

January 11, 1990

Special Analysis: Romania: New Regime Under Fire Still has Lead□□□

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Summary:

An analysis of the economic turmoil in Romania and its effects on the National Salvation Front's authority.

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Original Scan

1599

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6.2(d)

Special Analysis

ROMANIA: New Regime Under Fire, Still Has Lead

The National Salvation Front (FSN) is taking pains to avoid the kind of economic hardship that would make for unrest before the national election, set for April, and appears well-situated to get through the winter. The Front remains the favorite to win the election, though the skepticism of students and workers might still improve the chances of the nascent, poorly organized opposition parties, particularly if the vote is delayed.

6.2(d)

The new regime is giving high priority to avoiding shortages of essential goods and services that could spark wide unrest. It has taken steps to ensure an adequate supply of food and energy, including halting all agricultural exports, which are worth more than \$1 billion a year.

3.3(b)(1)
6.2(d)

For its longer term economic needs, Romania is moving to improve its relations with the West. The FSN has rescinded Ceausescu's earlier renunciation of most-favored-nation trade status with the US, has stated its interest in establishing relations with the EC

3.3(b)(1)
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Unless the decrepit local distribution system breaks down completely, the FSN is in an excellent position to get through the winter without major unrest. The Soviet decision to continue supplying energy will help, and roughly half of Romania's energy will continue to come from the Middle East. Bucharest has enough foreign exchange to pay for several months of such imports.

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Population Still Wary

The FSN is under fire even as it moves to guarantee the freedom to organize political parties, minority rights, and freedom of assembly and travel and to restore economic activity and security. The Front's efforts to portray itself as embodying national consensus have failed to mollify a population that is suspicious it means to entrench itself. Many Romanians disbelieve Front claims that it means to be only an umbrella organization uniting prodemocracy groups.

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TCS 2709/90
1: January 1990

1598

~~Top Secret~~

6.2(d)

**Romanian Political Parties and Organizations:
The Emerging and the Moribund**

The **National Peasant Party**, a dominant party until forced to disband in 1947, is the best organized of the opposition groups and claims to have thousands of supporters. Its program includes return to traditional Christian values, democracy, nationalism—"true patriotism like President Reagan's"—and social justice. It favors a return to private farming.

The **National Liberal Party**, a major force in Romania until 1946, has called for a liberalized economy, educational reform, and a return to a constitutional monarchy under ex-King Michael. The Liberals started publishing the first opposition newspaper, *Liberalul*, on Monday. A representative has said they are in contact with the National Peasant Party to present a common list of candidates.

The **Romanian Democratic Party** models itself on Western social democratic parties and calls for free elections in the second half of the year, free trade unions, and continued membership in the Warsaw Pact.

The **Romanian Ecological Movement** supports the National Salvation Front (FSN) program but maintains its right to criticize it.

The **Hungarian Democratic Forum**, created to represent 2 million ethnic Hungarians—Romania's largest ethnic minority—emphasizes support of the FSN's democratic values. It has announced it will probably field candidates under the FSN.

The **Democratic Forum of Romanian Germans** reportedly has organized in almost all towns with ethnic Germans. Romania's 230,000 ethnic Germans probably cannot sustain an independent political party.

The 3.8 million-member **Communist Party** has virtually disintegrated in the face of the anti-Ceausescu revolt. Even if it tries to come back with a new name and rhetoric, it may not survive. A small group of Communists on 30 December called for an emergency congress to dissolve the party and transfer its assets to the FSN, but the FSN is distancing itself from the Communists, indicating it does not want their assets.

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TCS 2709/90

11 January 1990

1600

~~Top Secret~~

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Students, widely regarded as the moral force that overthrew Ceausescu, are particularly vocal critics. In Bucharest Sunday more than 2,000 students protested the presence of Communist holdovers and unknown figures in the transitional government, demanded educational reforms, and threatened new mass protests. Students dismissed the six student representatives on the 11-member FSN Executive Council last week as puppets, and thousands of students reportedly have demonstrated recently in Braila and Galati, southeastern cities. [redacted]

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Waffling on Election Timing

At least six new political parties—none yet registered—and other opposition groups appear to agree that the national election should be postponed. They claim an early election will unfairly help the Front, which almost totally controls the mass media. The groups also cite lack of such resources as telephones, typewriters, and office space, as slowing their efforts. [redacted]

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The FSN has indicated some flexibility on election timing but still appears committed to an early date. Spokesman Silviu Brucan has said the FSN would consider a formal request for postponement and has proposed roundtable talks with opposition parties. President Iliescu has said the election may be delayed a month, but Prime Minister Roman is sticking with the FSN's original commitment. [redacted]

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Opposition groups probably cannot seriously challenge the FSN by April. In addition to its organizational and logistic advantages, the Front can take credit for restoring stability and improving food and energy supplies. The opposition parties' chances may improve if the election is delayed and they can win better access to the media. Nevertheless, unless their inexperienced leaders can build broad alliances and produce coherent programs, or the FSN abuses its power enough to alienate ordinary Romanians, these steps are not likely to be enough. [redacted]

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TCS 2709/90
11 January 1990