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RESTIVE ROMANIA

Golans had been occupying Bucharest's University Square since April 22 to oppose Romania's interim communist leader, Mr. Ion Iliescu, and his party, the New Salvation Front. Orders were for these student demonstrators to leave the square by May 24, four days after the election. The word golans means hooligans in Romanian. It was a derogatory term used by the deceased former president, Nicolae Ceausescu, to describe student dissenters.

On the afternoon of May 24 our travel group from the Inter-American Security Educational Institute was received at the U.S. Embassy by Ambassador Alan Green, United States Ambassador to Romania, and his staff. He had been called back to the United States to protest pre-election violence but by election day on May 20 he had returned. At one of the polling places, a medical emergency center, in Timisoara we had observed what appeared to be a peaceful, orderly vote. In Romania's first free election in approximately 45 years, Mr. Iliescu was elected president in a landslide victory. Ambassador Green expressed his sentiments to us. His attitude would be tolerant, a willingness to give Mr. Iliescu and the NSF a chance to succeed. In a light moment the genial ambassador who is from Portland, Oregon mentioned that he wished Bucharest had a Safeway store.

On the evening of May 24 we milled around the square with throngs of people. Banners imprinted with slogans like "Golans

sans Frontieres" (vagabonds without frontiers), "Welcome to Golanias" and "Golans from all over the world, wake up" were strung across the square. It was a Mardi Gras-capacity crowd in Bucharest. Dissenters were fervid but orderly. Two impassioned leaders from our group addressed the crowd along with other speakers from an upstairs balcony of a university building. Their talks were fiery and empathetic. They too protested the apparent results of the May 20 election. Dr. Morris and I ducked into the shabby Inter-Continental Hotel to "escape the madding crowd". However, at that time (May 24) the crowd was non-violent, resolute but controlled and without an apparent "hooligan" in sight. University buildings around the square as well as the hotel were scarred and pocked with bullet holes -- mementoes of the December uprising against President Nicolae Ceausescu which resulted in his execution and that of his wife Elena on December 25.

The mood of the masses had heightened by Wednesday, June 13. Demonstrators who had not vacated University Square on May 24 had turned violent. Rioters had assaulted and fire-bombed government buildings. Hooliganism prevailed as many demonstrators now attacked the government of the new president shouting, "The final solution is another revolution". Tempers flared, violence accelerated. Protesters now demanded that ex-Communists such as Iliescu be banned from politics.

One writer commented that "few observers were surprised to see Romania shaken by violence. Since the December

revolution against the Communist dictator, Nicolae Ceausescu, the country has been riven with nervous tensions, suspicions and unrelenting, unforgiving recriminations."

In accusing extremist elements of organizing an "Iron Guard rebellion" and trying to overthrow the government, the new president-elect was referring to the pre-World War II Iron Guard party that supported the Nazis. His appeal for "responsible people" to protect government buildings brought out thousands of workers -- pro-government supporters.

Ultimately, as violence and destruction prevailed at the square and tumult became uncontrollable, Iliescu felt compelled to call upon loyal miners to help put down anti-government protests in order "to avoid bloodshed and disorder" as he explained on TV.

Tens of thousands of miners responded as they came to Bucharest from as far away as 250 miles. Armed with clubs, iron bars, hoses -- their faces and clothes still smudged with coal dust -- they presented a shocking example of violence to a TV audience as they quelled the demonstration. In a take-over stance they milled around University Square on Thursday, June 14 demanding identity papers from foreign journalists and those they suspected of being anti-government sympathizers.

The sight of the miners' unmitigated violence evoked a memory of one of Romania's past "heroes". On May 23 we had visited the Castle of Vlad the Impaler at Bran. Vlad Tepes,

the Impaler, was a fifteenth century Walachian prince and the son of Vlad Dracul. Dracul means "devil", so Tepes was known as "son of the devil" or Dracula.

I was nagged by a line from Bram Stoker's famous novel about the vampire count: "Strange to say there were hairs in the center of the palm". Thousands of Turks were reputed to have been annihilated in one campaign by this "noble and brave" prince. Some Romanians still regard him as a "national hero".

Iliescu had trouble calling the miners off. One miner was quoted as saying, "The hooligans stayed for a couple of weeks but we will stay until we are sure that we reinstate order in the Romanian capital."

By June 13, the 53-day anti-communist protest was finally subdued. In Bucharest on Wednesday, June 20 in his inaugural address President Iliescu pledged "to defend democracy . . . fundamental rights and freedoms" as he promised to transform his formerly Communist nation into a full political democracy with a market economy incorporating mixed forms of ownership. He also admitted that "there was overreaction in the public order restoration process."

To say the least, Romania's road to democracy has been bumpy. This beautiful country has a long history -- evidence of the existence of human life since the Old Stone Age and establishment of human settlements during the Bronze and Iron Ages. It has known Greeks, Dacians, Romans, barbaric hordes,

Vlachs (Romans and Dacians), Hungarians, Turks, Boyars and the Russian Empire. The state of Romania was formed in 1861 and the country had a monarchy. It became involved in World War I and World War II. The Romanian government joined Germany and Italy in the war against the U.S.S.R., Britain and the United States. By December 1947 Romania was proclaimed a republic and the Communists took over the government.

The Casa Republicii in Bucharest is a permanent reminder of the excessive extravagances of the former, deposed, deceased President, Nicolae Ceausescu. The empty monumental white stone government building has 600-light chandeliers in each hall and custom-made carpets on each floor. The burdensome building inflames the people of Romania. Perhaps Ceausescu envisioned his inevitable demise when he built a tunnel beneath the building, leading to the airport. The tyrannical dictator was not destined to use this escape route.