near-collapse of the Romanian economy has led to rumors that the Soviets would not at all mind if the army toppled Mr. Ceausescu and installed a military government similar to the one that has run Poland since 1981. However, any such move is unlikely. For all of his economic bungling, Mr. Ceausescu still delivers valuable exports to the Soviet Union and serves as a conduit for the transmission of embargoed Western technology to Moscow.

Continuing to renew Romania's MFN status will not make that nation more independent of the Kremlin. Mr. Ceausescu's devotion to Stalinist Marxism is clear even to naive observers. I worked with him for many years, and the one thing I came to



understand was that his position toward Moscow was never influenced by the U.S. Rather, it was primarily determined by the nature of his personal relationship with the Kremlin's top man. Yuri Andropov, whom I met, seemed to show less rigidity toward Mr. Ceausescu than Leonid Brezhnev had; Mikhail Gorbachev is apparently following the same policy.

According to recent reports, relations with Moscow are getting closer again, with a large Soviet presence once more in Romania. In addition, secret bilateral agreements with Moscow, such as those between the two intelligence services for the procurement of Western technology, are sacred obligations for Mr. Ceausescu.

Human rights in Romania have been strangled since the granting of MFN status in 1975. The proportion of security personnel in the population has steadily increased over the years, reaching a ratio of 1:15—the world's highest—by the time of my break with Bucharest in 1978. Selective mail censorship was replaced in 1976 with total censorship, with every single letter and package from abroad being opened. In February 1977 a secret Communist Party decision approved the complete monitoring of all international telephone calls. At the same time, Mr. Ceausescu personally ordered that the only legally permissible telephone device to be used was one developed by the security police that can be instantly converted into a microphone to monitor people's private conversations.

During the mid-1970s electronic monitoring devices were secretly installed in every Roman Catholic church and Jewish synagogue. In March 1978 a top-secret decision by Mr. Ceausescu required that all but a few token Jews be quietly removed from the military and security forces as well as from sensitive posts in the party and government.

Bucharest's terrorism against the West has also increased substantially. In the mid-1970s there was a surge in the secret training given in Romania to Western communists, especially Spaniards and Greeks, in sabotage and other forms of guerrilla warfare. In 1975 the DIE, the Romanian foreign intelligence service, made secret agreements with Palestine Liberation Organization terrorists, providing them with significant logistical support and using them in operations against Romania's own political opponents in the West.

In 1975, only days after receiving MFN status, Romania had its DIE secretly kill three militant anti-communists in the West, one of whom, Vasile Zapartan, was a

priest. The DIE later organized assassination attempts and savage beatings of emigres who had publicly criticized the cult of personality in Romania, using PLO terrorists in France in 1976 and criminal mercenaries in both West Germany in 1976 and France in 1977. In July 1978 I personally received the order to arrange unattributable assassinations of emigres working for the U.S. government in Radio Free Europe, and to bomb the radio's Munich headquarters (an action that finally took place in February 1981).

On July 28, 1981, Emil Georgescu, a senior editor at Radio Free Europe in Munich, was stabbed 22 times by criminals hired by Bucharest and barely escaped with his life. (He was one of the people I had been ordered to have killed.)

Nevertheless, Bucharest has always considered itself able to outwit Washington in obtaining the annual renewal of MFN. The only significant step I saw Mr. Ceausescu take to ensure the renewal was his August 1975 appointment of a permanent MFN task force, consisting of the minister of foreign affairs, the minister of interior, and the deputy chief of the DIE (at that time myself). Because the U.S. indicated that Romania's emigration policy was the key to MFN renewal, Mr. Ceausescu decided to maintain emigration from Romania (mostly Jews and ethnic Germans) at the minimum level but no higher. "We should make as much money as possible on our vanishing national resources—oil, Jews and Germans," he told the task force.

As part of the task force, the DIE was also responsible for selling the West on the myth of Mr. Ceausescu's domestic popularity and persuading the U.S. government to like Romania. The DIE paid for the Western publication of hundreds of articles and books about Mr. Ceausescu's accomplishments. It mounted successful operations to develop sources of influence at the U.S. Embassy in Bucharest and to exert pressure through agents and contacts in the U.S. It created and financed Romanian emigre organizations in the U.S., which paid for thousands of emigres to come periodically to Washington from all over the U.S. and Canada to demonstrate and lobby on Capitol Hill for MFN renewal.

Nor will the most recent renewal of MFN status improve U.S.-Romanian relations. Bucharest is now apparently pressing for a new official visit by Mr. Ceausescu to Washington, but its Oriental-rug-merchant approach to bilateral relations is entirely different from the American one. I

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