

NARRATIVE REPORT ON 2002 IREX SHORT-TERM TRAVEL GRANT

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In September-October 2002, I traveled to Eastern Europe with the main goal of attending in Bucharest the conference on “Romania and the Warsaw Pact” and pursue the further opening of the still largely inaccessible Romanian archives from the Cold War period. At variance with my original proposal, I did not find it necessary to travel to Poland and Hungary, where the intended goals of my travel had been accomplished without necessitating special trips. Instead, on my way to Bucharest, I went to Prague for meetings at the Institute on Contemporary history to make provisions for research in the newly opened files of the Czechoslovak communist party from the 1970-80s and for the online publication of new documents.

Romania

The conference on Romania and the Warsaw Pact was co-sponsored by the Parallel History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact (PHP), of which I am the Coordinator, in cooperation with the Cold War International History Project (CWIHP) of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington. It was organized by the Institute for Political Studies of Defense and Military History (IPSDMH), a subsidiary of the Romanian Ministry of National Defense.

The conference was conceived to provide an opening to the Romanian archives from the Cold War period, thus far the least accessible archives in Eastern Europe. Because of the reluctance of the Romanian authorities to provide access to the critical mass of documents necessary to give the conference scholarly substance, the original date of the conference—fall 2001—had to be postponed while the PHP, with support from the head of the IPSDMH Gen. Mihail Ionescu, continued to press for the declassification and release of documents. These efforts were notably more successful than any previous ones, though not yet successful enough to put Romanian archives at the same level of transparency as those in other former countries of the Warsaw Pact.

By the time of the conference, the PHP had made the greatest progress in securing the release of several hundred pages of records of the communist party central committee, particularly stenographic minutes of the politburo meetings, which are deposited at the National Archives in Bucharest. The minutes and other documents included some from the officially closed post-1972 period, but the original promise to supply photocopies of the whole set of the stenographic minutes, amounting to several thousand pages, was not fulfilled. The documents had been selected by archivists without giving access to the finding aids. Some items were provided incomplete, others retyped rather than photocopied. Despite these shortcomings, the records that became part of the public domain illustrate with unprecedented clarity the high-level perceptions, discussions, and

decisions that shaped Romania's dissident role within the Warsaw Pact in the 1960s, besides other dimensions of the Ceausescu regime's separate road in foreign policy.

More limited amount of documentation, likewise selected by the archivists according to their own judgment, was supplied from the Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This concerned Romania's relations with the Warsaw Pact and, to a limited extent, its participation in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Few documents of any significance were provided from the Military Archives, despite our repeated requests to the authorities, including the Chief of the General Staff, and promises of fulfillment. In particular, no documentation concerning military plans and exercises or anything concerning the development of Romania's own military doctrine in the 1960s has been released.

In advance of the conference, CWIHP prepared two volumes of a 1000-page document reader, consisting of photocopies of the most important documents received and well over a hundred pages of English translations. Copies of the document reader were made available to participants in the conference, and through them to leading scholarly institutions in Romania. Their distribution amounts to a significant breakthrough in bringing Western scholarly practices into the country. It provides encouragement to local efforts to break the seal of secrecy on the vast amounts of documents from the communist era, including especially those of the Securitate secret police, that are still being withheld from public scrutiny as politically sensitive.

These efforts have been spearheaded by the Romanian Institute of Recent History (IRIR), Romania's only independent research institution in the field of modern history. The Institute, supported by grants from the Netherlands and other countries of Western Europe, is widely respected abroad and cooperates, among others, with the National Security Archive in Washington, one of the PHP's funding partners. IRIR has recently launched a major project aimed at opening Romania's archives from the communist period to its citizens, following the models applied in Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, and other former countries of the Soviet bloc.

On the eve of the Bucharest conference, I met with IRIR director Professor Andrei Pippidi and senior researcher Marius Oprea to discuss their need of support for their project. Together with Prof. Pippidi, I met with Thomas L. Delare, deputy chief of mission of the US Embassy in Bucharest. Mr. Delare expressed the Embassy's interest in the project in view of its significance for the growth of Romania's civil society and arrange for the issue to be further pursued by Eleanor Kennelly, Senior Democracy Advisor at the Democracy and Social Sector Reform Office of the USAID in Bucharest.

The conference, efficiently organized by Gen. Ionescu and his staff, met at the ornate premises of the Military Club, an impressive edifice from the 1920s in downtown Bucharest. It was attended by well over a hundred participants and guests, and elicited considerable attention from the Romanian media as well as the World Service of the BBC. Papers by Romanian scholars, based in part on the archival documents declassified as a result of the pressure exerted by the PHP, concerned aspects of Romania's controversial

relationship with the Warsaw Pact. Only a few papers had been made available in advance of the conference. Their oral presentations were interpreted simultaneously from Romanian into English. So was the discussion that followed at each session, with participation by several foreign guests who had been invited for the conference. The discussion periods, which often touched on still sensitive political issues, proved to be the most valuable part of the conference.

As chairman of one of the sessions and later in my concluding remarks, I used the opportunity to emphasize the conference's accomplishments as well as the persisting limitations of access to the archives, expressing my confidence that the conference would serve as the beginning of more systematic declassification efforts, particularly in regard to military records. The limitations attracted considerable attention of the media representatives present at the conference, thus giving me an opportunity to elaborate on the persisting problems in about a dozen interviews for the state and independent television, radio, and press. The idea that historians should particularly welcome Romania's prospective membership in NATO because it would make untenable continued protection of the secrets of the country's previous alliance appeared to meet with particular resonance.

The potentially most important result of the conference may be the establishment, with encouragement from both the PHP and CWIHP, of a working relationship between the official IPSDMH and the independent IRIR, both of which have tended to regard each other with mistrust. By working together, they should be able to take optimal advantage of the more cooperative attitude of the Romanian authorities toward declassification that may be forthcoming. The PHP plans to continue publishing on its website declassified Romanian documents as they become available and the IRIR is prepared to provide the necessary translations. The first priority is to secure the release of the military files necessary for preparing a sound Romanian contribution to the June 2003 conference on strategic planning during the Cold War that will be organized by the PHP's Norwegian partners at Longyearbyen, Spitzbergen.

Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic

Following the coming into effect in March 2002 of the new Polish archival law, I met in Prague with Pawel Piotrowski, a military historian with the Institute of National Remembrance in Wroclaw, to make arrangements for research in the Polish military files. Mr. Piotrowski subsequently conducted research in Warsaw as well as in Modlin, where the records of the subsidiary agencies of the Ministry of National Defense are kept, and made photocopies of several thousand documents.

Some of these documents were used to prepare a new publication on the PHP website, together with the Danish Institute of International Affairs, on the Polish plans of an attack on Denmark during the Cold War. The publication occurred soon after the publication on the same website of interviews with Gen. Jaruzelski and nine other top-ranking Polish Warsaw Pact generals, the preparation of which was made possible by my previous IREX travel grants. The publication of the full Polish texts, together with a

topical selection in English of about 10 per cent of the total, has been noted in the international media.

Securing continued cooperation by the Open Society Archive in Budapest by providing translations of Hungarian documents did not necessitate a special trip on my part. Several of these translations, concerning Hungary's role in Warsaw Pact, have already appeared on the PHP website and other are in the process of being published.

While in Prague prior to the Bucharest conference, I met with Oldrich Tuma, director of the Institute of Contemporary History, to discuss joint project, which have been lagging behind schedule. This concerns particularly the preparation in English translation of documents from Czechoslovak archives on Soviet policy during the Khrushchev era for publication on the PHP website. The documents are being translated and are expected to be ready before the end of this year.

Research in the communist party files from the 1970-80 in the Central State Archives has been hampered by the Archives' rule that limits the number of folders made available to researchers to five per day. The PHP is prepared to support arrangements that would help overcome the shortage of archival personnel to facilitate for expeditious production of archival material.

Note: Information on contacts to persons and institutions mentioned in this report is available on request.

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