

Romania's rocky road from the Ceaușescu dictatorship to fragile democracy

Appendix: Reports of 31 former students
of the Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca/Romania
who live today in Romania and abroad

by Prof. Dr. Dr. Johannes Kneifel

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**This book is not a scientific work,
but a personal experience report
about Romania.**



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The Marquis de Custine wrote
in the 19th century after a trip to Russia:

„Oppressed peoples always deserve their punishment -
Tyranny is the work of nations,
not the masterpiece of one individual.“

The writer Panait Istrati wrote
1929 after a 16-month trip to the Soviet Union:

„The real drama of my life and writing career was
born in the USSR. There I saw how compact masses
– not individual tyrants – are capable of tyrannizing
whole peoples of brothers and sisters.
Injustices of societies against societies are not crimes
of a Stalin or Mussolini, they are crimes of collectiv-
ities. This is also true of the dictatorship in Romania:
They were the crimes of a group of criminals.“

CONTENT

| | |
|--|----|
| Foreword | 7 |
| Introduction | 9 |
| 1. Review | 16 |
| 1.1 Phase before 1945 | 16 |
| 1.2 Developments after 1945 | 21 |
| <i>Internal party power struggles</i> | 23 |
| 2. Armed resistance groups between 1945 and 1962 | 25 |
| 3. Dictatorial violence | 26 |
| 3.1 Collectivization of agriculture..... | 26 |
| 3.2 Suppression of the churches | 27 |
| 4. Repression and terror | 29 |
| 4.1 Deportation to the Soviet Union | 29 |
| 4.2 Romania's Transformation into a Communist State..... | 30 |
| 4.3 Securitate | 32 |
| 4.4 The destruction of political parties | 33 |
| 4.5 Arrests and mock trials | 34 |
| 4.6 Proceedings against intellectuals..... | 35 |
| 4.7 Arrests of opposition members on the eve of the elections | 36 |
| 4.8 The Deportation of Rural Elites | 38 |
| 4.9 The German minority | 38 |
| 5. Relationship between Romania and Hungary | 40 |
| 6. Withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1958 | 43 |
| 7. Amnesties in 1955, 1964 and 1988 | 44 |
| 8. Cooperation between the communist party and the judiciary. | 47 |
| 8.1 Criminal justifications and verdicts of the arrests..... | 47 |
| 8.2 Romanian „Nobody's children” | 47 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 9. Penitentiaries..... | 53 |
| 9.1 Sighet | 53 |
| 9.2 Pitești | 55 |
| 9.3 Other locations of the penitentiaries..... | 56 |
| 9.4 Personal status of the detainees | 57 |
| <i>Birthplaces of those imprisoned in percent.....</i> | <i>57</i> |
| <i>Penalty of the detainees.....</i> | <i>57</i> |
| 9.5 Deaths in prisons | 58 |
| 9.6 Two million victims of communist terror..... | 59 |
| 10. Forced labor..... | 61 |
| 11. The Gheorghiu-Dej era..... | 62 |
| 12. Danube-Black Sea Canal..... | 65 |
| 13. Nicolae Ceaușescu..... | 66 |
| 13.1 Other measures and projects of the Ceaușescu's:..... | 70 |
| 13.2 Elena Ceaușescu..... | 79 |
| 13.3 The children of Elena and Nicolae Ceaușescu..... | 81 |
| 13.4 Siblings of Nicolae Ceaușescu | 81 |
| 13.5 Relatives of Elena Ceaușescu..... | 82 |
| 13.6 Cult of personality of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu | 82 |
| 13.7 Medals and awards..... | 85 |
| 13.8 Weapons industry | 86 |
| 13.9 Prosecutor's accusations and the end of the Ceaușescu | 87 |
| 14. Pacepa defector | 93 |
| 15. Iliescu, initiator of the „Front for the National Salvation of Romania | 95 |
| 16. Departure to democracy | 98 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| 17. 1965 – 1989 Functional Elites in Romania..... | 99 |
| 17.1 Transformation – Development since 1989..... | 102 |
| 17.2 Post-Communist Era 1990-1992..... | 103 |
| <i>Opposition parties</i> | 104 |
| 17.3 Developments since 1992 to the present day..... | 104 |
| 1992-1996..... | 104 |
| 1996-2000..... | 105 |
| 2000-2004..... | 106 |
| 2004-2008..... | 106 |
| 2008-2011..... | 107 |
| 2012-2014..... | 108 |
| 2014-2021..... | 109 |
| 17.4 Herta Müller, German-Romanian Nobel Prize winner | 111 |
| 17.5 Laura Codruța Kövesi, Prosecutor General in Romania..... | 112 |
| 17.6 Elena Udrea, former minister..... | 113 |
| 17.7 Gabriela Adameșteanu: The Provisional Love – Novel..... | 114 |
| 17.8 Lavinia Braniște: Sonja reports – novel | 115 |
| 17.9 The silence of a generation | 115 |
| 17.10 Civil society in Romania..... | 116 |
| 18. Review and a possible future development..... | 125 |
| 31 Personal reports of some former students of BBU in Cluj-Napoca | 133 |
| Bibliography | 216 |
| Publications of Prof. Dr. Dr. Johannes Kneifel | 221 |

FOREWORD

I would like to answer the question of why Romania has moved me so strongly since 1970.

One day my father said to me, „We absolutely must go to Bistrița to visit my old student friend Michael, with whom I studied at the Faculty of Theology at Leipzig University between 1919 and 1923.“ We applied in Germany for a 7-day visa to Romania, which was granted. My father had informed Michael that we would arrive at the București-Otopeni Airport in București on June 6, 1970. When we landed at the airport and went to pick up our suitcases at customs, we were led into a room by two „customs officers“. They asked the following questions:

1. who sends you to Romania?
2. do you have contacts with the German minority in Romania?

My father, who was 74 years old at the time, answered the questions truthfully: he wanted to visit his old college friend Michael. We had the feeling that the Securitate officials already knew the reason for our trip. It was a humiliating treatment of „individuals far from education“. After a 2-hour interrogation, we were told that we would be interned for the night in a hotel located on the airport grounds. We were not allowed to leave the hotel during the day. The next day we were expelled as „undesirables“ on the next flight to Germany. My father was very indignant about this treatment. He said, „The way these communist guys treat us, that’s how they treat their own Romanian people. You can see the stupidity and brutality in these communists.“ We had taken two suitcases of food and clothing for Pastor Michael and his family, but they were not forwarded to them.

35 years later – in 2005 – I flew with Tarom from Munich via Sibiu to Cluj-Napoca. When the plane was over the Carpathians, I „shot“ some photos of the landscape from the window. When the stewardess saw

this, she rushed up to me and lectured me: Romanian territory, photography forbidden. She also did not accept my explanation that the satellites had recorded every square meter of this earth. The co-pilot also appeared and explained to me that taking pictures was forbidden and could lead to my arrest after landing. This is how the staff was trained, acting as „enforcers“ of the Romanian state power. Such people are incapable of a self-determined life and of weighing decisions.

When I arrived at the airport in Cluj-Napoca, I noticed a big sign in the arrivals hall: Photography prohibited. Now 17 years have passed and some things have changed.

**Ceaușescu dictatorship
- Crimes against the own people -
The cruelest dictatorship in Europe after the
Second World War.**

- **Approximately 2 million innocent prisoners were arbitrarily held in 100 detention centers.**
- **Approximately 100,000 Romanians were murdered.**
- **Approximately 90,000 Romanian prisoners starved to death or were beaten to death during the construction of the Danube-Black Sea Canal.**
- **1,165 Romanian protesters were shot by the Romanian army and Securitate after the execution for demanding a democratic and free Romania.**

INTRODUCTION

In the late 18th century, Great Britain, France, Prussia and Austria became world powers. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the USA, Great Britain, France, Germany and Japan took over this role. In the 21st century, there are only 3 world powers left: USA, China and Russia.

At the Moscow Conference between Great Britain and Russia in October 1945, the zones of influence in Eastern and Southeastern Europe were divided between Russia and Great Britain. The USA had not participated in the conference and did not accept the result. Russia's influence in Romania was set at 90%, by Great Britain at 10%. Russia wanted to exert a greater influence on the country than on other countries of the former Eastern Bloc. Although the Romanian Communist Party had only 400 to 500 members before World War II, the Communists took power in Romania in 1946.

The respected communism researcher Stephane Courtois, editor of the „Communist Black Book“ and himself a leftist, describes the crimes: The Communists had killed close to 100 million men, women and children – by neck shot, fusillade or combat gas – hanged, drowned, beaten to death. They were maltreated to death in forced labor or exterminated by deliberately induced famines, epidemics and death marches.

The communists have been in government in Cuba since 1959, in Nicaragua since 1979 and in Venezuela since 1998. There are no fundamental rights in these countries: no free elections, no separation of powers, no independent judiciary. Venezuela had a democratically elected government until 1998. Since 1998, more than 6 million people have fled from the formerly prosperous Venezuela: 5 million to neighboring countries and 1 million to other regions of the world.

Communism has caused untold suffering to people and has not worked anywhere in the world. If communism worked, the Swiss and Scandinavians would have had communist governments long ago.

Romania's communist system developed into the bloodiest system in Europe after World War II. Many of those who had mustered the courage to free Romania from tyranny died in a hail of bullets from the Securitate and the military during the popular uprising. Almost 1200 people were killed only after Ceaușescu's fall. Thus, communism destroyed the destiny of two generations of Romanians. Class struggle and class hatred led to the collapse of the country's elites. As a result, a civil society could not emerge. Ceaușescu ruled the country with state terror. His idiosyncratic foreign policy created distance from the Soviet Union, and his economic policy drove the country into a permanent crisis.

Ceaușescu wanted Romania to become a world power in order to influence world politics. It was an illusion that brought despair and hopelessness to the country. He was constantly on state visits. There were about 200 state visits to all parts of the world between 1967 and 1989. Ceaușescu hated the Hungarians, the Transylvanian Saxons, Banat Swabians, as well as the Jews. With the aura of a red monarch and the state terror of a Stalin, he ruled the country.

Ceaușescu believed he could impress the Romanians and the world with the new government building. Countries like Switzerland, Denmark or Costa Rica would not even think of building a „Palazzo Prozzi“. The educated of the world ridiculed Ceaușescu and considered him a fool. One exception: North Korea.

The Romanian Communist Party and its organs are responsible for the crimes inflicted on their own people. 2 million Romanians were arrested during this horrible epoch. 100,000 Romanians were beaten to death or murdered in the 200 prisons and 100 execution sites. No country in Europe left this terrible trail of blood: only Romania.

In all Eastern Bloc countries, after the end of communism, all responsible politicians were put on trial, except in Romania and Bulgaria. There, the communists continued to rule and called themselves „social democrats“. They wanted to prevent a reappraisal of the communist past at all costs, since they themselves were heavily involved. In Czechoslovakia, the freedom hero Václav Havel, who was serving a nine-month aggravated prison sentence for hooliganism, was elected president.

In the GDR, leading communists were removed from the leadership levels in all institutions across the board. In Romania, this has not been the case to this day. Especially in the civil service, schools and universities, the communists and Ceaușescu's henchmen are still in leading positions today. Independent research shows that about 25% of the population still mourns the old Ceaușescu system.

Since the political and economic situation in Romania after 1989 did not develop according to the ideas of the educated and active Romanians, a great many people left the country. Many disillusioned and helpless people remained behind.

Many Romanians have left their homeland because they did not want to live in a corrupt country where, in many places, political clans call the shots.

After 1989, about 300,000 Transylvanian Saxons and Banat Swabians and about 40,000 ethnic Hungarians left the country. They had experienced too much, suffered too much during the Ceaușescu dictatorship. They just wanted to leave and build a new future for themselves. They were quickly integrated in Germany, Austria and Hungary because they are very reliable.

If King Mihai I had been able to return to Romania in 1989, developments for Romania would have been different. But this was prevented by Iliescu and Co. When King Mihai I landed in Romania in a small plane from his Swiss exile in 2002, he was banned from entering the

country. The same people who had prevented his entry cheered him in 2012 with the words: long live the king.

Emil Constantinescu, President of Romania from 1996 to 2000 stated in an article published in Le Monde on 22.2.1997, i.e. 7 years after the end of the Ceaușescu dictatorship: „It is our ambition to preserve the functionalities and the state companies of the old regime. We want to pursue an independent and anti-Western policy that prevents all changes to our system by European and non-European countries.“ An opening of Romania to Western Europe was prevented by the Iliescu clique in 1990. In 2004 Romania became a member of NATO and in 2007 a member of the EU, although Romania did not meet the requirements.

Romanian historian Armand Gosu compared Soviet-type communist bureaucrats to those of Romania. In Romania, a similar culture exists: the boss is always right, there is no alternative to what a president or a minister says. The state institutions of power can do no wrong.

Point of view of many Romanians: A Romanian is not allowed to criticize his country, otherwise he will be called a nest-destroyer. Václav Havel, a Czech writer and freedom hero, was arrested three times during the communist dictatorship and spent a total of five years in prison. After the successful, bloodless revolution, he was elected president of the CSSR.

A country has a future only if it accepts not only the bright but also the negative side of its own past and feels responsible for its crimes. In Romania, the Communist Party arrested two million decent Romanians and sentenced them to long prison terms. They were reported to the Securitate by neighbors, relatives and friends. Reason: they wanted to have advantages for themselves. They were completely indifferent to the fate of those arrested. No other country in Europe has incurred so much guilt:

2 million arrested, 100,000 murdered.

After 1989, the Romanian Communist Party under Iliescu tried everything to present the Ceaușescu period in a better light. Iliescu wanted to have the Sighet Memorial closed. It was there that the pre-war elite was tortured and exterminated. Today, the memorial is supported and financed by the Council of Europe. The right-wing and left-wing parties in Romania are still trying to prevent knowledge about the horrors of the Ceaușescu period from being taught in schools. The historical fact, the murder of 250,000 Romanian Jews, is also negated.

The final chapter, Retrospect and a Possible Future Development, discusses the criminal proceedings against Iliescu and Co.

Romania describes itself as a „strategic partner of the United States. In the complex system of checks and balances, foreign policy responsibilities in the U.S. Congress are widely dispersed. Poland, the Baltic states and Hungary have had many friends in the U.S. Congress for decades, and this is reflected in current NATO decisions. The Black Sea is currently geopolitically important to the US. As interests shift to Asia, the Black Sea will not be as important in the future as it is today.

According to opinion polls in Romania, approximately 25-30 % have pro-Communist attitudes and 15-20 % have extreme right-wing attitudes. Both communists and nationalists reject basic democratic values (stable democracy, the rule of law). Democratic structures are therefore very fragile.

As long as Romania does not accept the German-Romanian Nobel Prize for Literature winner Herta Müller as an icon of freedom, Romania will have no future. Chapter 17.4 discusses Herta Müller's courageous and exemplary behavior.

I have tried to chronicle the Ceaușescu dictatorship and developments since 1989, having to refer to secondary literature because I do not speak Romanian.

Babeş-Bolyai University was named after the Romanian physician Victor Babeş and the Hungarian mathematician János Bolyai. It is the former King Ferdinand University, founded in 1581.

It is the only university in Southeastern Europe where lectures are held in Romanian, Hungarian, English, German and French in some faculties. The university has 48,000 students and ranks 1st in the national ranking.

From 2005 to 2017, I held block lectures at the German-language department of the Faculty of Economics of the University of Cluj-Napoca. In addition to the subject of logistics, I also taught political science for a few semesters. Unfortunately, I was told that supposedly there was no interest on the part of the students to learn the basics of political science: democracy, communism and fascism. When studying economics, the subject of economic policy is a foundation for understanding economic relationships.

31 former students of Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca answered the following questions:

1. How did your grandparents (grandma and grandpa) and your parents feel about the years under the Ceauşescu dictatorship?
2. Was the Ceauşescu dictatorship discussed in elementary school, high school and university?
3. How do you and your friends assess Romania's political situation today?

It was a look back for the students into the tragic past of their grandparents and parents during the Ceauşescu dictatorship. They were willing to answer these questions because they were assured anonymity. This shows how deeply rooted fear still is in Romanian society today. According to sociologists, it will take several generations before the

majority of Romanians prefer democratic structures to a totalitarian system.

The questions were answered by 17 former students living in Romania and by 14 former students living abroad. I am grateful to the former students for their great support in my research.

They report that sometimes the Ceaușescu period was talked about in the history subject in high school. But this was the case only in some high schools. Most of the time there was a silence. It was also a taboo subject at Babeș-Bolyai University. Only two foreign professors mentioned Romania's tragic time during the Ceaușescu dictatorship and the following decades, which were different in all other former Eastern Bloc countries.

Approximately 100,000 Romanians were beaten to death and murdered in about 200 prisons and 100 execution sites during the Ceaușescu dictatorship. Another 90,000 prisoners died during the construction of the Danube-Black Sea Canal.

Many Romanians do not want to face the responsibility of their history and believe that silence about the most terrible period of their history can heal the wounds.

During the Romanian Revolution, a total of 1,165 innocent Romanian patriots were shot by the Securitate and the army. Of these, 895 followed Ceaușescu's execution.

Thousands were injured. The Romanian patriots demanded a free and democratic Romania. This was prevented by the Securitate.

Since I am now 83 years old, I have certainly made some mistakes, although I have revised the manuscript several times. I therefore ask for your understanding.

1. REVIEW

1.1 Phase before 1945

The principalities of Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia were under Ottoman rule at the time of the Second Turkish Siege in 1683 and had to pay tribute to the „high gate“ in the form of warlike support. Not all of them complied, as the example of the Wallachian prince Șerban Cantacuzino shows. He officially sided with the Ottomans, but secretly cooperated with the emperor.

As Rusan describes in detail in Chapter 7 of „The Black Book of Communism 2“, the Ottoman Empire sought to subjugate Christian Romania.

The Sultan showed no interest in occupying Romania and instead demanded tribute payments. The Romanian Orthodox Church and the Greek Orthodox Church played key roles in Romania's national identity.

On March 28, 1918, Bessarabia and on November 27 Bukovina voted for annexation to Romania. The delegates of Transylvania, the Banat and the Crișana region followed on December 1, 1918. The Romanian territory increased from 137,000 km² to 295,000 km², while the population grew from 8 to 18 million.

Communist Hungary did not want and could not accept the loss of Transylvania and launched an offensive against Romania, which failed. Bla Kun was born in Transylvania under the name of Béla Kun, the son of a notary. He studied at the University of Cluj, where he maintained close contact with socialists. In 1914 he went to Budapest and served in the Austro-Hungarian army during World War I. In 1916 he was taken prisoner in Russia, where he developed into a convinced communist. At the end of 1918 he was back in Budapest. There he edited a communist newspaper. In 1919 he formed a council government of socialists and communists and became the most powerful communist in Hungary.

Béla Kun and his soviet government made territorial claims on Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia. The occupation of large parts of the former Hungary by Romanian, Czechoslovak and French troops led former soldiers and officers of the K. and K. armies to fight for the soviet government for patriotic reasons. During the Hungarian-Romanian War, Romanian troops advanced as far as Budapest. This city was occupied for 3 months. This led to the fall of the soviet government. Béla Kun fled first to Austria, later to the Soviet Union, where he worked for the KPSDU. In 1931 he was shot as part of the Stalinist purge.

- The Romanian Communist Party was founded on May 9, 1921. From the beginning, it pursued a pro-Soviet, i.e. anti-Romanian, policy and had only about 800 members at the end of World War II.
- In 1918, suffrage was introduced in Romania. A major agrarian reform followed in July 1921: over 6 million hectares of arable land were redistributed and the economy experienced an upswing.
- Despite a democratic constitution, political turmoil and economic difficulties persisted between 1923 and 1938.
- From 1927, the nationalist organization – Legion of St. Michael the Archangel – determined politics. This organization, which from 1930 called itself the Iron Guard, felt connected to Italian fascism.
- King Carol II, due to domestic instability, created a royal dictatorship on February 10, 1938: all democratic parties and institutions were abolished. The assassination of the leader Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and other 13 legionaries was ordered by King Carol II.
- On August 23, 1939, the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact was signed in Moscow.
- On June 26, 1940, Stalin demanded that the Romanians relinquish Bessarabia and northern Bukovina. By the so-called „Dictate of Vi-

enna“, northern Transylvania had to be ceded to Hungary and southern Dobruja to Bulgaria.

- Ion Antonescu was a Romanian general and dictator of the Kingdom of Romania during World War 2 from 1940 to 1944. He led Romania into World War 2 alongside the Axis powers. Between September 1940 and June 1941, he worked closely with the fascist Iron Guard legionary movement.

A. Heinen reports in his book (Romania, the Holocaust and the Logic of Violence) on p. 58, that Antonescu rejected elections because he acted as omniscient and no one dared to contradict him. He believed that he was the „Chosen Savior“ of the Romanian people and that only through his ingenuity could he pave the way for Romanians out of difficult circumstances.

The Iron Guard was a fascist movement in Romania. It was characterized by radical anti-Semitism and Romanian ultranationalism. With its 250,000 members, it was at times the third largest fascist movement in Europe, after the PNF fascist party in Italy and the NSDAP in Germany.

- Under the authoritarian royal dictatorship of Carol II, the movement was massively suppressed.
- Between July 1940 and early September 1940, the Iron Guard participated in government for the first time.
- On September 3, 1940, under Horia Sima, it attempted to carry out a coup against Carol II.
- On September 4, Carol II appointed General Ion Antonescu as Prime Minister.
- On September 6, 1940, Antonescu, with the support of the Iron Guard, forced King Carol II to abdicate the throne and established a fascist dictatorship that brought Romania firmly into line with the Axis powers.

- In January 1941, the Iron Guard attempted to coup against Antonescu. After a bloody suppression of the uprising, the Iron Guard was banned.
- Antonescu wanted to regain Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, so he joined the fight against the Soviet Union on the German side on June 22, 1941. Within 5 days Bessarabia and Bukovina became part of Romania again.
- 250,000 Jews and 25,000 Roma were liquidated by the Romanian army. To the present day, Antonescu's role is relativized by nationalist and fascist groups.
- Within a few months, Romania lost 36,000 km² of its territory and over 6 million inhabitants.
- King Mihai I had Ion Antonescu arrested on August 23, 1944. Mihai I ended the alliance with Nazi Germany and switched to the side of the Allies. Subsequently, Antonescu was extradited to the USSR and transferred back to Romania in 1946. A court sentenced him to death and had him executed with the most important ministers.

Three coalition governments followed between August 23, 1944 and March 6, 1945. On September 12, 1944, an armistice treaty was signed between Romania and the Soviets in Moscow. An Allied control commission was to supervise the agreements concluded. The Soviets did not care about the Anglo-American diplomats, nor about legitimate Romanian interests. The Soviets forced the Sănătescu and Rădescu governments to follow their instructions.

The Soviet Union occupied Romania and stationed troops throughout the country. According to the agreements reached by Winston Churchill and Josef Stalin and by the Americans, occupied Romania was an integral part of the Soviet sphere of influence from 1945. So-called „patriotic fighting formations“ were created, communist ministers and police prefects were appointed just to destabilize the country. They also spread

the rumor that the „fascists“, as the members of the government of democratic parties were called, were incapable of imposing stable conditions in Romania. To increase the pressure on Romania, the Deputy Foreign Minister of the Soviets, Andrei Januaryevich Vyshinsky, appeared. He was the executioner-prosecutor of the Great Purges in the Soviet Union in the 1930s. In June 1940, he also acted as the „Gauleiter“ of the Sovietization of Latvia. Threatening with his fist, he even declared orders to King Mihai I. His two stays in București, in November 1944 and February-March 1945, each time led to the change of government.

The states of Central and Southern Europe were expecting the Soviet liberators and not the Soviet oppressors. This turned out to be a momentous mistake, as Rusan reports in his remarks.

Stalin was surprised by the actions of King Mihai I, who had ended the alliance with Germany despite the 680,000 German soldiers in the country. King Mihai I had formed a military regime involving four ministers of the party coalition. The Soviets delayed the signing of the armistice with Romania for twenty days. During this period, they feigned „victorious liberation“ by covering several hundred kilometers to Banat and central Transylvania without any resistance. By the time the armistice was signed, the Soviets had captured 160,000 Romanian soldiers. These had originally been waiting to join them. Chaos was deliberately created by the Soviets in order to have a pretext for the Communist seizure of power in Romania.

The Soviet terror against the army, the political parties and the civilian population were foreshadowing the 45 years of terror that Romania had to suffer. It is one of the many tragedies of Romanian history. King Mihai I had brought down a military dictatorship in a coup d'état on August 23, 1944, only to be overthrown by another totalitarian regime within six months.