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The Sale of the Romanian-Germans (1969-1989): Migration, Minority Status, and the Construction of Ceaușescu's Maverick State

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The Sale of the Romanian-Germans (1969-1989): Migration, Minority Status, and the
Construction of Ceaușescu's Maverick State

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by

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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
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INTRODUCTION

“I bought out my brother,”¹ says Thomas, a Romanian-born farmer now residing in Germany. “It was a financial transaction. My brother paid 10.000 Lei, and I gave him another 8.000DM. That was the price for a Banat Swabian² back then. After about a year, he was allowed to leave.” It is matter-of-fact, much like the rhetoric found in the transcripts of the negotiations that sent more than 200,000 people from Romania to West Germany over a 20 year period and allowed Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu to get out from under the control of the Soviet Union.

While the paid emigration deal between Romania and the Federal Republic of Germany is no longer a secret, it is rarely mentioned beyond a passing acknowledgement of it as a reason for the decline of German-speaking minority groups in Romania. However, a migration of this scale, which resulted in billions of dollars changing hands, has implications far beyond the demographics of Transylvania and the Banat. An agreement such as this was made possible by a perfect storm: a culturally well-preserved Romanian-German minority, a Romanian nation drawing upon its distinct origins to pursue independence from the constraints of being a satellite state, a world split into three groups in need of mediation, a divided Germany grappling with the concept of German identity the aftermath of the Holocaust.

Dr. Heinz Günther Hüscher, the lawyer and Bundestag member who acted as the West German representative during the negotiations, reflected on West Germany’s obligation to the German diaspora, saying “On the one hand, prosperity and quality of life increased in the Federal Republic; on the other hand, the standard of living in Romania fell steadily. Who could refuse the

¹ Thomas Koch. Interview by Nicholas Hermann. Phone Interview. October 16, 2020.

² Banat Swabians are one of the German-speaking minority groups in Romania.

Germans in Romania the moral right to relocate to the Federal Republic?"³ Dr. Hüscher's justification draws on traditional ideas of German citizenship being ethnocultural and not geographic. It is essential to note that Romanian-German communities existed long before any official German nation, so the responsibility of Germany to this group only exists if one believes in an idea of German citizenship based on these notions of blood and ancestry. While this definition of citizenship might have been well suited for multi-ethnic empires, following the post-Treaty of Versailles push for self-determination and the later German-nationalism violently espoused by the Nazis, it becomes more complicated. As was the case in most Eastern European lands, Romania had long been a multi-ethnic landscape, where it was common for four or five ethnic groups to live in close proximity to one another.

Although West Germany engaged in population transfers with other Eastern Bloc countries in exchange for financial benefits, such as Poland and Czechoslovakia, the agreement with Romania is unique for a number of reasons. Most notably, the compensation went beyond general trade agreements or loans. Instead, each emigrant was appraised and assigned a price based on their age, educational attainment, and skill. Whereas other deals, such as the 1975 agreement between West Germany and Poland that resulted in 125,000 Polish-Germans migrating to West Germany in exchange for a low-interest \$400 million loan to Poland, were open diplomatic agreements between two nations that addressed the issue on the meta level, Bonn's deal with Bucharest was shrouded in secrecy and focused on the purchase of individuals. Like Poland, Romania received large loans with favorable terms, but unlike Poland, the Romanian Communist Party received hard currency for each departure, which they had no obligation to repay or even spend for government-related purposes. These payments, which

³ Heinz-Günther Hüscher, Peter-Dietmar Leber, and Hannelore Baier. *Wege in Die Freiheit : Deutsch-Rumänische Dokumente Zur Familienzusammenführung Und Aussiedlung 1968-1989*. (2016): 37.

totaled well over 1 billion dollars, could easily have gone right into the pockets (or, more accurately, the Swiss bank accounts) of Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu.

In his 1987 book *Red Horizons*, former-Securitate general Ion Mihai Pacepa alleges that Ceaușescu had a larger plan, codenamed “Horizon,” which sought to obtain Western money, technology, and political approval in an attempt to establish independence from the constraints of the Warsaw Pact.⁴ With this in mind, one must evaluate the motives of the Romanian government. Is it accurate to view this agreement as an attempt to homogenize the country’s population and eliminate the threat of minority group opposition? Based on conversations with those who have personal or familial connections to the situation, it’s not a simple answer. According to Andras Elek, who is of Hungarian and Banat Swabian ancestry and spent his childhood under Ceaușescu’s rule: “At a certain level, they considered everything to be a threat. You weren’t able to move two steps without the Securitate knowing. But it was obvious that the German community couldn’t have done anything big against the communists. The opportunity was just better to sell them for money and foreign relations.”⁵

Characterizations of the deal range from it being a simple and logical population transfer for purely humanitarian reasons to a government-run human trafficking ring that profited off of the exploitation and suffering of those wishing to emigrate. On the one hand, the idea of putting a price tag on a human being, determined by factors such as age and education, feels reprehensible and dehumanizing. Ceaușescu himself is alleged to have said, “oil, Jews, and Germans are our best export commodities,” and the transcripts of the negotiations generally echo this sentiment of émigrés as just another product to be sold on the international market. On the other hand, unlike other instances of humans being sold, the sale was consensual. Every Romanian-German “sold”

⁴ Ion Mihai Pacepa. *Red horizons: The true story of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescus' crimes, lifestyle, and corruption*. (1990): 8.

⁵ Andras Elek. Interview by Nicholas Hermann. Skype Interview. October 8, 2020.

had to apply and, despite enduring a long process that often involved extortion and intimidation, their quality of life would improve following their purchase. There was also logical reasoning behind the payments that extended beyond notions of ownership over a person, as allowing thousands of state-educated citizens to leave the country freely would be detrimental to the construction of the independent and industrialized country Ceaușescu envisioned.

If categorizing it as a sale of humans feels like sensationalism, one could instead use the word *ransom*, which makes some sense as it addresses the desire for those being ransomed to be bought. However, *ransom* has the connotation of returning a prisoner or something that was stolen. Given that Germans settled in Romania centuries ago, and at the time of the deals were not prisoners in the literal sense, this term does not fully encapsulate the nuances of the situation. The West German side codenamed the operation *die Geheimsache Kanal*, which roughly translates to the Secret Channel. The Romanian side referred to it as *Acțiunea „Recuperarea,”* which means the Recovery Action. In some ways, these titles are ironic, as it was the German side who claimed the negotiations were a humanitarian mission to rescue Romanians of German descent, while the Romanian side saw the negotiations as a channel to acquire Western funds and influence while insisting on secrecy.

This paper attempts to reassess the sale of Romanian-Germans, specifically focusing on the role it played in the formation of Ceaușescu's Romania as a semi-independent state during the Cold War. Minority groups, specifically Jews and Germans, were secretly at the center of Romania's foreign policy. Due to the division of East and West, the emigration of a minority group in a country that had historically been in the shadows of greater powers would have huge diplomatic impacts beyond the negotiating countries. The Romanian-Germans, who had a long history of acting as a bridge between two sides (whether it be the Hungarians and Romanians in

Transylvania or the Nazis and the Iron Guard in World War II), offered Romania a link to the West, which signified independence from the Soviet Union. Initially under the guise of family reunification, West Germany was able to provide support to the German diaspora, while Romania traded the emigrants for hard currency and loans used to grow the economy, and took on a greater level of global importance than ever before with strong relationships in the West, East, and non-aligned countries. As was commonly the case in this period, the United States and the Soviet Union sat in the background with a vested interest in Romania's independence.

Without the sale of the German and Jewish minority groups, Romania would not have been able to oppose the USSR in the same way, resulting in stronger Soviet control over the Eastern Bloc and less communication across the Iron Curtain. Though not often acknowledged, the sale of Romania's Germans altered the dynamics of Cold War Europe. In the larger sense, there is something to be said about the importance and validity of hyphenated identity. Without the Romanian-Germans maintaining a cultural and linguistic tradition while resisting assimilation over centuries, this natural link between nations would not have been possible. This is a testament to the role of ethnicity and diaspora in diplomacy and the construction of nationhood.



Figure 1.1. A Banat Swabian family (c. 1900) Photo courtesy of Andras Elek.

CHAPTER I: Romania's German Minority (Pre-1969)

To understand the circumstances that allowed for the deal of 1969, one must first understand how the Romanian nation had historically been shaped by interaction between various ethnic groups, as well as how Romanian-German identity developed over time. While there were several German-speaking communities throughout the land that makes up present-day Romania, the two most prominent were the Transylvanian Saxons and the Banat Swabians. The Transylvanian Saxons first arrived in Transylvania in the mid-12th century at the invitation of King Géza II of Hungary. While the term *Saxon* refers to the German region of Saxony, the Transylvania settlers came from all over modern-day Germany, as well as parts of France, Luxembourg, and Belgium.⁶ Initially tasked with populating the region and defending the Kingdom of Hungary's southern border from invasion, they soon carved out a prominent role in Transylvanian society. In 1224, Andrew II of Hungary issued the *Diploma Andreanum*, giving the Saxons autonomy, allowing them to maintain German language and culture undisturbed by

⁶ Georges Castellan. "The Germans of Rumania." *Journal of Contemporary History* 6, no. 1 (1971): 52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200947100600103>.

other groups in the region.⁷ The Saxon population settled in the areas around Hermannstadt (Sibiu) and Kronstadt (Braşov).

The elevated status of the Saxons is illustrated by “Unio Trium Nationum” (The Union of the Three Nations), a 1438 pact between the Transylvanian Saxons, Hungarian nobility, and the Szekely, the initial Hungarian settlers of the region.⁸ Created in response to the Transylvanian peasant revolt of 1437, this alliance provided the perceived three ruling “nations” of Transylvania mutual aid against potential Ottoman attacks and peasant uprisings. Given that Romanians made up the majority of the peasantry throughout Transylvania’s history, the pact essentially signified a German and Hungarian bourgeoisie that saw itself threatened by a largely Romanian proletariat and the expansion of the Ottoman Turks.

Despite being the ethnic majority in the region, Romanians lacked the recognition and privileges that the Saxons and Hungarians possessed. This perceived inequality remained central to inter-ethnic relations for centuries, with 20th century Romanian intellectual Traian Bratu proclaiming “compared to its overwhelmingly Romanian rural population, an urban population that, for the most part belongs to other nationalities; its trade, industry, and a large share of banking - and therefore, the main sources of wealth - are in the hands of these non-Romanian inhabitants.”⁹ Although no official German state existed and, therefore, the Saxon settlements in Transylvania can not be seen as a German colony in the traditional sense, the power dynamics between the Saxons and the Romanians mirrored colonial societies to a degree.

The other major group, the Banat Swabians, arrived in the 18th century, following the Treaty of Passarowitz, which awarded the Habsburg Monarchy significant territory that had

⁷ Daniel Ursprung. “The German Minority in Romania: a Historical Overview.” *The German Minority in Romania, Euxeinos*, 19-20 (2015): 11. <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-133324>.

⁸ Valentin Quintus Nicolescu. “Nature and Identity in the Construction of the Romanian Concept of Nation.” *Environment and History* 20, no. 1 (2014): 128. <https://doi.org/10.3197/096734014x13851121443526>.

⁹ Rogers Brubaker. *Nationalist politics and everyday ethnicity in a Transylvanian town*. (2006): 71.

previously been under Ottoman control.¹⁰ The term *Banat Swabian* refers to the Banat, a historical region that encompasses parts of modern-day Romania, Serbia, and Hungary, while the Swabian part refers to the region of Swabia in southern Germany. However, like the Saxons, not all Banat Swabians originate from Swabia. In contrast to the Saxons, the Swabians were much more willing to cross cultural boundaries, as interaction and even intermarriage with neighboring groups was not uncommon.¹¹ While both groups were of German origin, they spoke different dialects of German and differed religiously. The Transylvanian Saxons were overwhelmingly Lutheran, while, like the Hungarians, the Banat Swabians were predominantly Catholic. The Banat Swabians were on average wealthier than the Romanian and Serbian communities they lived amongst, but they did not enjoy the same privileged status as the Saxons.¹²

On December 1, 1918, the Great Assembly of Alba Iulia occurred, officially uniting Transylvania with the Kingdom of Romania. While it likely goes without saying, the acquisition of Transylvania and the Banat was of enormous importance to Romania and was a significant reason for their involvement in the First World War. Prior to the agreements, Romanian Prime Minister Ion Brătianu alleged that in addition to the self-determination aspect of ethnically-Romanian areas, the Banat was in fact promised by the Allies in exchange for Romanian entrance into the war.¹³ Interestingly, when negotiations began to look less favorable, Brătianu took a page from the future Ceaușescu playbook, playing the East against the West by threatening to give the Bolsheviks control of Romania if the Allies did not award the Banat in Romania's favor.¹⁴ In this way, Romania's historical disadvantage, being in the proximity of powerful empires, was becoming its greatest tool.

¹⁰ Georges Castellán, 53.

¹¹ Daniel Ursprung, 9.

¹² Georges Castellán, 53.

¹³ Margaret MacMillan, Richard Holbrooke. *Paris 1919: six months that changed the world*. (2002): 127.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 133.

Although having historically aligned with the Hungarian population, the Transylvanian Saxons supported Romanian efforts to take over Transylvania, which went a long way when it was time to decide the fate of the former Austro-Hungarian lands. This gesture illustrates the Saxons' changing position between the Hungarians and Romanians, which allowed them to gain favor with the potential new ruling group, as they had done previously with the Hungarians. The decision to support the union was primarily based on assurances made about the protection of minority cultures. According to Georges Castellán, the Great Assembly of Alba Iulia promised "complete national freedom for all cohabiting peoples', that is, the right of self-government, the right to conduct education and judicial proceedings in their own language, and to be judged by persons drawn from their own people', and to be represented in legislative bodies and the government in proportion to their numbers."¹⁵ There were some additional benefits too, such as the fact that the Saxons and Romanians had a common struggle against Magyarization¹⁶ and that Romania was a monarchy with a Hohenzollern king in Ferdinand I, who was born in the German Confederation.¹⁷ While the Saxons would still be a minority in a country with a majority that was arguably even more culturally distant than the Hungarians, the presence of a German king provided some assurance that German cultural practices would be given a space to continue.

Despite the fact that, unlike Germany, Romania benefitted from the post-World War I territory changes, aggressive fascist movements gained influence in both countries by the 1930s. One movement of particular note is "The Legion of the Archangel Michael," better known as "The Iron Guard," formed in 1927 by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, who happened to be of German heritage on his maternal side.¹⁸ The Iron Guard was a rather bizarre, radical group that blended

¹⁵ Georges Castellán, 55.

¹⁶ Magyarization refers to the assimilation of non-Hungarians into Hungarian culture.

¹⁷ Ibid., 55.

¹⁸ Ibid., 58.

xenophobic and nationalist philosophies with Eastern Orthodox-Christianity. While this movement advocated for a Greater-Romania exclusively for ethnic Romanians, the Transylvanian Saxons were actually perceived as “full-fledged Romanian citizens” and therefore the only exception.¹⁹ Romanian fascism was very anti-Semitic in nature, which allowed for a relatively seamless alliance with Nazi Germany under the military dictatorship of Ion Antonescu. The collaboration between Antonescu and Hitler also allowed for a stronger connection between Romanian-Germans and the Germans of the Reich.

At the request of the Nazis, Romania agreed to not only treat the Romanian-German minority fairly, but also ensure space for self-determination as promised by Alba-Iulia.²⁰ This agreement gave Romanian-Germans special privileges when it came to the establishment of political entities, which opened the doors for more openly National Socialist groups to take power in the Romanian-German community. Most notable was Andreas Schmidt’s appointment as the leader of the German minority and the creation of the “National Socialist German Workers Party of the Ethnic Germans in Romania” (*Nationalsozialistische deutsche Arbeiterpartei der deutschen Volksgruppe in Rumänien*) in 1940. Schmidt himself had strong ties with SS leadership, as he was married to the daughter of SS-Obergruppenführer Gottlob Berger²¹, and therefore would act on behalf of the Reich. Despite initial opposition from Antonescu and the Romanian government, the Romanian-Germans were eventually allowed to enlist in the Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS, in large part due to external pressure from Germany.²² This illustrates an interesting dynamic regarding self-determination, as the Romanian-Germans were

¹⁹ Mircea Platon. “The Iron Guard and the ‘Modern State’. Iron Guard Leaders Vasile Marin and Ion I. Moța, and the ‘New European Order.’” *Fascism I*, no. 2 (January 1, 2012): 76. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22116257-00201002>.

²⁰ Ottmar Trașcă. “Andreas Schmidt and the German Ethnic Group in Romania (1940-1944).” *The German Minority in Romania, Euxeinos*, 19-20 (2015): 16. <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-133324>.

²¹ Georges Castellán, 60.

²² Ottmar Trașcă, 18.

not only caught between two fascist dictators in Hitler and Antonescu, but also Andreas Schmidt, whose role allowed him to become a dictator, not over a territory, but rather over an ethnic group.

In many ways, this is consistent with the history and later status of the Romanian-Germans, who



Figure 1.2. A pro-Nazi billboard in Romania, reading “Sieg oder Sibirien!” (Victory or Siberia!) August 1944. Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-244-2316-34A / Waidelich / CC-BY-SA 3.0/ war.²³

were able to use their presence in both German and Romanian cultural spheres to their advantage. That being said, the Romanian-Germans were of great use to Hitler, as at least 61,880 Romanian-Germans served in the Waffen-SS and participated on all fronts of the

Following the end of World War II, the Romanian-Germans found themselves at risk of discrimination for a couple of reasons. The first of which was the issue of Nazi collaboration. While not all Romanian-Germans supported the Nazis, those who did were vocal and active enough that there would undoubtedly be consequences, especially because Romania was now under the Soviet sphere of influence. Perhaps the most notable punishment faced by the German minority was deportation to labor camps in Siberia after Stalin declared that ethnic Germans from all over Europe would be forced to rebuild parts of the Soviet Union as a form of reparation.²⁴ This policy had a massive impact on German minority groups in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and especially Romania, as it had the largest ethnic German population in Eastern Europe outside of the Soviet Union. Of the 551,049 ethnic Germans in

²³ Ibid., 19.

²⁴ Hannelore Baier. “The Deportation of Germans from Romania to Forced Labor in the Soviet Union.” *The German Minority in Romania, Euxeinos*, 19-20 (2015): 20. <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-133324>.

non-USSR Eastern Europe counted by the Soviets, 421,846 of them lived within the borders of Romania, and of the 112,480 people sent to forced labor camps, 69,332 were from Romania.²⁵ Men between the ages of 17 and 45 and women between 18 and 30 were eligible for forced labor, regardless of any personal guilt for the actions of the Nazis. However, women married to Romanian men, people with one Romanian parent, and any clergy members were exempt.²⁶

Although large-scale deportations occurred, the existing evidence tends to support the notion that the Romanian government opposed such measures but was simply unable to go against the Soviets. While Romania remained a sovereign state in theory, the Soviet Union occupied the country from 1944 until 1958. Because ethnic Romanians historically didn't support communism, on top of the fact that the previous regime was a Nazi-allied fascist government, the Soviet Union felt it necessary to place Soviets in prominent positions until a strong enough Romanian communist base existed.²⁷ This fact made opposition to any Soviet wishes rather difficult. However, that didn't stop some Romanians from trying. In 1945, the Romanian government wrote a letter to the Soviet-installed Vice-President of the Allied Commission for Romania, Vladislav Vinogradov, explaining that the request to deport ethnic Germans would cost the country and that the Romanian government had a responsibility to protect the interests of "all its subjects, regardless of their ethnic origin."²⁸ Further attempts were made to get other allied powers involved, such as Great Britain and the United States, but both agreed that Romania was under Stalin's sphere of influence and it would be best to stay out of it.²⁹ These attempts ultimately failed, and the Romanian-Germans were sent off for five years, eligible to return in 1949. While this certainly had a significant impact on the

²⁵ Ibid., 21.

²⁶ Ibid., 22.

²⁷ Dennis Deletant. *Ceaușescu and the Securitate: Coercion and dissent in Romania, 1965-1989*. (1995): 30.

²⁸ Hannelore Baier, 21.

²⁹ Ibid., 22.

Romanian-Germans, it is important to emphasize that this was a shared experience of ethnic Germans all over Eastern Europe, and that while the Romanian government did not prevent the deportations, they did not support them either.

The second threat was related to their historical status as landowners and bourgeois. Now that the Romanian Communist Party was in power, issues of class took center stage, and those who had possessed economic privilege were now seen as the enemy of the state. This was characterized by the term *chiabur*, the Romanian equivalent of the well-known Russian term *kulak*. *Chiabur* is thought to be derived from the Turkish word *kibar*, meaning overly polished or pretentious, and was reappropriated by the communists to refer to class enemies.³⁰ Landowners who resisted collectivization were labeled *chiaburi* and subjected to surveillance and potential deportation to Soviet labor camps. While people of any ethnicity could be labeled a *chiabur*, Romanian-Germans commonly received this label due to their widespread land-ownership and wealth. For example, in 1952, it was determined that one Banat village had 29 *chiabur* households, and of those 29, 26 were Romanian-German.³¹ While this did not explicitly target Romanian-Germans on ethnic grounds, the historical inequality caused them to be disproportionately impacted by communist policies. They were, however, prohibited from voting for a period of time as a direct result of perceived Nazi collaboration.³²

Under Petru Groza's rule, there were significant attempts to integrate minorities into the larger Romanian population, though Romanian-Germans were still not entirely accepted due to perceived Nazi collaboration. In 1945, the Romanian state established thirteen ethnic

³⁰ Smaranda Vultur, "The Role of Ethnicity in the Collectivisation of Tomnatic/Triebswetter (Banat Region) (1949-1956)," *Transforming Peasants, Property and Power: The collectivization of agriculture in Romania, 1949-1962*. (2009): 155.

³¹ Smaranda Vultur, 153.

³² *Ibid.*, 149.

organizations with the purpose of providing a path to integration for ethnic minorities.³³ These included organizations for both groups that would eventually be ransomed, with the German Anti-Fascist Committee and the Jewish Democratic Committee. As the name would suggest, the German Anti-Fascist Committee was dedicated to the de-Nazification of Romania's German community, as they were still seen as potentially sympathetic to Nazism. Similarly, the Jewish Democratic Committee was anti-Zionist and primarily concerned with ensuring the loyalty of Jewish citizens. Both of these groups acted as a form of re-education, where those deemed at a higher risk of placing a perceived ethnic homeland above the nation of Romania were pressured into assimilation. By replacing fascism and Zionism with communism, the hope was that these minority groups would buy into the Romanian Communist Party, and any threat would be neutralized. However, there were hints about what would happen if social restratification did not take place. In a 1946 speech, Communist Minister of Justice Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu stated that if ethnic Hungarians threatened state security, they would be resettled to Hungary.³⁴ While this statement was not necessarily endorsed by the Romanian government itself, it does suggest that integration was Plan A, with deportation being Plan B. Not long after that speech, the state of Israel was founded, and Romania began exporting its Jewish community.

Following the death of communist leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej in 1965, it was decided that Nicolae Ceaușescu would be his successor, causing some friction between the top party members.³⁵ The territory of modern-day Romania had always been ethnically diverse, but Romanians were hardly ever the ones truly in power. Because of their close proximity to multiple historical powers, Romanians found themselves under the rule of Hungarians, Russians, Turks,

³³ Stefano Bottoni. "Reassessing the Communist Takeover in Romania: Violence, Institutional Continuity, and Ethnic Conflict Management." *East European Politics & Societies* 24, no. 1 (2010): 73. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325409354355>.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 74.

³⁵ Edward Behr. *'Kiss the hand you cannot bite': The rise and fall of the Ceaușescus*. (1992): 138.

Greeks, Austrians, and European Royalty over time. While Ceaușescu was far from the first ethnic Romanian to lead the nation, the fact that he was a Romanian was still meaningful to the public. Dissident author Paul Goma noted, “the general feeling was, among the vast majority of Romanians, okay, he’s a communist but at least he’s against the Russians, the Hungarians, the Jews, etc. He’s one of us.”³⁶

This anti-Soviet persona was crucial to the success of Ceaușescu, both at home and in the West. According to the former Head of Romanian Intelligence, Ion Mihai Pacepa, Nicolae Ceaușescu recognized the potential benefits of breaking from the Soviet Union in the eyes of the West, saying “let’s present Romania as a Latin island in the Slavic sea ... Our millennia-old traditions of independence are now up against Moscow’s political centrism ... A pawn between two superpowers.”³⁷ As Ceaușescu alludes to, Romania’s cultural heritage lent itself to a more independent path, one that didn’t idolize Russia as a big-brother figure, compared to the other overwhelmingly Slavic countries of Eastern-Europe. The Romanian people are thought to be descended from intermixing between the Dacians, a Thracian people indigenous to the Balkans, and the Romans, who conquered the region thousands of years ago.³⁸ Despite bordering three Slavic-speaking nations, as well as Hungary, the modern Romanian language is most closely related to Italian, making Ceaușescu’s characterization of Romania as a “Latin island in the Slavic sea” fairly accurate.

As surprising as it may initially seem, Romania’s official policy on ethnic minorities was much more progressive than West Germany’s at the time. Keeping in line with communist ideology, Ceaușescu publicly pursued a policy of integration, or “homogenization,” for Romania’s minority groups. Historian Dennis Deletant presents three very connected main

³⁶ Ibid, 146.

³⁷ Ion Mihai Pacepa, 8.

³⁸ Rogers Brubaker, 57.

arguments that Romania was attempting to erase the culture of its minority groups, namely Hungarians and Germans.³⁹ The first deals with the movement of ethnic groups. Based on decrees issued in 1976, the state could assign university graduates to jobs all over the country. Members of the German and Hungarian minorities felt that they were often placed far away from areas that had sizable German or Hungarian communities as an attempt to assimilate them. This theory suggests that a person is more likely to marry and have children with someone close to them, and therefore by placing a Banat Swabian in Dobruja, where there are very few Swabians, they will find a Romanian partner and have children of mixed ethnicity. Because these children would grow up away from their parent's minority community, they would likely have less connection to the culture, and after a generation or two at most, the family would identify as Romanian and not Swabian. While there is some logic to the theory, this fate was seemingly avoidable if one chose, as there was no official law forcing the intermarriage of ethnic groups. Additionally, the official explanation for these practices is that workers were assigned positions based on job availability, not ethnicity, as a way to combat unemployment. It must also be acknowledged that in many cases, intermarriage did not lead to a loss of culture but rather a fusion. "My great grandmother would speak to me in German, but I would speak back in Hungarian as it was easier for me,"⁴⁰ says Andras, whose family continues to maintain a strong connection to their Hungarian and Banat Swabian roots, despite generations under communism.

Another piece of evidence supporting the idea that Romania engaged in forced assimilation was the restricted availability of Hungarian or German language education in schools. Under Law 26, a school was required to offer classes in Romanian if there was at least one student whose native language was Romanian.⁴¹ On the other hand, Law 278 stated that

³⁹ Dennis Deletant, 129.

⁴⁰ Andras Elek. Interview by Nicholas Hermann. Skype Interview. October 8, 2020.

⁴¹ Dennis Deletant, 124.

there needed to be at least 25 German-speaking students to create a class in German at the Primary School level. This requirement increased to 36 students at the Secondary level. This is obviously unbalanced and favors Romanian-language education. With the changes in educational requirements coupled with the increase of ethnic Romanians settling in traditionally German or Hungarian areas, there was legitimate reason for concern about the availability of minority-language education. However, on the flip side, the argument was made that keeping minority groups educationally segregated was ultimately detrimental to both the student and Romanian society as a whole. To Ceaușescu and others in powerful positions, the idea that many Romanian citizens wouldn't be completely fluent in the Romanian language was seen as a failure of the state education system, with Ceaușescu declaring "Romanian is not a foreign language to any youth living in Romania. It is the language of our socialist society and it must be learned by all Romanian citizens."⁴² While Romania was a multi-ethnic state, the majority of citizens were ethnic Romanians, and if members of minority groups were expected to learn, work, and live in the country of Romania, it was reasonable that they possess proficiency in the Romanian language.

However, these policies are potentially more problematic in the case of the Hungarian minority, given the dispute over Transylvania. As mentioned earlier, Transylvania, which was previously part of the Austro-Hungarian empire, was given to Romania following World War I and the Treaty of Trianon. Without any movement, the Hungarian population, who had previously lived as citizens of Hungary, now found themselves as a minority group in a foreign nation as a result of the redrawn borders. This increased ethnic tensions and the debate over who has the right to Transylvania continues to this day. However, the Banat Swabians and Transylvanian Saxons were always a minority group. Whether under Austro-Hungary, the

⁴² Ibid., 126.

Ottoman Empire, or Romania, they had always occupied a space outside of the territorial boundaries of the German Reich. Because of this, there was no widespread resentment towards the Romanian state related to territorial disputes on the part of the Germans. The German and Hungarian experience differs significantly in this way, and the things that might have been especially difficult or repressive for Hungarians were not necessarily so for the Germans.

While these two policies can be seen as evidence that the Romanian Communist Party was anti-minority, they can also be interpreted more positively. These laws suggest that there is an equal place in Romanian society for people of various backgrounds, so long as they are willing to accept certain aspects of Romanian culture. There is nothing that directly forbids the use of other languages or the practice of non-Romanian cultural traditions in daily life, only that citizens must also know Romanian. While this policy is in line with communist ideas about minority status, it is also quite similar to Western ideas around immigration. Whether it be the integration of immigrants to the United States or even the case of the Aussiedler, who despite being ethnically German still had to go through a process of integration into West German society, most countries seem to agree that regardless of ethnic background, all citizens should be able to speak the dominant language and exist outside their own ethnic community. This is evidenced by the fact that many countries have language proficiency as a requirement for citizenship. Interestingly, Germany would later find itself in a similar situation, as the integration of *Gastarbeiter*⁴³ and refugees from the Middle East became a defining issue of German politics post-reunification.

The increase in German cultural representation, which had previously dwindled after World War II, also contradicts the narrative of state-sponsored suppression of German identity. In

⁴³ Migrant workers from Southern Europe and Turkey who moved to West Germany as part of the *Gastarbeiterprogramm* in the mid-20th century. Their descendants make up some of Germany's largest minority groups today.

1969, Romanian public television introduced its first German-language program.⁴⁴ That same year, the German Nationality Workers Council was established.⁴⁵ Additionally, the continued operation of the German theater of Timișoara, the Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn literary circle (whose membership included Richard Wagner and Nobel Prize winner Herta Müller), and the publication of hundreds of original books in German suggest that German identity was very much alive under Ceaușescu in the 1960s and 70s. While the existence of these programs does not preclude all forms of cultural discrimination, it is at least evidence that the Romanian government was not outwardly anti-German. Statements by Ceaușescu himself acknowledged the value and importance of ethnic minorities in Romania's history and future:

“Alongside the Romanian people have settled on large expanses in the course of centuries, and are living side by side Romanians, Magyars, Germans and other nationalities; everything that has been built, in the conditions of the past, but especially the successes obtained at present in socialist construction, are the joint work of the Romanian, Magyar and German working people and of those other nationalities who benefit today from the results of the building of our new society.”⁴⁶

Of course, public statements made by a politician, especially one as notorious as Ceaușescu, should not be taken at face value. Many Romanian citizens, especially those of Hungarian ancestry, might find this statement laughable. That being said, the acknowledgment of the multicultural origins of the modern Romanian state is suggestive of a fairly inclusive official stance.

The sentiment of a shared history between Romania's ethnic groups was echoed by many throughout the 1970s, specifically with the intent to discourage emigration in order to prevent the loss of skilled citizens and the cosmopolitan character that had long existed in cities such as

⁴⁴ Christel Ungar Țopescu. “Broadcast in German - 50-Year Anniversary.” *The Role of National Minorities in the Development of the Romanian Society*, (2019): 167.

⁴⁵ Dennis Deletant, 117.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

Timișoara. While the official negotiations were a secret from both the West German and Romanian citizens, the desire of some Swabians and Saxons to emigrate was well known. This desire was met with opposition from many sources, including Romanian-Germans. Eduard Eisenberger, who was Chairman of the Council of Working People of German Nationality, warned that Saxon and Swabian communities were at a greater risk of losing their identity by emigrating to “a society which is not their own.”⁴⁷ In 1977, Dan Zamfirescu, a Romanian literary historian, told Radio Bucharest that “Romania refuses to make a deal out of the destiny of the Saxons and Swabian population of German descent, for they are only remotely German in origin; if you like, they are just as much German as the Americans are English, or the Austrians are German.”⁴⁸ At the time of these comments, Romania was eight years into the deal with West Germany, and had already sent thousands of Romanian-Germans to the West.

Of course, many of the people who spoke out against emigration had ulterior motives. Despite being of German descent, Eduard Eisenberger was Chairman of a group founded by the Romanian Communist Party, and even if the group was more than a puppet for the regime, whatever power it did have would decrease as Romanian-Germans left the country. Zamfirescu, who was not of German descent, is noted for promoting Protochronism, a form of Romanian nationalism focused on an idealized past, which was especially prevalent under Ceaușescu. This certainly makes him biased on the topic of ethnic history, but it is also somewhat telling that, as was the case during the fascist years, Romanian-nationalist narratives were inclusive of Saxons and Swabians as part of the historical identity of Romania. This is in stark contrast to other nationalist movements, such as 20th-century German nationalism, which placed notions of racial purity over regional history. Of course, this should not be taken to mean that all Romanians felt

⁴⁷ Florica Dobre, Florian Banu. *Acțiunea "Recuperarea": Securitatea și emigrarea germanilor din România (1962-1989)*. (2011): 202.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 203.

this way, but rather to highlight the way that prominent voices pushed a narrative of inclusivity for the Germans of Romania.

In many ways, the Romanian government's treatment of the Romanian-Germans does not appear to be about the erasure of minority culture, but rather the modernization of the nation-state and the unification of people of various backgrounds under one government. With the exception of the years following WWII, Romanian-Germans generally enjoyed a model-minority status, being the closest ally group to both the Hungarians and Romanians, all while avoiding the persecution that the Jewish and Roma minorities faced. This does not mean that life wasn't hard for the Romanian-Germans, only that their hardships were not caused by their German heritage.



Figure 2.1. West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt (left) and Nicolae Ceaușescu during a state visit in January 1978.

Fototeca online a comunismului românesc. #44724X5179X5732

CHAPTER II: The Initial Negotiations (1969-1978)

Having established an understanding of the conditions for the Romanian-Germans leading up to the first departures, it is important to acknowledge the diplomatic history that laid the groundwork for the deals. The organized emigration of Romanian Jews began with the “Jakober-Marcu Gentlemen’s Agreement” under Dej in the late 1950s. Henry Jakober, a Bessarabian-born Jewish businessman from London with commercial interests in Romania, revealed to Securitate General Gheorghe Marcu that the Israelis would be willing to pay Romania for the emigration of Jews.⁴⁹ This offer was initially declined, but Jakober continued to push negotiations, and a one-time deal was eventually agreed upon in 1958. However, Dej had been urged by Soviet leader Nikita Krushchev to take other forms of compensation instead of hard currency, as it would appear better for Romania in the event that the existence of such a deal was ever made public.⁵⁰ The first transaction saw Jakober build an automated chicken farm in the

⁴⁹ Ion Mihai Pacepa, 73.

⁵⁰ Radu Ioanid. *The Ransom of the Jews : The Story of the Extraordinary Secret Bargain between Romania and Israel*. (2005): 84.

village of Periș in exchange for the passage of 500 Jewish families.⁵¹ Dej was pleased with the agreement and decided to approve more emigration in exchange for more farms. These farms were all paid for by Jakober, owned by the Romanian Ministry of Interior, and staffed by political prisoners, with Dej even advising Alexandru Draghici, the Minister of Interior, to “just arrest the ones you need and then use them” if there were not enough prisoners in the jail to meet labor demands.⁵²

These developments continued through the early 1960s, with the construction of numerous chicken, pork, cattle, and turkey farms, as well as a Kellogg's Cornflakes factory.⁵³ While the Romanians were not directly receiving money from this agreement, the agricultural production was being exported to the West in exchange for 8 to 10 million dollars annually.⁵⁴ It is not as cut and dry as the later agreements, but make no mistake, Dej was profiting immensely from the sale of citizens, as well as what was essentially slave labor. For whatever face would be saved by forgoing hard currency, as Krushchev advised, it would be hard to defend such practices to the international community if need be. Unsurprisingly, this arrangement was kept secret even from many within the Romanian leadership, and Dej was the only one with access to the Swiss bank account containing the profits.⁵⁵

Ceaușescu was unaware of this agreement until becoming Dej's successor in 1965.⁵⁶ Perhaps not yet realizing the benefit of such a deal, Ceaușescu ended the agreement and fired Gheorghe Marcu, effectively halting Jewish emigration. However, by 1967 he had a change of heart, bringing back Marcu and reopening communication with Jakober, though revising the terms of the deal. Instead of agricultural development, Ceaușescu preferred to cut to the chase

⁵¹ Ion Mihai Pacepa, 73.

⁵² Ibid., 74.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Radu Ioanid, 91.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ion Mihai Pacepa, 75.

and demanded hard currency. The recently renewed Jewish emigration deal lasted for decades, laying the foundation for the sale of an even larger minority group: the Germans.

The issue of family reunification for the Romanian-Germans had been present since the end of World War II, though due to the political instability of Europe in the post-war era, official diplomatic solutions would not be reached for some time. Instead, these issues were tackled by other organizations such as the German Red Cross, who handled much of the family reunification from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania, and the USSR in the 1940s and 50s. In May 1948, the Romanian Red Cross agreed to handle specific reunification cases referred by the International Committee of the Red Cross, and by 1950, over 100 reunifications had been resolved.⁵⁷ The efforts continued following the 1954 International Red Cross Conference in Oslo, and from 1955 to 1967, 15,271 Romanian-Germans were able to enter West Germany thanks to the work of the Red Cross.⁵⁸ However, the majority of these departures took place prior to 1963, as the Red Cross took a back seat after declaring that family reunification should be taken on by governments.⁵⁹

It should be noted that, at least initially, there was a distinction between family reunification (*Familienzusammenführung*) and ethnic resettlement. Following the conclusion of World War II, it was not uncommon for families to be separated by borders. In the case of the Romanian-Germans, many who had been sent to Soviet labor camps were “returned” to Germany, their perceived ethnic homeland, instead of Romania, their country of birth where their relatives remained.⁶⁰ Even if one had wanted to return to Romania, given the complicated nature

⁵⁷ H.G. Beckh. “The Reuniting of Families in Europe During and After the Second World War.” *International Review of the Red Cross*, no. 227 (April 1982): 78.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁵⁹ Heinz Günther Hüscher, 21.

⁶⁰ Remus Gabriel Anghel, Laura Gheorghiu. “The Mass Migration of Romania's Germans. Patterns, Timeframes and Romanian-German Inter-Institutional Arrangements in the 20th Century.” *Review of Historical Geography and Toponomastics* XV, no. 29-30 (2020): 30.

of European borders in the post-war period, it was not as simple as taking a train from Berlin to Bucharest. As the years went on, Romanian-Germans in the West continued to push for the relocation of their spouses, parents, siblings, and children. Considering that many of the family separations occurred as a result of the deportation and forced labor of ethnic Germans, the case can easily be made that the issue was the product of anti-German sentiment in Eastern Europe.

The West German government remained interested in assisting the resettlement of Romanian-Germans, though no official contact between the West German and Romanian governments took place until May 1958, when a West German delegation, which included the representative of the German Red Cross, traveled to Bucharest.⁶¹ The goal of the meeting was said to have been related to trade, but the German side was keen on resolving the issue of the German minority in Romania. The resettlement of first-degree relatives was eventually approved by the Central Committee of Romanian Workers' Party, though the criteria for departure was very strict, and anyone who failed to obtain approval would live worse than before as a result of revealing their desire to leave.⁶² This agreement lasted only a few months, as departures were halted in October 1958 following an unspecified act of espionage. The West Germans attempted to resume movement but were met with resistance from the Romanian side. The next strategy employed by West Germany would be a media campaign, designed to put international pressure on Bucharest. Unfortunately for the Federal Republic, Romania's position was not swayed by the negative press.

Talks cooled until 1961 when Henry Jakober offered to arrange the departure of 500 Romanian-Germans in exchange for \$500,000. West Germany felt that 500 people was far too low a percentage of the Romanian-German population (which was roughly 380,000) to warrant a

⁶¹ Heinz Günther Hüscher, 20.

⁶² Remus Gabriel Anghel, 34.

deal and declined Jakober's offer. No major developments occurred until May 1964, when the Romanian Foreign Minister revealed on a visit to Bonn that the Romanian government would be willing to accept a list of Romanian-Germans wishing to emigrate. By May 1966, over 13,000 names had been given to the Romanian side, but no progress had been made. That same year, West German Federal Minister of Economics, Kurt Schmücker, was told by Romanian Prime Minister Ion Gheorghe Maurer that Romania would take a greater interest in cases of family separation but that a large population transfer for the larger Romanian-German community would not happen.⁶³

Dr. Ewald Garlepp, a Stuttgart lawyer, had been dealing with cases of persecution against ethnic Germans in Central and Eastern Europe since the mid-1940s. Working with the Evangelical Church and other organizations, Garlepp managed to assist in resettlement and family reunification on individual scales throughout the 1950s while building relationships in the East. By November 1962, Garlepp had negotiated a deal with the Romanians to send \$150,000 (coming from the West German government, German Red Cross, and relatives of the Romanian-Germans) in exchange for 106 Romanian-Germans.⁶⁴ While laying the groundwork for future agreements, these exchanges were much smaller and less official than the ones that would follow in later years.

In Fall 1967, Heinz Günther Hüscher, a lawyer from Neuss who had experience with Romania from representing a toilet paper importer, was approached by CDU politician Ernst Lemmer about Romanian-German repatriation. While the work of Dr. Garlepp was certainly meaningful, the German side hoped to widen the scope of the deals, with Hüscher saying, "we

⁶³ Heinz Günther Hüscher, 22.

⁶⁴ Remus Gabriel Anghel, 36.

wanted justice for everyone, not just the wealthy with money.”⁶⁵ Hüscher got on board the project and, following Dr. Garlepp’s 1968 visit to Bucharest, took a leading role in the negotiations. The records of Heinz Günther Hüscher, published in 2016 as *Wege in die Freiheit: deutsch-rumänische Dokumente zur Familienzusammenführung und Aussiedlung*, serve as one of the foundational sources of information on the secret exchanges.



Figure 2.2. Dr. Heinz Günther Hüscher (right) at a 1987 Bundestag Meeting. Bundesarchiv, B 145 Bild-F074340-0035 / Schaack, Lothar / CC-BY-SA 3.0

As for the West German side, the deals offered some value in the development of post-war German society, both culturally and politically. First and foremost, it should be noted that there was a genuine humanitarian interest in the Romanian-Germans, and the writings of Dr. Heinz Günther Hüscher highlight this: “as a Rhenish Catholic who lived through the National Socialist era and

was beaten up as an altar boy by the Hitler Youth, I had a lot of sympathy for those who were stuck there. Our prosperity exploded while in Romania the material situation was noticeably falling.”⁶⁶ The mass expulsion of Germans in Eastern Europe following World War II, largely as a result of the violent German nationalism perpetrated by the Nazis, left the West Germans with some degree of responsibility for the diaspora that had been displaced and suffered due to the actions of their ethnic homeland. As previously noted, members of the German diaspora played a huge role in the crimes of the Third Reich, but many who faced anti-German retribution were

⁶⁵ Birgit Franchy, Heinz Günther Hüscher. *Gekaufte Freiheit – Interview mit Dr. Heinz Günther Hüscher*. February 24, 2018. <https://movieaachen.de/gekaufte-freiheit-interview-mit-dr-heinz-guenther-huesch/>.

⁶⁶ Hannelore Baier and Heinz Günther Hüscher. “Es war der Kauf von Freiheit: Gespräch mit Dr. Heinz Günther Hüscher, dem deutschen Verhandlungsführer beim Freikauf der Rumäniendeutschen.” *Allgemeine Deutsche Zeitung Für Rumänien*, October 29, 2011. <https://adz.ro/artikel/artikel/es-war-der-kauf-von-freiheit>.

innocent. It is this duty to perceived fellow Germans that drove people like Dr. Hüscher and Chancellor Kohl to take action, even if there was not a societal consensus:

“The desire to preserve Germanness and at the same time to prevent resettlement came about at times when the people were not prepared to give up any of their prosperity and to limit the pursuit of even more prosperity. [...] Even if not all cases were driven by the desire for family reunification, rather by economic wishes, it was understandable that many parents wanted a safe and free future for their children. Compared to the wish to preserve Germanness, the right to freedom and life, to integrity and future had to be valued much more highly for the next generation. I have therefore often taken the opportunity and seen the need to counter doubts about the correctness of the German approach. However, such doubts never existed with Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl. He was permeated by the fact that with increasing selfishness in German society it would only be possible for a limited time to make financial sacrifices for the return of the Germans to freedom.” - Hüscher⁶⁷

Hüscher's characterization of the internal debate is interesting for a number of reasons, most crucial being the suggestion that to not intervene on behalf of the Romanian-Germans would be selfish, and Chancellor Kohl's belief that the window of opportunity was closing due to increased prosperity and in turn “selfishness” in West Germany. On the one hand, equating lack of concern for the Romanian-Germans on the basis of shared heritage with selfishness had some questionable implications to many on the Left. Considering that the official position of West Germany was “*wir sind kein Einwanderungsland*”⁶⁸ (we are not a country of immigration), one could argue that assisting ethnic Germans in other countries on the basis of ethnicity was, in fact, incredibly selfish and simply a rehash of the German ethnonationalism seen in the 1913 nationality law and the later Nuremberg laws. Would it be such a bad thing if a German speaker in Bonn didn't value the well-being of a German speaker in Transylvania more than the

⁶⁷ Heinz Günther Hüscher 37-38.

⁶⁸ Rogers Brubaker. *Citizenship and nationhood in France and Germany*. (1992): 174.

well-being of a Turk in Anatolia? On the other hand, there was a logical link between the German speakers of Eastern Europe and West Germany, especially considering historical German definitions of citizenship. It is the classic dilemma of nationalism, only made more complicated by the legacy of Nazism and the division of Germany.

However, hundreds of thousands of lives were improved by the West German initiative to organize the departure of Romanian-Germans, and to imply that West Germany should not have helped, in an effort to be equally indifferent to the suffering of all peoples, would be to say that it's worse to be a hypocrite than a bystander. Kohl's hunch that the public's sense of duty to help the "*Volksdeutsche*"⁶⁹ was running out could be framed as an attempt to use the problematic legacy of Pan-Germanism for something good before letting it die. By resettling Germans from Eastern Europe in the Federal Republic, West Germany's goal was in some ways the exact opposite of *Lebensraum*, the settler-colonialism of Eastern Europe that had long been central to German nationalism. Hüscher mentions that some sections of society wanted the Romanian-Germans to remain there in order to maintain German identity outside the country, which Hüscher dismisses, saying "compared to the wish to preserve Germanness, the right to freedom and life, to integrity and future had to be valued much more highly for the next generation."⁷⁰ Can one make the argument that to offer special help to a population who never lived within the borders of the country only out of a sense of shared ethnicity is problematic? Sure. But to not help them could also be seen as equally, if not more, troublesome. This is where the debate gets truly difficult, specifically regarding West German aid to the Transylvanian Saxon and Banat Swabian communities that were not emigrating.

⁶⁹ Term used to describe ethnic Germans who were not citizens of Germany, popularized during the Nazi-era.

⁷⁰ Heinz Günther Hüscher, 38.

German-speaking communities had been an important part of the region for nearly 800 years, and erasure of that culture would be tragic in a way. However, if Romanian-Germans were automatically eligible for West German citizenship by virtue of ethnicity, while non-German Romanians were not, it would imply that they were Germans and not Romanians. In this case, there should be no extra effort to maintain German culture in Romania. Either the Transylvanian Saxons and Banat Swabians were of West German nationality, and therefore the Romanian government had no responsibility to protect this culture, or they were Romanians, and the West German government had no responsibility to repatriate them. While both of these options fail to perfectly address the complexity of diaspora, not picking one gives the Germans of Romania an especially privileged and unique status above both Romanian and West German citizens. The West Germans, or at least the CDU, viewed the Romanian-Germans as West German citizens but were not allowed to facilitate the departure of the entire population due to Romania's reluctance. Does this make West German investment in the well-being and cultural preservation of the Romanian-Germans left behind a humanitarian duty to its citizens or something slightly neo-colonialist that undermines the Romanian government?

One clear example of this debate is found in a transcript of a 1987 meeting between Dr. Hüscher and the Romanian representative, Col. Constantin Anghelache.⁷¹ In the meeting, Hüscher expresses concern about the food shortages and overall unrest in Romania, before offering to provide aid to the cities of Brasov, Sibiu, Timișoara, and Târgu Mureș, which, as Dr. Anghelache points out, are the cities with significant German populations.⁷² Hüscher responds to this by explaining that this is intentional, as the plan is meant to provide aid to the Germans specifically, though the goods would go through normal organizations and be open to people of all

⁷¹ Ibid., 228.

⁷² Ibid., 233-234.

backgrounds, as long as they live in the area. Dr. Anghelache asks about aid to the city of Constanța, where the population is primarily Romanian with Turkish and Tatar minorities. When Hüscher admits that it hadn't occurred to him to deliver there, despite the fact that it was roughly tied for Romania's second-largest city, Anghelache tells him that Romania can not distribute aid to just one part of the country. Hüscher assures him that the aid would be kept a secret, implying that the Romanian side would not need to answer for any preferential treatment. If the German side were truly interested in helping Romanians of non-German origin, logically, they would give aid to the whole country instead of trying to persuade the Romanian government to allow for aid to be given to a specific region. While Hüscher mentions that other ethnic groups could also receive the aid, it is very clear that by targeting German cultural centers, the intention was to help Germans specifically.

Of course, there was significant reluctance on the part of the Romanian side to accept any aid, so it is likely that even if West Germany were to agree to distribute aid equally across all regions, Romania still would have declined. In the same meeting, Dr. Anghelache calls the reports of the dire situation in Romania exaggerated and claims that "the only purpose of this propaganda is to lure away people who have a technical or highly qualified job."⁷³ Because aid from the West could be seen as part of a larger conspiracy to undermine the Ceaușescu regime, which given the dynamics of the Cold War, was not unreasonable, West Germany had little opportunity to genuinely help the situation. This once again gets back to the heart of the issue: is it better to help some, even if you can not or choose not to help all? The ideology behind these deals was one that undoubtedly valued those who were culturally German more than any other group, but it was also unreasonable to expect West Germany to protect the well-being of all the

⁷³ Ibid., 230.

Earth's peoples, lest they be seen as embracing the ethnonationalism that destroyed much of Europe decades earlier.

Another, more cynical motive for the interest in Romanian-Germans was a partisan one. The Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the conservative party that Helmut Kohl and Heinz Günther Hüscher were members of, was typically more outspoken in favor of the interests of the German diaspora. Many ethnic Germans from Central and Eastern Europe, referred to as *Aussiedler*, tended to be more conservative in their views and, having lived under communism, were wary of the socialist policies pushed by West Germany's more left-leaning parties making them natural CDU voters.⁷⁴ There certainly was a political advantage to bringing in the Romanian-Germans, expanding the constituency of the CDU.

Though Romanian-German migration was a primarily CDU cause, the agreements existed under the leadership of Willy Brandt and Helmut Schmidt, both members of the Social Democratic Party (SPD). Brandt is well known for his advocacy of Ostpolitik: the improvement of relations between West Germany and the Eastern Bloc countries, ultimately with the goal of reuniting Germany. The position previously held by West German leadership, based on the Hallstein Doctrine, was that West Germany represented the sole legitimate state of the German people and that any country that recognized East Germany would no longer have diplomatic ties with West Germany. Ostpolitik argued that the Hallstein Doctrine did more harm than good for the future of Europe and advocated for official diplomatic relations with the East, especially between the two German states. Willy Brandt became Chancellor in 1969, the same year of the first departure agreement with Romania, and soon led the overhaul of West Germany's policy towards Eastern Europe by signing the Treaty of Moscow and the Treaty of Warsaw in 1970,

⁷⁴ Edmund Spevack. "Ethnic Germans from the East: "Aussiedler" in Germany, 1970–1994." *German Politics & Society* 13, no. 4 (37) (1995): 76. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23736265>.

officially recognizing Poland. This was followed by the Basic Treaty of 1972, which established diplomatic relations between East and West Germany.

Ostpolitik was continued to an extent by Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who continued to take an interest in the fate of the Romanian-Germans throughout the 1980s. According to Dr. Hüscher “[Kohl] also saw the agreement with the Romanian side as a methodological means of persuading the government of the GDR to be more accommodating in the humanitarian sector.”⁷⁵ Based on this statement and the fact that the beginning of the relationship between West Germany and Romania coincided with the implementation of Ostpolitik, it seems quite probable that the departure of Romanian-Germans and payments to Ceaușescu’s government were carried out, at least partially, in the name of Ostpolitik.

While these agreements were of value to the West German government, it was Ceaușescu who truly benefited from the partnership. Pleased with the results of the Jewish ransom to Israel, Ceaușescu began exploring a similar strategy with the German minority, which due to larger numbers, was seen as having even greater potential for profit.⁷⁶ On March 7, 1969, the West German and Romanian sides signed the first written agreement in Stockholm, which would send at least 3,000 Romanian-Germans to West Germany between March 15, 1969 and March 14, 1970. In this first batch of departures, eligibility was limited to a few types of relationships or otherwise extenuating circumstances. For cases of family reunification, it had to be immediate family members, meaning only parents, children, spouses, and siblings were eligible. However, there were also “Hardship Cases”, in which war victims, prisoners, the seriously ill, and those unable to work were also eligible.⁷⁷ These qualifications would not encompass all of the Romanian-Germans who wished to leave, but it was a solid start for the two governments.

⁷⁵ Heinz Günther Hüscher, 38.

⁷⁶ Ion Mihai Pacepa, 76.

⁷⁷ Heinz Günther Hüscher, 86.

Compensation for the different types of departures varied. It was agreed upon that those wishing to leave would be divided into three groups, each with a flat rate for departure to be paid by the West German government.⁷⁸ Group A consisted of the elderly and those without any level of higher education. The members of this group cost 1,700 DM a head (equivalent to \$3,030 in 2021). Group B referred to those in the process of getting a degree and cost 5,000 DM (equivalent to \$8,900). Group C were those who had a degree and were actively contributing to the workforce. This group was the most valued at 10,000 DM per person (equivalent of \$17,800). These groupings would continue to be revised and expanded in the decades to come, but it provided a basis for the value of the departures. The cheapest would be those who could not contribute to the West German or Romanian economy (the elderly past working age) or those who had not completed a Romanian education, meaning that the country had not invested as much in their training and development. Group B housed potential but would require additional schooling or training to be fully ready to contribute to society, hence the mid-range price. Group C was the most valued commodity, given that they were highly trained and skilled individuals whose arrival would most benefit West Germany and departure would most hurt Romania.

While it may be a very blunt and dehumanizing way to discuss human beings, there is logic behind it. Under communism, Romania had invested significantly in its citizens' training and education, which in theory would then be repaid through decades of service to the country. To allow some of the best and brightest of Romania's workforce to take their skills elsewhere would quickly hinder the development of the nation and undermine the communist system as a whole. By assigning a price to prospective emigrants based on age, education, health and other factors, the Romanian government was at least compensated for the loss of valuable citizens. It is especially important to consider the historical reputation of Romanian-Germans as well. As

⁷⁸ Heinz Günther Hüscher, 87-88.

previously mentioned, the Saxons and Swabians had the reputation of being skilled and valuable members of society. A similar reputation existed for the Jews, though it was complicated by widespread anti-Semitism. Given this model-minority status, the Romanians would need to be enticed by the potential return in order to give up these assets.

After the expiration of the first agreement, which sent approximately 2,500 Romanian-Germans west, Bonn and Bucharest began work on another deal. This second agreement would be larger in scope but also contain more stipulations. The Romanian side agreed to send at least 20,000 Romanian-Germans between March 1970 and December 1973. However, if the number of departures reached 40,000, there would be additional benefits. The cheapest group, Group A, was made up of men over the age of 62, women over the age of 60, and those who did not fall under any of the other categories and cost 1,800 DM (\$3,250).⁷⁹ Group B was split into two categories, B1 and B2. B1 were those who had gone above minimum schooling and carried a price of 5,500 DM (\$9,920). B2 were those who had gone above minimum schooling and were in the final 2 years of their training, raising their value to 7,000 DM (\$12,600). Anyone who had completed university with a degree was placed in Group C, valued at 11,000 DM (\$19,800). The final group, Group D, consisted of those who had a job but did not have any level of higher education. Members of this group were valued at 2,900 DM (\$5,230). However, there was a special condition that no more than 20% of the emigrants could be from Group D, and if it exceeded that, then the additional Group D departures would be placed in Group A. This ensured that Romania would not disproportionately send its least-skilled workers.

The compensation would come in chunks, with West Germany providing 600,000 DM (\$1,080,000) on December 31, 1970, another 600,000 DM on December 31, 1971, and a third

⁷⁹ Heinz Günther Hüscher, 88.

payment of 800,000 DM (\$1,740,000) due on September 30, 1973. If 30,000 departures were reached, West Germany would pay 3,000,000 DM. If 40,000, it would go up to 4,000,000 DM. In addition to the cash payments, West Germany agreed to provide a commercial loan to Romania of up to 100 Million DM (\$158,000,000) with favorable terms.⁸⁰ There were also smaller “gifts”, including 1 BMW 2000, 4 Ford Taunus XL, and 1 Mercedes 280 SE (with special equipment).⁸¹ According to Securitate records, this special equipment referred to film projectors and speakers installed in the van.⁸² Another Securitate record, a note from Gheorghe Marcu (using the codename Dorin Pavelescu) to Ion Stanescu, reveals that an exchange took place on October 12, 1971, in which the Securitate received dozens of radios, tape recorders, camera, and a Grundig Closed Circuit TV system⁸³ from West Germany free of charge.⁸⁴ Also included in the transaction were four automobiles, three hunting rifles, tear gas, and 2,100,000 DM (\$3,810,000). The hunting rifles were reportedly for Ceaușescu himself. There is an amusing anecdote involving the procurement of these rifles, courtesy of Hüscher.⁸⁵ The exchange was initially supposed to occur in Paris, but the Romanian middleman got stuck in Cologne. Upon hearing this, Hüscher went to pick him up and allowed him to stay at his home with his family, where the Securitate agent spent time teaching Hüscher’s son the Butterfly stroke in the family’s pool. While it is never explicitly stated that these West German supplies were ever used for unethical purposes, it seems almost implausible that one of the most repressive surveillance states of the 20th century would request these materials for a purpose other than surveillance.

On the topic of espionage, Pacepa alleges that Ceaușescu attempted to use the German and Jewish emigrants as spies, telling him in 1972 that “no Romanian citizen of Jewish or

⁸⁰ Ibid., 89.

⁸¹ Heinz Günther Hüscher, 92.

⁸² Florica Dobre, 142.

⁸³ Ibid., 177.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 169-171.

⁸⁵ Birgit Franchy

German descent should be given an emigration visa unless he has signed a secret agreement with the security forces and has agreed to act as an intelligence agent abroad.”⁸⁶ Not a lot is known about this practice, as it seems that it was not particularly fruitful. Pacepa does mention that while most of the German emigrants never reported back to the Securitate, the country with the most agents uncovered in West Germany in 1972 was Romania.⁸⁷ Because of the lack of information on this topic, no major conclusions can be drawn. However, if this is legitimate, it demonstrates Ceaușescu’s desire to take advantage of every possible opportunity to gain leverage over his Western trade partners.

The next deal was agreed upon on April 4, 1973, with the goal of reaching 40,000 departures by June 30, 1978. This would require roughly 8,000 departures a year. Importantly, the departures were now referred to as “legal emigration” instead of “family reunification.”⁸⁸ The rates stayed the same, but there were adjustments made to the loans. The agreement states: “The foreign trade bank of the Socialist Republic of Romania will take out a loan of up to 200 million DM from a German bank named and arranged by the German contractual partner. This loan is granted for a period of eight years. There is no repayment for the first four years. In the last four credit years it is repaid with 1/4 of the loan amount.”⁸⁹ This loan would equal approximately \$434,000,000 in 2021. It was also agreed that the Romanians could request up to 50% of the payment be made in banknotes, which would not require a written receipt of the transaction.⁹⁰ From June 11 to August 27, 1973, 2,211 Romanian-Germans arrived in West Germany, costing the country 6,400,200 DM (\$14,000,000).⁹¹

⁸⁶ Ion Mihai Pacepa, 76.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 77.

⁸⁸ Remus Gabriel Anghel, 38.

⁸⁹ Heinz Günther Hüsche, 103-104.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 104.

⁹¹ Ibid., 107.

Upon the expiration of the 1973 agreement in 1978, the two sides negotiated another deal in Vienna. This deal did away with the groupings, instead opting for a flat rate of 4,000 DM per person, which though lower than the higher end departures, was on average 700 DM (\$1,362) more than they had been paying. It is said that a quarterly payment of 8 Million DM was transferred to account #180-03 of the Romanian Foreign Trade Bank at the Frankfurt-Bucharest Bank.⁹² While the sale of Romanian-Germans was proving to be quite lucrative for Ceaușescu, the benefits to Ceaușescu's bank account were matched by the diplomatic advantages the collaboration with West Germany provided.

| Year | Romanian-German Departures | | |
|------|----------------------------|-------------------|---------|
| 1969 | 2,675 | 1980 | 15,767 |
| 1970 | 6,519 | 1981 | 12,031 |
| 1971 | 2,848 | 1982 | 12,972 |
| 1972 | 4,374 | 1983 | 15,501 |
| 1973 | 7,577 | 1984 | 16,554 |
| 1974 | 8,484 | 1985 | 13,972 |
| 1975 | 5,077 | 1986 | 13,130 |
| 1976 | 3,764 | 1987 | 13,994 |
| 1977 | 10,989 | 1988 | 12,902 |
| 1978 | 12,120 | 1989 | 23,387 |
| 1979 | 9,963 | Total (1969-1989) | 224,600 |

Figure 2.3. Departures of Romanian-Germans (1969-1989)
Compiled using information from Heinz-Günther Hüsch's *Wege in Die Freiheit : Deutsch-Rumänische Dokumente Zur Familienzusammenführung Und Aussiedlung 1968-1989*.

⁹² Ibid., 118.

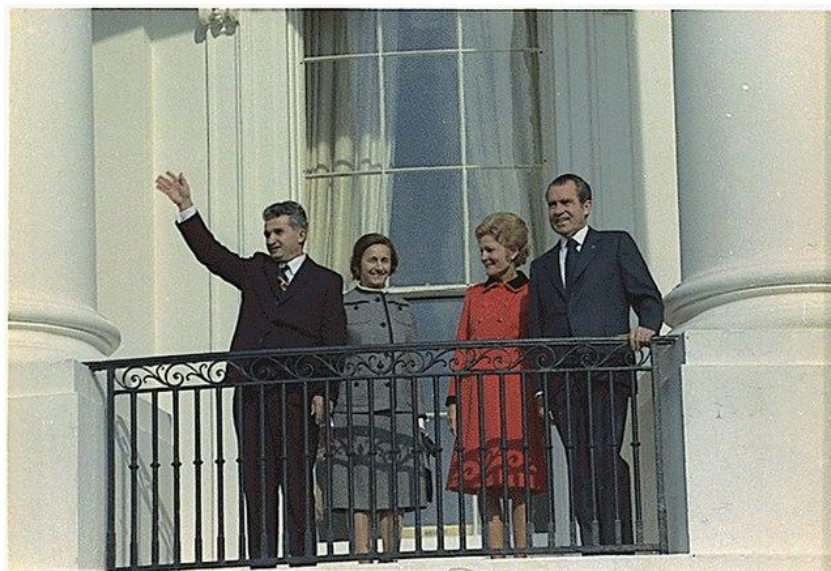


Figure 3.1. Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu with U.S. President Richard Nixon and First Lady Pat Nixon during a 1973 visit to the White House. Image courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration. Photograph by Robert L. Knudsen.

CHAPTER III: The Construction of the Maverick State (1964-1989)

In order to make claims about the diplomatic benefits these deals gave to Romania's status as a maverick state, one must first understand the relationship between Romania and the Soviet Union. As previously alluded to, Ceaușescu took after Mao and Yugoslavia's Josip Broz Tito when it came to his stance on the Soviets. Following the Prague Spring, Ceaușescu became a symbol of resistance against Soviet aggression in the eyes of the West, but there has since been much debate over the legitimacy of this persona. While it is perhaps giving too much credit to paint Ceaușescu as a brave and rebellious leader, evidence suggests that the Soviet government was forced to treat Romania differently than the other Eastern bloc countries due to their non-conformist leadership. American historian Larry Watts has even gone so far as to use the term "clandestine war" when referring to the Soviet Union's policy towards Romania.⁹³

⁹³ Larry Watts. *With Friends like These--: the Soviet Bloc's Clandestine War against Romania*. Bucharest: Editura Militară, (2010).

Prior to communism, relations between Romania and Russia were a mixed bag. On the one hand, it was with the help of the Russians that Romania was able to gain independence from the Ottoman Empire in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877. However, unlike the Serbs and Bulgarians, Romanians are not a Slavic group and therefore lacked the special pan-Slavic relationship with Russia that other Balkan states had, instead admiring France and Italy due to a shared Latin heritage. Of course, there was also tension around Russian claims to the ethnically Romanian Bessarabia, and a general fear of Russian imperialism was prevalent. By the early 1960s, Moscow and Bucharest were drifting due to the COMECON proposal of shared economic planning between the Warsaw Pact countries. Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, who hoped to industrialize Romania, saw this proposal as limiting Romania's potential for industrial growth, as well as its sovereignty.⁹⁴ In April 1964, the Romanian Worker's Party declared its intention to resist socialist internationalism and maintain economic independence, denouncing Soviet interference in the affairs of other communist countries. Just a year before his death, Dej had laid the groundwork for the eventual maverick state that his successor, Nicolae Ceaușescu, would build upon.

When Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej died of lung cancer in 1965, many, including Ceaușescu, believed that he had, in fact, been irradiated by the KGB, as it was said that Dej's symptoms began with throat pain after a trip to Moscow.⁹⁵ Whether true or false, this conspiracy lingered in Ceaușescu's mind, and after developing a sore throat following a visit to the USSR, Ceaușescu believed that he too had been the target of an assassination attempt by the Kremlin. After weeks of examination by doctors, both from Romania and abroad, it was determined that the pain was

⁹⁴ Vladimir Tismaneanu. *Gheorghiu-Dej and the Romanian Workers' Party : From De-Sovietization to the Emergence of National Communism*. Working Paper, No. 37. Washington, D.C.: Cold War International History Project, Woodrow Wilson International Center of Scholars, (2002): 46.

⁹⁵ Ion Mihai Pacepa, 248.

the result of vocal cord irritation, with a West German doctor bluntly telling the Romanian leader, “you talk too much and too loudly.”⁹⁶

While Dej had begun forming ties to the West, it was Ceaușescu’s condemnation of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia that resulted in the most tension between Romania and the rest of the Eastern Bloc. Ceaușescu’s motivation for the opposition was not to protect a sense of democracy and human rights but rather, it was based on the desire for Romania to remain independent and the fear that he too could be pushed out by the superpower to the east. Immediately following his speech condemning the invasion and speaking out against Soviet intervention on August 21, 1968, Ceaușescu created *Gărzile Patriotice* (the Patriotic Guards), stating that this militia “formed of workers, peasants and intellectuals shall be immediately reorganized in order to assure the Romanian people's peaceful work, the homeland's national sovereignty and independence.”⁹⁷ The formation of this citizen’s army was explicitly aimed at preventing a Soviet invasion and remained in operation until 1989, when it was made up of 700,000 men and women.⁹⁸ Meanwhile, Moscow and the Soviet satellite states began collecting data on Romania as if it were a Western country, with Romania now a secondary target in the anti-China INTERKIT operation due to the budding Romanian-Chinese relationship.⁹⁹ Soviet records from 1978 are evidence of this concern: “it is impossible not to observe that China, in developing its relations with Romania, pursues the aim of creating a single international front in the struggle against the USSR.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ “Protocol No. 5 of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the CC of the RCP on the situation in Czechoslovakia.” <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110454>

⁹⁸ Ronald D. Bachman. *Romania: a Country Study*. (1991): xix.

⁹⁹ Larry Watts. “A Romanian Interkit?: Soviet Active Measures and the Warsaw Pact ‘Maverick,’ 1965-1989.” *CWIHP Working Paper #65*. (December 2012): 7.

¹⁰⁰ Gromyko and Potapov, “Conspect of Conversations with V. I. Potapov, Chief of Romanian Sector of CPSU CC Section.” <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114158>

Like Dej before him, Ceaușescu was focused on industrializing Romania and creating a multifaceted economy that could increase the country's international influence, which would require support beyond the Eastern Bloc. Having joined the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in 1972, the Romanian Communist Party saw a legitimate path to becoming the third or fourth most important communist country, something that frankly should not have been possible given Romania's lack of production and minimal cultural influence outside its borders. Though it is certainly debatable to claim that Romania ever truly achieved this, it is undeniable that, under Ceaușescu, the country took on greater importance than it likely should have. Much of this was the result of Ceaușescu's desire to act as a mediator on world conflicts. For example, Richard Nixon's 1969 visit to Bucharest was the first time an American president had visited a Warsaw Pact country. The trip was made in part to ask Ceaușescu to bridge the gap between the United States and China and assist in resolving the issue of the Vietnam war, with Nixon telling Ceaușescu, "we would welcome your playing a mediating role between us and China."¹⁰¹ This role potentially undermined the Soviets, especially since Ceaușescu was having some degree of influence on U.S. foreign policy. Nixon admitted at a National Security Council meeting that while he had previously seen the Soviets as more reasonable than the Chinese, Ceaușescu disputed this and convinced Nixon that Moscow was actually more aggressive.¹⁰²

Another noteworthy aspiration of Ceaușescu's was solving the Israel-Palestine conflict, which created some very interesting diplomatic challenges. While Romania was the first Warsaw Pact country to recognize the state of Israel and engage in significant trade (most importantly of human beings), Ceaușescu was seen as a true friend of the Arab world. He would frequently host Yasser Arafat, the Chairman of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, providing money to the

¹⁰¹ Larry Watts, 15.

¹⁰² Ibid.

Palestinians, as well as collaborate with noted anti-Zionists Muammar Gaddafi and Saddam



Figure 3.2. Yasser Arafat (left) with Nicolae Ceaușescu during a visit in Bucharest in 1974.
Image courtesy of the Romanian National History Museum (through the Project Communism in Romania)

Hussein on various projects.

However, Ceaușescu did play a role in arranging the visit of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to Jerusalem in 1977, a historic moment, as it marked the first Arab leader to officially visit Israel and eventually led to the signing of the Camp David Accords and the

Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty. Truth be told, Romania had no real business getting involved in the Middle East or the Vietnam War, but Ceaușescu's love of diplomacy helped propel the nation to the role of a miniature power. He could market himself as a "good communist" to the West and play on Romania's struggle against imperialism to forge connections with the leaders of the so-called third world. This ability to play all sides without taking a firm position is what the Soviets perceived as a threat. The prospect of conflict with the Soviets and their satellite states was undoubtedly frightening for the Romanians, but with NATO and China on Romania's side, the Soviets would have to think twice about meddling in the affairs of their Balkan neighbor.

According to British historian Christopher Andrew's assessment of KGB records, Soviet spies were tasked with collecting information about "Romanian relations with the United States and China; Romanian claims on Soviet territory in Bessarabia and north Bukovina; the political and economic basis of opposition to the Soviet Union; the position of the German and Hungarian

minorities; the Ceaușescu cult; and the state of the Romanian Communist Party.”¹⁰³ The fact that Romania’s minorities were of interest to the Soviets is suggestive of a perceived vulnerability in the nation that could be exploited for diplomatic gain. While there is no way to say for certain, it has been suggested that if enough unrest occurred amongst the minority groups, the Soviets could use it as an excuse to invade and overthrow Ceaușescu.¹⁰⁴ This might sound a bit paranoid on the part of Ceaușescu, but there is some evidence to support the validity of such a threat. Though not much information is known, it has been alleged that the Securitate discovered a Soviet plan termed *Dnestr*, which involved replacing Ceaușescu with a Soviet-backed puppet government.¹⁰⁵ Although Yugoslavia and China had already paved the way for anti-Soviet Communism, Romania was a much smaller country than China and, unlike Yugoslavia, shared a border with the USSR. For this reason, Ceaușescu could not allow the situation for minority groups to deteriorate, which might have influenced the decision to ramp up Romanian-German emigration. In this regard, the deals offered multiple benefits, not only improving the situation for some minority groups, if only in the short term, but also establishing closer relationships with West Germany, Israel, and in turn, the United States.

Even dating back to the Dej regime, Romania’s relationship with NATO was heavily dependent on the emigration of minority groups. Because of Israel’s interest in the repatriation of Romanian-Jews, an issue that also had substantial support from American Jewish organizations, the United States was inclined to monitor the situation. By 1963, the fate of the Jews, coupled with Dej’s move towards independence from the Soviets, led the United States to become active players in the ongoing negotiations. William Crawford, the head of U.S. legation in Bucharest,

¹⁰³ Christopher M. Andrew, Vasili Mitrokhin. *The Sword and the Shield: the Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB*. (2001): 270.

¹⁰⁴ Dennis Deletant, 116.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 84.

communicated to the Romanian deputy minister of foreign affairs that “Romanian-American relations could best be improved were Bucharest to let more people emigrate, especially those seeking family reunification.”¹⁰⁶ Romania complied, with hopes of one day achieving Most Favored Nation trade status with the United States, which would allow for greater international trade opportunities and a seat at the table beyond the Warsaw Pact nations. It was becoming clear that Romania’s minority groups offered an opportunity to help break with the Russians and achieve global power that had long eluded the largely underdeveloped, perpetually conquered nation. However, the road to Most Favored Nation status was a long one, not being achieved until 1975, in part due to Romanian reluctance to increase emigration.

The congressional hearings regarding Romania’s MFN status dwelled on the issue of emigration for some time, as the number of approved émigrés to the United States and other Western nations in 1975 had decreased significantly from the previous year, giving the impression that Romania was beginning to restrict emigration.¹⁰⁷ This was an issue because freedom of emigration is theoretically a factor in a country’s MFN eligibility. The Romanian side pushed for the emigration issue to not hold as much weight in the decision, arguing that for a developing country, the continued loss of the skilled and educated Jewish minority would be harmful to future development. While this is true, Ceaușescu’s alleged enthusiasm for ransoming off minorities makes it likely that this was largely a negotiation tactic. After all, if Jews and Germans were truly considered Romania’s greatest export, as Pacepa alleges, it would be foolish not to prolong the supply by limiting emigration quotas. The hearings only make mention of emigration to Israel and the United States. It is unclear whether or not the United States was aware of West Germany’s dealings with Ceaușescu at this time, as this was before Ion Mihai

¹⁰⁶ Radu Ioanid, 81-82.

¹⁰⁷ Thad W. Simons Jr., *Trade, Most-Favored-Nation Status: The 1975 Agreement with Romania on Trade Relations*, 6 Ga. J. Int’l & Comp. L. 581 (1976): 586.

Pacepa's defection and subsequent tell-all, largely credited with exposing the trade of Romanian-Germans. In an attempt to ease American concerns, Ceaușescu approved 694 exit visas to the United States between May and July 1975 and 2,000 visas to Israel from January to July.¹⁰⁸ In return, President Ford waived the emigration requirement and affirmed his faith in the Romanian government to continue accommodating humanitarian issues.¹⁰⁹ Romania's MFN status was approved at the end of July 1975, and the Romanian leadership finally obtained what had been coveted since the rule of Dej.

However, this doesn't mean that they were no longer subject to pressure from the West regarding emigration. Rabbi Moses Rosen, president of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Romania, claimed "[Leaders of the pro-Israel lobby in Washington] did not ask that the MFN status be withheld from Romania, but that the possibility should always be there so that the Romanians should be frightened into agreeing to increase the number of Jews leaving for Israel."¹¹⁰ Romania's MFN status was a valuable bargaining chip for the West, just as minority groups were for Romania. A few years later, they would engage in a game of diplomatic chicken to see which chip was more valuable.

Before getting to the stand-off of 1982, it is crucial to step back from the diplomatic angle and dive into Ceaușescu's need for hard currency and his less-legitimate methods of obtaining said currency. During negotiations with Romania over the emigration of the Jewish minority, David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister, wrote in his journal, "you can't do anything without money. From top to bottom, even the communist wants money."¹¹¹ While the Communist Party Ben-Gurion refers to pre-dates Ceaușescu, the sentiment only became truer as the decades

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 585, fn 32

¹¹⁰ Radu Ioanid, 154.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 63.

passed and Romania became further estranged from Moscow. In 1960, Warsaw Pact countries made up roughly two-thirds of Romanian trade, whereas, by 1970, that number was less than half.¹¹² By choosing to go the independent route, Romania would not be able to rely on the other Warsaw Pact countries to assist in its economic development, meaning that the acquisition of hard currency was essential. Favorable trade agreements with the United States were a start, but the Romanian leadership needed all the money it could get if they were to transform one of the least industrialized countries in Europe into a competitive economy.



Figure 3.3. Ion Mihai Pacepa in 1975.

Image courtesy of ANGHEL PASAT / AGERPRES ARHIVA

In the early 1970s, Ceaușescu had his hands in a variety of business ventures, from the already established agricultural and human exports, to the sale of diamonds, drugs, and weapons, if Pacepa's allegations are to be believed. According to the former Securitate general, an operation with the codename "Stars" began in 1975.¹¹³ The goal of the operation was to create synthetic diamonds ("Stars") to sell abroad. Pacepa alleges that Ceaușescu told the DIE (Securitate) "to sell the 'Stars' secretly on the Western market - the same

way it does with the cocaine in transit from Asia to Europe that we confiscate at the border."¹¹⁴

While the claims of drug trafficking have not been verified, Pacepa states that both Romania and Bulgaria engaged in the smuggling of drugs to Western Europe.¹¹⁵ If this is true, it strongly illustrates Ceaușescu's willingness to acquire foreign currency at all costs and places him

¹¹² Ronald H. Linden. "Socialist Patrimonialism and the Global Economy: The Case of Romania." *International Organization* 40, no. 2 (1986): 356. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2706840>.

¹¹³ Ion Mihai Pacepa, 71.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 72.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

somewhere between world leader and organized crime boss. One might ask how a self-professed communist leader could engage in these activities. Ceaușescu's answer would be, "Marx and Lenin have taught us that anything is ethical, so long as it is in the interest of the proletarian class and its world revolution."¹¹⁶ Therefore, there was no such thing as ill-gotten gains or dirty money, as long as it went towards the betterment of the Romanian state. The merits of this statement are very much up for debate, but it helps establish the mindset of the Romanian leader.

Given the secrecy around the deals, information on the movement of funds is somewhat scarce, though Ion Mihai Pacepa provides a description of the process in *Red Horizons*:

"The money the DIE obtained from the West in the form of cheques or bank transfers, which could be legally controlled, was immediately deposited at the Romanian Bank of Foreign Trade, known as BRCE, and credited to the national budget. But the money obtained by the DIE in hard cash - most of it from the export of Jews and Germans - was recorded only in Ceaușescu's TA accounts. Cash received in other currency was exchanged into dollars, usually in Zurich. The dollar bills received from Bonn and Tel Aviv were first laundered into new ones, in case the numbers had been recorded, and then were kept in a DIE underground vault. It constituted Ceaușescu's secret slush fund, and he occasionally withdrew money from it, buying Western cars for his children or ordering a custom-built, armored Mercedes for himself - outlays that were kept secret in Romania. He also used the money for Elena's diamond collection and for the jewelry she bought during her official visits abroad. So far he had spent no more than \$4 million from this fund, a negligible sum compared to the total amount accumulated, which was in the neighborhood of \$400 million."¹¹⁷

If there were in fact different routes for cash and banknotes, it makes sense that the Romanian side would include the conditions that they did, such as that roughly 50% of the payments be made in hard cash. One Securitate document supports the existence of multiple avenues, showing that of a 29,000,000 DM payment by West Germany in May 1973, 17,400,000 DM went into the

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 47.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 79.

Romanian Bank of Foreign Trade, while 11,600,000 DM went into an account TN 73, one of the two private accounts.¹¹⁸ It is stated that, as of December 29 1975, account TN 73 contained \$18,125,720 (\$89,239,523 in 2021), while TN 75 contained \$1,627,908 (\$8,014,784). Additionally, \$24,640,517 (\$121,314,242) was taken from TN 73, including a \$13.5 million loan to the Romanian Bank of Foreign Trade and \$1,227,000 towards the factory for Operation Stars. This could suggest that the money in these supposedly personal accounts was used, at least in part, to benefit the Romanian economy rather than simply to buy Elena Ceaușescu's jewelry, as Pacepa asserts. However, this money could have just as easily wound up in the hands of the Ceaușescus.

Teodor Meleșcanu, who worked in the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, gave a statement in 1991, saying “the sums of money that the German side paid for each ethnic German were deposited in a Swiss bank in Basel in two accounts. One of the accounts was also open to Romanian enterprises, and the other was known only to those who made the payments and to the trusted members of the Ceaușescu family.”¹¹⁹ This conclusion, which actually describes the funds acquired post-1978, aligns very closely with Pacepa's recollection of the pre-1978 money trail. The question of how large each account was is still very much up for debate, but the existence of multiple Swiss bank accounts containing foreign currency is not.

Following Pacepa's defection to the United States in 1978, Ceaușescu completely reorganized the Securitate. As part of this, he created a new department specifically dedicated to the acquisition of foreign currency, known as *Aport Valutar Special* (AVS), which roughly translates to Special Foreign Currency Contribution. In 1990, Colonel Octavian Stelian Andronic described the purpose of this division to the government commission: “During 1981-1985, I

¹¹⁸ Florica Dobre, 194.

¹¹⁹ Dan Badea, Cornel Nistorescu. *Averea Presedintelui : Conturile Ceaușescu*. (1998): 99.

worked at UM 0544 as the head of the AVS department, whose primary objective was: bringing foreign currency into the country resulting from the successions and other rights of Romanian citizens, accounting and transfer to special accounts from BRCE (TN-73, TN-75, OV-80, etc.) of the amounts resulting from the agreements with the Federal Republic of Germany and Israel on emigration, the execution of foreign currency operations without export of goods, and obtaining commissions from various foreign trade operations.”¹²⁰ Both Andronic and his successor, Constantin Anghelache, met with Dr. Hüscher on numerous occasions and played a vital role in the negotiations. Andronic’s admission that the departure of Germans and Jews from Romania was part of a larger effort to acquire foreign currency, which did, in fact, end up in the Swiss bank accounts, reiterates what Pacepa and others already suggested; the Romanian-Germans were viewed as an export commodity, perhaps no different than oil or agricultural products.

Having established the importance of hard currency to Ceaușescu and the Securitate, perhaps it should come as no surprise that they would continue to milk every last dollar or mark out of the departures. Passed in October 1982, Decree 402 nearly ruined Romania’s emigration dealings with West Germany and Israel, as well as its Most Favored Nation status with the United States. The decree stated that all emigrants would be required to pay back the cost of their education and other social welfare in foreign currency to the Romanian state after leaving, putting them in debt to the oppressive regime they had just escaped. The debts varied depending on educational attainment: 2 year secondary school was \$3,700 (\$9,800), 4 year secondary school was \$7,400 (\$19,600), 2 year technical university was \$11,100 (\$29,400), 4 year university was \$22,150 (\$58,700), medical school was \$29,900 (\$76,800), those with a degree in arts, architecture, or conservatory \$35,800 (\$94,800), doctor of technical sciences \$33,950

¹²⁰ Ibid., 98.

(\$89,900), and medical doctor \$39,900 (\$106,000).¹²¹ On top of this, Article 4 mandates that from the time of approval of the exit visa until the actual departure of the country, those who will emigrate will be treated as foreign citizens and required to pay for expenses using foreign currency.¹²² Understandably, West Germany and Israel were upset with this development, feeling as if the Romanians had changed the terms of the agreement without any warning or consultation.

On December 21, 1982, Dr. Hüscher met with Stelian Octavian Andronic, the Securitate colonel who acted as the Romanian representative in the negotiations at the time, at the Intercontinental Hotel in Bucharest.¹²³ A number of issues were to be discussed, but most pressing was the newly passed decree. Dr. Hüscher explained that the German side felt as if the decree was a slap in the face, considering how beneficial the relationship with West Germany had been to Romanian diplomacy. Andronic asserted that the decree applied to all citizens, regardless of ethnic origin or destination country, and was not aimed specifically at the Germans.¹²⁴ Additionally, Andronic explained that the Romanian state felt as if they were getting the short end of the stick by investing in their citizens' education only to have them leave the country.¹²⁵ While Andronic's point stands, as under a communist system there is a large investment in every citizen that only pays off if that citizen uses their education to contribute to society, Hüscher refuted this by emphasizing that this was already accounted for, hence the payments being made by West Germany. The Federal Republic of Germany agreed to pay a set price based on age and education precisely to offset the brain drain and loss on investment for the Romanians. With this new decree, Romania would be double or, as we'll get to soon, even triple

¹²¹ Heinz Günther Hüscher, 157.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 135.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

dipping. Regarding the status of children and the elderly under this new decree, Andronic affirmed that the decree only applies to students and graduates of working age, though any professional currently working must pay the full amount, regardless of how many years of service they completed in Romania.¹²⁶

Hüsch continued by reminding Andronic that the Federal Republic was also paying the pensions of the Romanian-German emigrants, something that was technically the responsibility of Romania.¹²⁷ Andronic countered this by pointing out that it was West Germany's choice whether or not to pay those pensions and that the societal value they were receiving from an influx of educated, German-speaking migrants justifies the price. However, the German records reveal that this was not the case in their eyes, saying "the Romanian side is completely wrong about the value of a Romanian education. Obviously, it is not taken into account that there is no shortage of trained personnel in the Federal Republic of Germany. On the contrary: there is now unemployment even among qualified workers."¹²⁸ The December talks were fairly unproductive regarding the application of Decree 402, and uncertainty continued into 1983.

On February 15, 1983, Berndt von Staden, the West German State Secretary of the Foreign Office, met with Lawrence Eagleburger, the American Undersecretary of State of Foreign Affairs, to discuss Decree 402.¹²⁹ In the conversation, Eagleburger revealed that the United States and Israel were just as taken aback by this development as the Germans were. He speculated that the decree was intended to put pressure on the West, but made it clear that the Americans were prepared to play hardball with Ceaușescu by terminating Romania's Most Favored Nation status. However, this outcome was not desired by any party, as the Americans

¹²⁶ Ibid., 150.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 146.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 160.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 171.

were aware that it would only strengthen Soviet power in Europe by leaving Hungary as the sole Eastern Bloc country with MFN status. Although the United States, West Germany, and Israel didn't need Romania as much as Romania needed them, there was still significant value in keeping Romania in the role of maverick state. They could afford to lose Romania, but it would be a painful loss in the fight against the Soviets.

Soon after this meeting, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin decided to halt negotiations with Romania. With the United States and Israel both taking a stand against Decree 402, the pressure was on West Germany to follow suit. Robert Farrand, the American Deputy Director of the Office of Eastern European/Yugoslav Affairs at the Department of State, requested that the West German government make a decision about how to proceed regarding Romanian-Germans and Decree 402, adding that "the United States has a great interest in ensuring that German talks with the Romanian side do not undermine the position of the United States and Israel."¹³⁰ It seemed that these negotiations, which had impressively crossed the Cold War lines, would soon dissolve, as West Germany would retreat to the West and Romania to the East.

Also straining the West German-Romanian relationship at this time was the issue of bribes and corruption amongst the lower level Securitate forces. While bribery was frequently reported by arrivals to West Germany, the government was fairly content to look past these instances of individual corruption in order to keep the peace, only occasionally issuing gentle reminders to Bucharest that such practices should not be tolerated. However, in the early 1980s, reports of bribery increased, and some Romanian-Germans informed German authorities of organized extortion of prospective emigrants perpetrated by local officials.¹³¹ The victims

¹³⁰ Ibid., 174.

¹³¹ Ibid., 170.

provided a few names but remained fairly tight-lipped due to fear of retribution against their family members who still resided in Romania. One of the identified extortionists was a notary in Timișoara named Bogdan, who would request 8,000 DM per person, provided by relatives already living in Germany, in exchange for expediting the process.¹³² However, it is said that applicants who did not pay Bogdan this bonus would likely never be approved, so the bribes were not for special treatment but rather the basic service. The West German report states, “officially, no Romanian authorities are involved in this procedure, but it was an open secret among the Romanian Germans that this was an official organization and that the Romanian state was behind such middlemen.”¹³³ It is also said that while an investigation of Bogdan eventually took place, the results were inconclusive and he continued his operations. Months later, complaints about Bogdan and his partners continued, leading Heinz Günther Hüscher to write a letter to Stelian Octavian Andronic. In this letter, Hüscher provides names, addresses and victim accounts of several corrupt Securitate officials, including Bogdan. While the tone of the letter is diplomatic and respectful, it is clear that the Germans were growing increasingly frustrated by the greed and corruption of the other side, with Hüscher even stating that Bogdan’s quick release from imprisonment “feeds the assumption that he is actually acting under the cover of official bodies.”¹³⁴

Cases like this appear to have been fairly common. As mentioned in the introduction, Thomas Koch revealed that he paid 8,000DM, the same amount Bogdan is alleged to have requested, in addition to the 10,000 Lei his brother had already paid in exchange for his exit visa. According to Thomas, the price doubled to 16,000DM if the person had a degree, a fact absent from the German records. Though he and his family did not experience the more brutal actions

¹³² Ibid., 173.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 217.

of the authorities, many were not as fortunate: “Some were beaten and had the money from their relatives living in Germany taken from them.”¹³⁵ One can only speculate on whether Thomas’s money did, in fact, go to Bogdan or to another corrupt official, but an eerie fact remains. The events Thomas describes occurred from 1983-1987, long after the various inquiries by the West German side, meaning that, sadly though perhaps unsurprisingly, no action was taken by the Romanian government to end these criminal practices.

In addition to financial extortion and beatings, it is suspected that sexual violence and coercion was frequently used as a tool by the Securitate. This is present in Herta Müller’s novel *The Passport*, which tells the story of a Banat Swabian family’s attempt to emigrate to West Germany.¹³⁶ The father, Windisch, tries to bribe officials with flour but is told that those in charge of the paperwork, a militiaman and a priest, will only provide the passport if they are able to sleep with his teenage daughter Amalie. While Windisch initially refuses, eventually, the family decides to go through with it, leaving Amalie to pay for her family’s passage with her body. Though the family is able to achieve physical freedom, the price of that freedom is likely to haunt them forever. It is a brutal story, and though a work of fiction, it is undoubtedly inspired by the very real corruption and seediness within the exit process. Specific instances of such practices are not publicly known, but Heinz Günther Hüscher mentions that many Romanian-Germans were subject to “the enforcement of sexual acts.”¹³⁷ The presence of these arrangements further complicates the debate around whether or not this “family reunification” agreement should be considered human trafficking. While these negotiations were between two governments, there is an undeniable criminal element on the lower levels, and it is hard to say

¹³⁵ Thomas Koch. Interview by Nicholas Hermann. Phone Interview. October 16, 2020.

¹³⁶ Herta Müller. *The Passport*. London: Serpent's Tail, 1989.

¹³⁷ Heinz Günther Hüscher, II.

that the experience of the emigrants was significantly safer or less exploitative than those trafficked illegally.

Despite these issues, the two sides reached an agreement in May 1983, which would send thousands of Romanian-Germans to the Federal Republic between July 1983 and June 1988.¹³⁸ Facing the loss of the diplomatic power they had worked so hard for, the Romanian side conceded on the issue of Decree 402, marking a win for the West and the thousands hoping to leave the country. One might be puzzled as to why Romania would risk over a decade's worth of diplomacy for a little extra money. The motivation likely had something to do with the economic situation of Romania in the early 1980s, which was bleak to say the least.

Over the previous 25 years, the Romanian economy had grown significantly, thanks in large part to Western loans, but by 1981, Romania owed \$10 billion in hard currency (roughly \$30 billion in 2021).¹³⁹ Romania likely saw an opportunity to squeeze more hard currency out of the deals with West Germany and Israel through Decree 402 to assist in the repayment of debts. Worrying that Romania's future would be one of economic slavery to the West, Ceaușescu prioritized paying off foreign debts as quickly as possible by implementing the infamous austerity policy. Under the austerity policy, production and exports increased dramatically, while imports and consumption were severely limited by food and energy rations. Romanians worked hard to produce more than ever before, but it was all exported, leaving the citizens without much food, heat, or electricity. Ceaușescu was eventually successful in paying back all debts by the end of the 1980s, but the living conditions inside Romania had gotten so bad that his fate was all but sealed. The suffering caused by the austerity policy is often cited as a primary reason for the

¹³⁸ Ibid., 203.

¹³⁹ Ronald H. Linden, 367.

violent revolution of December 1989, which culminated in the televised execution of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu on Christmas day.

With the fall of the Eastern Bloc in 1989, it's not surprising that the agreement didn't make it to the next decade. The deal was terminated weeks before the Romanian Revolution on December 4, 1989, when the Romanian side communicated that while they would continue to assist in family reunification of Romanian-Germans, they no longer wished to engage in monetized trade or official contractual agreements. Violation of secrecy was cited as the reason for the cancellation, with Anghelache telling Hüscher, "our opinion is that the Romanian side complied with all obligations, although the German side did not respect all the terms of the treaties. This also applies in particular with regard to confidentiality, because there are numerous publications."¹⁴⁰ While it is true that by the late 1980s, word of the agreements had occasionally made their way into the press, the West German government had never publicly acknowledged the deal.

The most revealing report was a 1987 interview in popular German magazine *Der Spiegel* with Romanian-German authors Herta Müller and Richard Wagner, in which they laid just about everything on the table: the government agreements, bribes, extortion, and poor living conditions.¹⁴¹ In addition to this exposure, Müller also characterized Ceaușescu as an "idiot" and did not hold back in her criticism of his personality cult and international persona, something that the Romanian leader surely didn't appreciate given how meticulously he had crafted his reputation abroad. However, it was not as if Chancellor Kohl or any other high-ranking West German politician had made these comments. Perhaps Ceaușescu forgot that, unlike in Romania,

¹⁴⁰ Heinz Günther Hüscher, 349.

¹⁴¹ Olaf Ihlau, Rainer Traub. „Jetzt hoffen die Rumänen auf Gorbatschow“. *Der Spiegel*, (Nr. 19/1987) (May 4 1987): 154-163.

there was basic freedom of the press in West Germany, so it wasn't as if everything published was backed by the state.

While the expectation of confidentiality was a nice thought, it was completely unrealistic to expect the migration of over 200,000 people to go undiscussed in the public sphere. It would have been one thing if the exchange of currency occurred only between the two nations, but as previously referenced, every prospective emigrant was subject to extortion and harassment before their departure. Threatening relatives left behind may have been enough to silence most of the departures, but someone was bound to go public eventually.

On top of that, the West German press was not the first place these agreements were exposed. It was former Securitate general Ion Mihai Pacepa's Red Horizons that first went into detail about the ransom of minority groups, as well as numerous other shady practices by the Romanian leadership. Of course, nobody was more damaged by the release of this book than Nicolae Ceaușescu, so it wasn't as if he approved of this information being revealed, but technically speaking, the first major leak came from the Romanian side. Even if there was a genuine feeling of betrayal, why would the Romanians wait two years after the Der Spiegel article to make an issue out of it? The truth is unknown, but there are a couple of theories that hold weight.

The first theory is that, following the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, Ceaușescu knew he would soon have to answer for his decades of ruthless governing. If questioned about the exit-visa ransom, and perhaps more importantly, the whereabouts of the funds acquired through this practice, Ceaușescu would likely struggle to produce an answer that satisfied the Romanian people and the larger international community. After all, it wasn't as if Romania was severing ties with West Germany. The only major changes were that they would no

longer accept payment, and the departures would be on a case-by-case basis, as opposed to the contracts of before. Perhaps by canceling the monetary agreement, the Romanian side was attempting to cover its tracks. Of course, there was enough information already out there to make questions inevitable, rendering this action somewhat useless, but remember: this was 1989. This was panic mode for the self-proclaimed ‘Genius of the Carpathians’. Besides, it wasn’t as if the ransom of minority groups was the only thing he would have to answer for. This was a leader whose economic policies led the country to starve; whose pro-natalist policies endangered thousands of women through illegal abortions and left many children abused, malnourished, or dead in the country’s notorious orphanages; this was a leader who tortured and killed political opponents, who blackmailed and spied on his own citizens.

Another possibility has to do with Romania’s international debt. The year 1989 was also significant in this regard, as Romania had finished paying off foreign loans early in the year. As previously alluded to, much of the 1980s was spent focused on eliminating the debt, even if it meant the Romanian people would go without food, heat, and other necessities. If the ransom of Romanian-Germans was primarily intended to assist in this repayment, perhaps Romania no longer felt it necessary to demand compensation after the debts were settled. It should also be noted that Romania had renounced its Most Favored Nation status with the United States the year before, suggesting that as the debt decreased, Ceaușescu was preparing to distance Romania from the West. However, the Romanian negotiator, Colonel Anghelache, explicitly told Hüscher that this was not the case, saying “there is no relationship between the external debts on the one hand and the sum paid by the West German side on the other.”¹⁴² The validity of this theory is ultimately predicated on one’s belief about how the money was spent. If one is of the opinion, like Romanian historians Florian Banu and Florica Dobre, that the money likely went towards

¹⁴² Heinz Günther Hüscher, 349.

paying off foreign debt, this makes perfect sense. However, following the information about a personal fund in Switzerland put forward by Pacepa and others, it becomes a bit more difficult to determine.

It is worth revisiting the question of where the money went, as more information was revealed following the fall of the Ceaușescu regime. During the brief trial proceeding their execution, Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu were questioned about the Swiss accounts, with Nicolae Ceaușescu insisting, “We had no account in Switzerland. Nobody has opened an account. This shows again how false the charges are. What defamation, what provocations! This was a coup d'etat.”¹⁴³ “If you had no accounts in Switzerland, will you sign a statement confirming that the money that may be in Switzerland should be transferred to the Romanian state,” the prosecutor asked in response. Ceaușescu refused to sign any such statement. Even if the majority of the money did go towards repaying Romania’s foreign debt, the existence of Ceaușescu’s Swiss bank accounts is not debatable and they were likely still operational, and full of money after his execution.

It has been suggested by Liviu Turcu, a former Securitate officer that sought asylum in the United States in January 1989, that the former heads of the AVS department of the Securitate, Col. Nicolae Anronic and Col. Constantin Anghelache, who both served as negotiation representatives for the Romanian side during the emigration deals, made trips to Switzerland and began closing the cover accounts and transferring large sums.¹⁴⁴ As if the story needed more excitement, Turcu notes that Anghelache served as Romania’s delegate to FIFA (yes, *that* FIFA,

¹⁴³ Irina Livezeanu, "Transcript of the closed "trial" of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu, December, 1989," *Making the History of 1989*, Item #690, <https://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/items/show/690>

¹⁴⁴ Radu Ioanid, 148.

headquartered in Switzerland), providing him an ideal cover story for frequent trips to Switzerland, where he could manage the secret accounts.¹⁴⁵

Despite the end of communism and the Ceaușescu regime, the post-Ceaușescu Romanian government was, not unlike West Germany in the post-war period, full of members of the previous regime with dark pasts. In 1992, Liviu Turcu told the *Washington Post* that “a very small group continues to possess the financial resources inherited from the old regime.”¹⁴⁶ It seems somewhat likely that the profits from all of the foreign currency operations, including the sale of Germans and Jews, wound up in the hands of former Securitate officers, though there is still mystery surrounding the fate of the Ceaușescu accounts. Considering that, even well into the 21st century, those with ties to the Ceaușescu regime remain politically active in Romania, it is unlikely that a definitive answer will be given anytime soon.

¹⁴⁵ Liviu Turcu. “Cum Producea Securitatea Valuta Pentru Ceaușescu,” *Jurnalul National*. (May 11, 2004)

¹⁴⁶ William McPherson. “Intrigue, Illusion and Iliescu.” *The Washington Post*. (September 13, 1992)

CONCLUSION

How should this peculiar arrangement be remembered in the history of these two nations, as well as the larger Cold War? This unique situation is a testament to the importance of diaspora and minority status in diplomacy and the construction of nations, as the sale of Romanian-Germans assisted in the formation of Ceaușescu's Romania and post-war Germany. The mere presence of the distinct Romanian-German minority allowed for a diplomatic meeting point, which in turn helped propel Ceaușescu and Romania into a unique position within a divided world, as evidenced by the huge diplomatic and financial benefits. It can be argued that without the sale of Romanian-Germans and Jews, Romania does not achieve the role of a global mediator, which would have significantly altered Cold War dynamics. Whether shameful or practical, the agreements leading to the departure of Romanian-Germans were only made possible by the Transylvanian Saxons' and Banat Swabians' preservation of German culture over centuries.

With this in mind, the huge decline in Romanian-German cultural presence as a result of the migration can not be ignored. While these deals were the product of distinction and non-assimilation, they ultimately pushed towards homogenization and the loss of hyphenated or dual identity. The Romanian-Germans largely assimilated into West German society, while Romania lost one of its largest ethnic minorities. The Romanian census records are especially illuminating:¹⁴⁷ in 1930, 633,488 Romanian-Germans were counted; in 1966, on the verge of the first agreement, there were 382,595; by 2002, there were a mere 59,764. Is this a tragic case of globalization and loss of culture, or rather a natural evolution of diaspora? Perhaps the dual

¹⁴⁷ "Populația După Etnie La Recensămintele Din Perioada 1930–2002, Pe Județe." Institutul Național de Statistică.

identity of Romanian-German served its purpose throughout the 19th and 20th centuries and is now no longer necessary in the time of the European Union, nation-states, and global migration?

Despite this drastic decline, it is not as if Romanian-German culture has completely disappeared. The Democratic Forum of Germans in Romania, founded in 1989, remains an active political party, though it does not have a large presence in the Romanian government. Despite this, Klaus Werner Iohannis, a Transylvanian Saxon who served as the president of the Democratic Forum of Germans in Romania, was elected the 5th president of Romania in 2014, making him the first Romanian president with a minority background. However, President Iohannis' parents and sister relocated to Germany in 1992, with Klaus making the active choice to remain in his country of birth rather than use his heritage to obtain German citizenship.

In addition to the continued presence of Romanians of Saxon or Swabian descent in politics and society, other forms of German culture live on in Romania. Andras Elek describes a new incarnation of Romanian-German community: "Now we have a German-speaking group in my city, made up of Transylvanian Saxons, Banat Swabians, people from Germany, Switzerland, South Tyrol in Italy. We meet once a month and speak German over dinner. I now have a German-related social life, which I did not have during the communist times."¹⁴⁸ Additionally, he also has made it a point to speak to his young son in German to ensure that he is proficient in the language of his Swabian ancestors, in addition to his already fluent Hungarian and Romanian. Though Romania may not be the same cosmopolitan melting pot of cultures it was a century ago, cases like this prove that a multi-ethnic character still exists in the region. With this continuation of cultural practices, perhaps the story of the Romanian-Germans isn't finished yet.

¹⁴⁸ Andras Elek. Interview by Nicholas Hermann. Skype Interview. October 8, 2020.

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