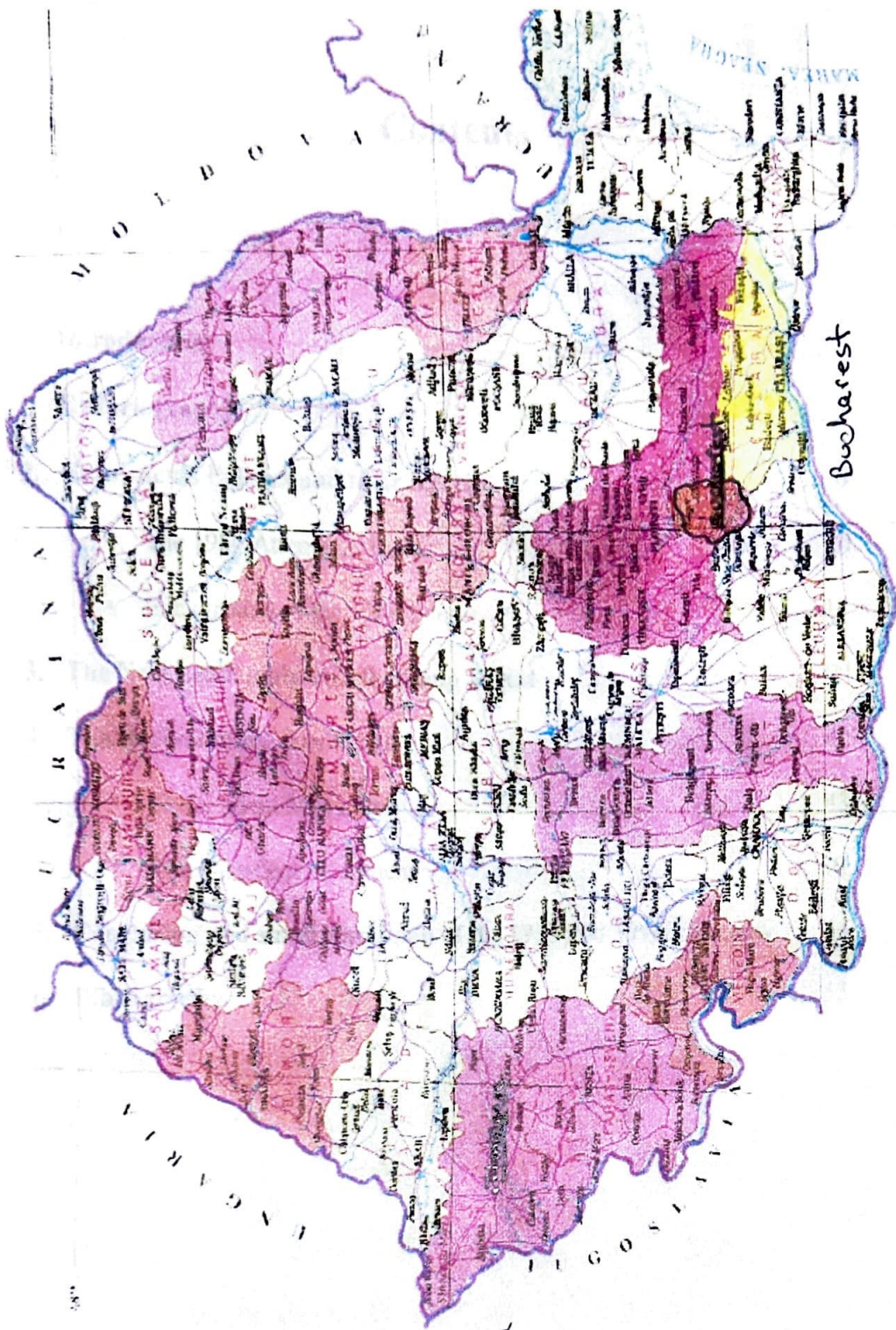




Redefining the Romanian Revolution of 1989

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Introduction

Before December 1989 Europe was divided in two separate spheres: the Democratic West and the Communist East. Change started in August with Poland, and the Eastern European block soon followed suit. Hungary opened its borders to East Germany in September of 1989, thus creating a window for East Germans to democratize. On November 10, of the same year, the famous Berlin Wall, the symbol of separation between communism and capitalism, finally fell. Within a few days the communist governments in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia crashed. Romania remained the last stronghold of communism.

In the eyes of outsiders Nicolae Ceausescu, the Romanian dictator since 1968, appeared to be well established in his seat as. After the party congress of November 1989, when Ceausescu was reelected as president, everyone believed that the wave of revolution would stop at Romania. For example, Mary Ellen Fischer wrote in Nicolae Ceausescu, a book published before the 1989 events, "A successful revolution against Ceausescu from below seems unlikely."¹ However, change happened: the dictator was removed from power in December 1989.

The December 1989 Revolution was one of the most dramatic events in Romanian history and put an end to Ceausescu's totalitarian rule. Unlike the other revolutions in Eastern Europe, the origins of the Romanian Revolution are hotly debated. Theories and speculations envelop the events of December 1989. Many endorse the idea

¹ Mary Ellen Fischer, Nicolae Ceausescu: a Study in Political Leadership (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989), 265.

that the transition of power in Romania was incomplete due to the fact that old communists replaced Ceausescu. This led to the belief that the events in Romania were not a revolution, but a coup d'etat. Although some historians see the events as a revolution they most often call it a failed, or unfinished one

I argue that speculations concerning the character of the Romanian revolution as a coup are not entirely accurate. By discussing the previous regime and the political environment at the time I argue that the Romanian revolution had a leaderless, popular character, which was later modified by former communists who simply rode the wave of the revolution to power. The intervention of the youth and the dissidents created an environment of open political discussion and open social dialogue, which expanded the initial goals of the attempted coup of December 22, 1989. By analyzing the transition of power from Ceausescu to the newly formed government, I propose that the December 1989 events unraveled from a genuine revolution on December 15-22, to an attempted coup December 22-28, and finally to a second revolution inspired by two groups in particular, the youth and the dissidents. By expanding and modifying the initial intentions of the leaders of the National Salvation Front these two groups succeeded in broadening the original scope of the revolution.

Historiography

The end of the Cold War marked the beginning of a new age for international relations. Within this context the study of the Romanian Revolution is important in order to define the role that Romania will, or should play in the new international order. By understanding the causes of the Romanian Revolution, and the perception of the

December 1989 events, one can better comprehend the present politics of Romania. The December events help us grasp the development of the Romania civil society and political consciousness. The way the NSF came to power and the many myths surrounding the events are the direct cause for the way Romanian politics is conducted today.

Since December 1989, historians have speculated on the transfer of power from Ceausescu to the National Salvation Front. The secondary literature on this topic falls in two main categories. The first group is made up of authors who agree that the events of December 1989 had the character of a revolution. The second category consists of authors who define the Romanian Revolution as a coup. They believe that the neocommunists who came to power after December 22 hijacked the original intentions of the revolution.

The lead historian who endorses the idea of the December events as a true revolution is Michael Shafir. In his multiple articles in Radio Free Europe/ Report on Eastern Europe, he upholds that "the resistance did not come from any organized political or social segment of the population,"² but rather that, "The Romanian Revolution began with a spontaneous and therefore unorganized uprising."³ In further articles, he vehemently opposes the theories that suggest a coup might have happened. For example, in "Ceausescu overthrow: Popular Uprising or Moscow Guided Conspiracy?"⁴ he points out that the conspiracy theories were mistaken interpretations of the events, based on unfounded speculations. Even after the May 1990 elections, when the National Salvation

² Michael Shafir, "The Isolation of Romania and the fall of Nicolae Ceausescu," Radio Free Europe 1, no. 1 (January February 1990): 29.

³ Michael Shafir, "The Isolation of Romania and the fall of Nicolae Ceausescu," 29.

⁴ Michael Shafir, "Ceausescu's Overthrow: Popular uprising or Moscow guided conspiracy," Radio Free Europe 1, no. 3 (9 January 1990).

Front produced a landslide victory, Shafir continued to insist that the leadership was swept into power by the popular uprising.⁵

Nestor Ratesh is another writer who supports the idea of a genuine revolution. He gives a realistic account of the December events, but still explains each conspiracy theory, and the facts behind it. The title of the book The Entangled Revolution makes the reader aware of the controversy around the events. Ratesh points out that the debate is ongoing, and that he strives to "stay within the known facts and serious objective interpretations."⁶ I use the accounts and opinions of these authors in order to establish the popular character of the 1989 events, and to bring to light the theories behind the coup.

Another author is the Romanian dissident Silviu Brucan. He played a prominent part in the leadership of the National Salvation Front during the revolution, until the February 1990 elections. His book The Wasted Generation records not only the immediate events of December 1989, but also the background of the uprising. Although in later interviews he endorsed the idea that the 1989 events followed the blueprint of the 1984 attempted coup;⁷ in his book he maintains that the revolution was genuine and popular. I will be using his analysis to show how a coup d'état was not possible to develop in Ceausescu's Romania, and to analyze the attempted coup of 1984. The attempted coup of 1984 showed that underlying discontents were spreading under Ceausescu, but that in order for any kind of plots to come to fruition the context of the popular uprising was a necessary prerequisite.

⁵ Michael Shafir, "The Leadership yet to prove it's credibility," Radio Free Europe 1, no. 28 (July 13, 1990).

⁶ Nestor Ratesh, Romania: the Entangled Revolution, (New York: Praeger, 1991), pg xxii.

⁷ Michael Shafir, "Preparing for the future by revising the past," Radio Free Europe 1, (October 12, 1990).

In the second category one finds Andrei Codrescu. Another recorder of the 1989 events he believes in the existence of the coup, but his theories are extremely speculative. He advances the idea that old communists in need of recognition staged the shootings in Bucharest and Timisoara. I believe that Codrescu represents an extreme believer of the conspiracy/coup d'etat theory. Nonetheless, Codrescu gives a good account of the mood of the Romanian youth following the revolution. Looking at the authors who believe in the conspiracy theory gave me an opportunity to analyze the reasons behind speculations, and point out viable arguments behind them.

To further explore the theme of a genuine revolution versus coup d'etat theories, I also paid attention to authors who discuss the evolution of the civil society in Romania, without paying attention to the larger debate. For example, Gail Kilgman points out in her article "Reclaiming the public, a reflection on Creating Civil Society in Romania,"⁸ the extremism of the Ceausescu regime, and therefore the importance to pay attention to it when talking about the Romanian Revolution, and the creation of civil society. She further discuss that although political talk is present and political expression is part of Romanian life, Romania is still under the influence of the Ceausescu legacy. Mary Ellen Fischer, Matei Calinescu, Vladimir Tismaneanu, Dan Ionescu are just some of the authors that addressed the issue of Romania without placing it in the larger context of the debate.

I use these resources to argue that the December 1989 events in Romania were the result of a leaderless, popular uprising. By analyzing the methods used by former communists to attain power, and by showing how the birth of political discourse

⁸ Gail Kilgman, "Reclaiming the Public: A Reflection on Recreating the Civil Society in Romania," East European Politics and Societies Journal 4 (1990): 393-438.

expanded their original goals, I argue that the Romanian revolution cannot be defined in terms of revolution or coup. The events intersected, and in the end it led to the rebirth of open political debate, and changes within the system.

Ceausescu's Policies and Their Legacies

"Citizens! Romanian Brothers!

We have overcome!

The tyrant has been defeated!

Ceausescu and his odious clique have been banished by the will and power of the people!

Power is in the hands of the people!"⁹

The history of communism in Romania is very different from those in other Eastern European countries. Ceausescu's power over the Romanian society was extensive. Through his dynastic political system, and his far-reaching control over private and public space, he created a dictatorship that even after it collapsed had lasting effects on Romanian politics and society. Ceausescu's rule over his people was unchecked, and was concentrated around Ceausescu's image as the leader.¹⁰ Without the outburst of popular anger the events of December 1989 were not possible. In order to comprehend why a popular uprising was essential for any political movement to succeed, an understanding of Ceausescu's system is required. Similarly, Ceausescu's control over the political system also meant that the December events could not have been triggered by a coup d'etat.

Ceausescu started his career in the party as a young teenager, while the Romanian Communist party was still illegal. He climbed the ranks of the Romanian

⁹ *Libertatea*, Vol. 1, no. 1, 22 December 1989, 1.

¹⁰ Matei Calinescu, Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Romania After Tyranny*, ed. Daniel Nelson (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 18.

Communist Party from 1944 until 1965, under Gheorghiu-Dej's protective wing.¹¹ Ceausescu became a Politburo member in 1954, and by March 1965 he was one of the contenders to replace Gheorghiu-Dej. In March 1965 he was voted by the party's highest organ as first secretary. During his first year in power, 1966-1967, he emphasized the need for collective leadership, and for increased support among the population. By 1967, through the elimination of some of his main contenders, Ceausescu succeeded in solidifying his power within the party. He further consolidated his image as a natural born leader in 1968 when he refused to provide troops for the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Many considered this "the founding myth of Ceausescu's Regime."¹²

1971 was the year when Ceausescu gave up any pretensions of collective leadership, and after publishing his July 1971 theses he inaugurated a new stage in Romanian history.¹³ After a prolonged visit to North Korea and China, Ceausescu returned with a new meaning of communism: that of a personality cult, and concentration of power in one person. In March 1974 he attained total power over the political system when, in addition to his job as first secretary he became the president of Romania.¹⁴ By merging state and party functions he was able to abolish free elections, and combine private and public lives.

During his growth as a politician he was an ardent follower of both Marxism and mainstream Romanian politics. He strongly believed in the need for industrialization, which was a point of intersection between Romanian politics and Marxism. He also

¹¹ Matei Calinescu, 18.

¹² Steven Roper, Romania, The Unfinished Revolution, (The Netherlands: Hardwood Academic Publishers, 2000.) 47.

¹³ Silviu Brucan, The Wasted Generation, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993) 115.

¹⁴ Brucan, 115.

believed in nationalism as a form of holding power over the society.¹⁵ By promoting hatred of all minorities he used national unity as a form of control. Ceausescu also incorporated centralized command in order to have complete power over the party. His experience with Romanian politics, in which factionalism was predominant, made him realize that the way to hold and maintain supreme power was through the unity of the people, and more importantly of the party. In his eyes democracy had no place in leadership, and the people did not have any input in policies.¹⁶

Many historians agree that Ceausescu's regime was the most oppressive and closed of the communist regimes. The system was involved in every aspect of public and private life. There was no personal space, and the public space was nothing more than an invention of Ceausescu's regime.¹⁷ Kligman points out that in Ceausescu's Romania talking meant whispering, even in the privacy of a personal home.¹⁸ By merging public and private space Ceausescu made sure that there was no room for plots, or plotters. Nonetheless, as I will later argue, the Romanian people showed their frustrations with the regime in many hidden ways. These concealed demonstrations of dissatisfaction fostered the anger that later exploded.

His control over Romanian life varied from what Romanians ate to how many children women gave birth too. In 1982 Ceausescu prepared the "Program of Scientific Nourishment." He established how much each person and family was allowed to eat depending on their jobs, and how many calories were essential for them.¹⁹ According to

¹⁵ By playing the nationalism card he was able to bring uniformity to the diverse Romanian society, and by doing so to hold control over it.

¹⁶ Fisher, *Nicolae Ceausescu*. I need a pg nr.

¹⁷ Gail Kilgman, "Reclaiming the Public: A Reflection on Recreating the Civil Society in Romania." *East European Politics and Societies Journal* 4 (1990) 398.

¹⁸ Kilgman, 398

¹⁹ Brucan, 104

the decree of the State Council of the Socialist Republic of Romania of 10 October 1983, one could get up to five years of jail time for purchasing more flour, oil, sugar, rice or foodstuff than it was allowed.²⁰ The control of the state over private life intruded even further. In 1966 a law passed that forced women to undergo monthly pregnancy checks at work. Furthermore, abortion was made illegal and women found to be pregnant and later on not were sentenced to prison.²¹ The invasive nature of his system ensured the absence of open space for disagreement, and therefore of different opinions.

An important feature of Ceausescu's power was the "personalistic" aspect of his regime. As Steven D. Roper points out, this quality of Ceausescu's regime was crucial not only to the success of his economic policies and politics, but also to ensure a lasting legacy among the Romanian people. Ceausescu's figure was present in every aspect of Romanian life. Throughout Romania he was portrayed as the hardworking communist who rose through party ranks,²² as the "idol of the people, savior of the nation's independence, the synthesis of Latin Genius."²³ While before 1973 Romanian people were aware of other public figures, after 1973 Romanian news channels centered on Ceausescu's activities and his accomplishments.²⁴ Brucan reported that every single book aspiring to be published in a Romanian bookstore had to contain the obligatory Ceausescu quotation.²⁵

The truth was that Ceausescu did not have any higher education. His lack of education created an environment of mistrust especially towards experts and intellectuals.

²⁰ Pavel Campeanu, *Ceausescu: the Countdown*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) 439.

²¹ Campeanu, 449.

²² Fischer, *Nicolae Ceausescu*, 257.

²³ Brucan, 123.

²⁴ Stokes, 54.

²⁵ Brucan, 124.

Due to his fear of technology Ceausescu closed down the Institute of Mathematics and of Information and any channels of communications that facilitated the exchange of intellectual information on these subjects. When members of the Academia complained that such prohibitions impeded them from doing their job, Elena, Ceausescu's wife, nonchalantly replied: "Nonsense comrades, I have never participated in international congresses, and look where I am!"²⁶ It was common knowledge that she never finished third grade.

Although his policies were often flawed, no one had the power basis necessary to contradict the dictator. An example of the unfeasibility to express and develop opinions different from the system is Dumitru Mazilu, the appointee in 1984 to the U.N. Human Rights Subcommittee. A well-known diplomat, Mazilu defied the president in 1988 when he attempted to send out a report criticizing Ceausescu's human rights violations. He wrote, "Great personalities have been reduced to silence. The only voice that can be heard is that of the leader."²⁷ Mazilu was put under house arrest, his wife Elena lost her job, his phone line was disconnected, and policemen surrounded his house.²⁸ His paranoia about foreign intervention put many Romanian writers, professors, expert politicians under house arrest, or in jail. This created a new dangerous class out of the intelligentsia: that of dissident.

Anybody that had the courage to disagree publicly with Ceausescu was immediately put under house arrest and demoted. Famous examples of dissidents include the poets Doina Cornea, Ana Blandiana, Mircea Dinescu. Most of these famous dissidents resurfaced during the 1989 events. It is important to underline that the

²⁶ Brucan, 117.

²⁷ Hoover Institution Archives, Romanian Subject collection, Box 4, Folder: Rom Rev 1989.

²⁸ Hoover Institution Archives, continue citation.

dissident movement was not connected to the popular movement of dissatisfaction that I will later address. Immediately following acts of rebellion the dissidents were isolated from the society. Although people were aware of their acts, the dissidents could not develop them further due to their isolation. Their open letters and appeals, "lent vital moral support to the Romanian populations," nonetheless, the authority was quick in suppressing and punishing them.²⁹ The dissidents were not arrested for expressing their anti-Ceausescu opinions, which made his power more obsolete. For example, Dinescu was put under house arrest for "participating without approval at receptions given by foreign embassies," and for "accepting visits from journalists, writers and diplomats from capital countries."³⁰ Ceausescu's use of fake accusations and control led to his need for the Romanian secret police: the Securitatea.

The Securitatea was the secret police used by Ceausescu to gain control over every aspect of Romanian social and political life. It was created during the communist take over of Romania, and modeled after its Soviet counterpart.³¹ Better trained and equipped than the army force it "penetrated deeply into the fabric of Romanian society," thus "creating a pervasive atmosphere of fear by continually testing the loyalty of every citizen in the country."³² Every well-known dissident was under Securitatea surveillance, as well as every unknown citizen. Doina Cornea wrote, "We are a land occupied by an invisible army of security forces under your [Ceausescu's] guidance and leadership."³³

²⁹Revolt against silence: the state of human rights in Romania, U.S. Commission on security and cooperation in Europe, December 1989. Hoover Institution Archives, Romanian Subject Collection, box nr 4,

³⁰ Revolt against silence: the state of human rights in Romania, U.S. Commission on security and cooperation in Europe, December 1989.

³¹ Mihai Sturdza, "How dead is Ceausescu's Secret Police Force?" Report on Eastern Europe, Radio Free Europe, v. 1, no 15 (April 13, 1990): 28.

³² Gail Stokes, 57.

³³ Mihai Sturdza, 28.

The Securitate was able to suppress attempts of change coming from the top, as well as from below. For example, in 1977 when miners in the Jiu Valley organized a massive strike, its leaders quickly disappeared and order was restored. The same was the case with the Brasov riots of 1987.³⁴ The legacy of this body of terror is felt today. Many of the myths surrounding the December events are related to the Securitate activities at the time.

"The leader," as he was called, ruled the political elite with an iron hand. On 10 February 1971 he introduced the policy of rotating cadres to "strengthen the ties between the leading organs and the masses," and "combat excessive centralism."³⁵ The rotation of the head figures of the party ensured that they were not able to create a power base, and did not accumulate any amount of knowledge on a particular aspect of government. By doing this he was able to maintain control of the party and make sure that a plot could not fully develop.

Furthermore, by adopting a "dynastic socialism,"³⁶ promoting his relatives to high positions within the government, he made sure he had a faithful political basis. He made certain that his decisions would not be debated. After he achieved supremacy within the party in the early 1970s, Ceausescu was the source of all major policy decisions.³⁷ Any one that spoke against his theories was demoted and eventually removed from the party ranks. By creating a network of support he guaranteed that a plot could not develop without being caught by his secret police or his supporters. His ardent followers created a barrier around him, which was unbreakable from within. At the same

³⁴ Daniel Nelson, 21.

³⁵ Mary Ellen Fischer, 179.

³⁶ Steven Roper, pg 51.

³⁷ Mary Ellen Fischer, pg 257

time, the fact that a plot could not develop from the top meant that any kind of uprising against Ceausescu had to start from the bottom, from the population.

▪ The 1984 Attempted Coup

An important example of the dictator's complete control over the political system and the impossibility of a coup to develop without popular support is the 1984 attempted coup. Although there are similarities between the 1989 events and the 1984 plans, the failure of this attempt demonstrates that any change in Romania had to begin with the population. Due to the fact that some of the players in the 1984 plan resurfaced in 1989, some historians believe that the December 1989 events were defined by a coup d'etat. Nonetheless, due to Ceausescu's extensive grip over the party, the people involved in 1984 could take hold of power only by riding the wave of the popular revolution, and did not have the basis of starting a popular revolution themselves.

The idea of the 1984 coup centered on the military. The masterminds, General Ionita and General Militaru, realized that the only opportune time to take over the country was when Ceausescu was out of the country. For example, during the 1977 earthquake, when the dictator was on an international visit, Militaru observed that the whole country was paralyzed and no decision making process was in place.³⁸ Thus, the decision was made to act while Ceausescu was out of the country. Eventually they drew to their side Ioan Ursu, a member of the Political Executive Committee, who supplied them with a list of the scheduled visits. The date was set for October 1984, when the Ceasucescus were visiting West Germany.

According to Brucan the plan had two central points: to round up the dictator's five closest collaborators, and to seize the television and radio station to call for popular

³⁸ Michael Shafir, "Preparing for the future by revising the past," RFR/REE (October 12, 1990) 33.

support.³⁹ Furthermore, "the linkage of the military coup with a popular uprising was the central idea of the scenario."⁴⁰ According to Brucan and Militaru's accounts, the mechanized division led by General Pletos and a tank division led by General Cheler were supposed to control the Securitatea forces. The attempted coup failed, because one of the army units crucial to the fulfillment of the plan was sent to harvest corn.⁴¹ Due to the fact that no one person knew more than needed to carry out his part, the main players of the coup, Militaru and Ionita were not arrested. They were summoned and prohibited from seeing each other, and later on Ionita died of a suspect case of cancer.⁴²

The main players of the 1984 plot were military generals, Militaru, Ionita, and Koystal, as well as the politician Silviu Brucan. Brucan named Ion Iliescu, who became the National Salvation Front Leader, as one of the people approached to take part in the coup. However, Iliescu declined the offer because of his party mentality. Iliescu was willing to change the ruler, but not the system; he wanted to "play by party rules."⁴³ Iliescu, Militaru and Brucan were among the leaders who surfaced during the December 1989. The three of them played the more preeminent roles in the National Salvation Front Leadership. Some historians believe that their connections from 1984 facilitated their ascension to power.

The 1984-attempted coup failed because of Ceausescu's extensive control over the Romanian society. The events of 1984 lacked the international context of 1989. Furthermore, the masterminds of the attempted coup realized that they would not be able to garner the popular support needed for the coup to be successful. The coup shows that

³⁹ Silviu Brucan, 133.

⁴⁰ Silviu Brucan, 133.

⁴¹ Nestor Ratesh, 94.

⁴² Silviu Brucan, 134

⁴³ Silviu Brucan, 133.

discontents existed within the high echelons of Romanian politics, as well as among the Romanian population, but at the same time change needed to start from the bottom up.

▪ Background of the 1989 Events

The revolution of 1989 was not a spontaneous movement; it was the result of underlying issues. Although in 1968 Ceausescu was seen as a welcomed change, soon his actions proved them wrong. In 1971 Ceausescu gave way to his aspirations as a dictator and the Romanian society changed. Liberties became nonexistent, while food was scarce. The suppression of civil liberties and free thought reached a new height in Ceausescu's policies. Economic depravation, combined with the political climate of 1989 and the hidden dissatisfaction with the system led to the Revolution of 1989.

Due to the oil rich soil, much of the Romanian exports were refined products. During the 1973-74-world oil crisis, the Romanian market was safe, but it eventually crashed in 1978 when the price of refined products did not go up with the price of oil.⁴⁴ This combined with the bad agricultural years that followed, led the Romanian economy into a borrowing frenzy. Nonetheless, Ceausescu projected that the national debt should be paid back by 1990.⁴⁵ His economic plan translated into shortages and rationing in the Romanian markets. Products like flour, sugar, oil and meat were rationed, as well as electricity and heat. For example, if an older person suffered a stroke they were most often left to die due to the need to conserve ambulance gasoline for younger patients. A doctor once said that if "the presidential procession had been made up of only four cars and the gas thus spared were to be given to ambulance cars, thousands of people could

⁴⁴ Mary Ellen Fischer, 249.

⁴⁵ He did so

have been saved from death every week.⁴⁶ The shortages on the Romanian market, and disparities in life style between the general population, the party actives, and Ceausescu, fostered discontent among the Romanian people.

The dissatisfaction of the people was made obvious in the Brasov Riots of 1987. In the words of Marxist theoretician Silviu Brucan "the cup of anger had spilled over."⁴⁷ On 15 November 1987, several thousand workers from the Red Flag truck company gathered and organized a massive strike, not only against working conditions, but also against the dictator himself. The workers were able to gather in great numbers because November 15 was Election Day, and according to communist tradition workers voted in block. While moving towards the main square, they chanted anti-Ceausescu slogans: "Down with the dictator!" "Down with Ceausescu!"⁴⁸ The foreign news picked up the story, but as soon as the Securitatea intervened the town was completely sealed off. Due to the location of Brasov in the Carpathian Mountains, the news of the uprising did not travel far. The only one to act out against Ceausescu was Brucan, who condemned the brutalities of the actions taken by the Securitatea, in an open letter published outside the country. Brucan was put under house arrest, and the main leaders of the Brasov uprising disappeared, or were sent into exile in small towns. The Brasov Riots served as a preview of what was to come in 1989.⁴⁹

Furthermore during 1989, acts of dissidence among the intelligentsia became more defiant and prominent. A famous example is the Letter of Six.⁵⁰ In March 1989, six Romanian Communist Party veterans circulated an open letter criticizing the economic

⁴⁶ Pavel Campeanu, 445.

⁴⁷ Nestor Ratesh, 11.

⁴⁸ Silviu Brucan, 134.

⁴⁹ For further information on other uprisings see Nestor Ratesh, *The Entangled Revolution*.

⁵⁰ Silviu Brucan, 153

policies of the dictator. This was an important sign that the political elites were becoming disillusioned with Ceausescu. The letter contained many requests of reform to be implemented in the society as well as within the system. Nonetheless, the political background of the six signatories made a deeper impact on the foreign news as well as in Romania, then the content of the letter itself: two former secretaries of the Communist party, one Politburo member, a former foreign minister, the acting editor of *Scanteia*, the party newspaper, and former ambassador to Washington.⁵¹ The dictator was losing control of his power base. Brucan, the mastermind of the letter, later stated that the context of the time made the letter something that "shook up the communist dictatorship."⁵² He was correct. The six signatories were formally part of Ceausescu's trusted network of power. By showing open disagreement within the party the letter drove a wedge between the party and the dictator, and created hope for future open protest. Nonetheless, the signatories were immediately put under house arrest, and some exiled from Bucharest to villages, a tactic often used by Ceausescu. But the letter left a deep impression on the Romanian population, intellectuals and workers alike.

The discontent of the people is best reflected in the hidden political discourse that was taking place during the 1980s. Political and social frustrations were expressed through jokes with many hidden meanings. The jokes that the Romanian people told reflected their deep dissatisfaction with the system. Romanian political jokes ranged from Ceausescu's paternalistic image, to food shortages, immigration and even the infamous Securitatea. But, just like in their everyday life, Ceausescu was at the center of their jokes. For example, in a joke that does not even mention the dictator's name, he is

⁵¹ Silviu Brucan, 155.

⁵² Silviu Brucan, 156

still the center of attention. When asked, "Why are there no pornographic magazines in Romania?" the answer: "Because the first page would be too terrible."⁵³ Ceausescu's image was on every first page of every book, from children songbooks, to academic discourses. The first page of a pornographic magazine would inevitably have to portray the body of a 72-year-old dictator. Furthermore, this joke has another deeper meaning: Romania does not need pornography, it had the biggest obscenity of all: Ceausescu. Many other jokes hint at the despair of the situation. In a joke about food shortages Ceausescu recognizes the deep shortages when after offering his people eggs and bread, he offers them chairs to wait in line for meat.⁵⁴ The nature of the jokes showed that discontent existed in Romania, and that people were aware of it.

Other important ingredients for the discontent that surfaced in December 1989 were the events of 1989 in Eastern Europe. Michael Shafir points out that the international context of 1989 served as a further awakening to the Romanian population. People became aware of the changes happening in Eastern Europe and expected reforms within their own country. Nonetheless, the fall of the Berlin Wall, Zhivkov's resignation, and street demonstrations in Prague did not impede the Romanian Communist Party Congress from reelecting Ceausescu as president. For many it was a sign that Ceausescu's stronghold was unstirred in Romania. However, this was not the truth. The Romanian people did not want to be left behind the wave of change.

Romanians, aware of the international situation, recognized that Gorbachev had distanced himself from Ceausescu, that the US withdrew its "most favorite nation" status, and that Ceausescu was the last mogul of communism still standing. Despite the imposed

⁵³ Robert Cochran, "What courage! Romanian 'our leader' jokes," *Journal of American Folklore*, 103, no. 405 (July-September, 1989): 261

⁵⁴ Robert Cochran, 264.

quarantine the people still got their news from foreign news sources. By listening to Radio Free Europe, BBC, or Hungarian television "most of them already knew much more than the dictator dared to tell them."⁵⁵ Foreign news sources and the Eastern European Revolutions played a very important role in spreading the news about the events in Timisoara, and it gave reasons to Romanian people to expect change. When change did not happen, the underlying discontents came to the surface.

Unlike in Poland, or Hungary, the Revolution in Romania began and grew within a few days. The main reason behind the suddenness of the revolution and its violence is the very different political environment in Romania. While in Poland, Solidarity was able to form and participate in the elections; such thing was unthinkable in Romania. People were not free to organize, gatherings of more than a few persons were illegal, unless previously authorized, and any conversation with a foreigner had to be immediately reported.⁵⁶ Due to Ceausescu's strong hold on politics, Romania had no alternative basis for the start of change, therefore change had to start in a sporadic and violent way. The suppressive nature of the Ceausescu regime left no space for the formation of any autonomous structures around which the movement for freedom could congregate.⁵⁷ The Romanian revolution of December 1989 started as a popular uprising, with no named leader. The former communists that took power were able to do so during the revolution, after the people had set the mechanism of change in motion.

The Beginning of the Revolution

*"Desteapte-te Romane din somnul cel de moarte
in care te-adancira barabarii de tirani
Acum or niciodata croiesteti alta soarta*

⁵⁵ Nestor Ratesh, 35.

⁵⁶ Gail Kilgman, 399.

⁵⁷ Mary Ellen Fischer, 47.

*La care sa se inchine si cruzi tai dusmani!*⁵⁸

This is the hymn of the free Romanian people. On December 22, 1989, many Romanian people rejoiced at the idea that the dictator was dead. December 22nd marked the fall of the Romanian dictator but also the beginning of an ongoing debate concerning the origins of the Romanian revolution. In order to understand the controversy behind the revolution, one must answer an important initial question: how did the revolution start, and who started it? By looking at the actual events, I argue that the December 1989 events started as a leaderless, popular uprising.

The social disruption started in Timisoara. Thousands of people rallied around Pastor Laszlo Tokes, the reverend of a small Reformed Church in Timisoara where he had been serving since 1986. Not only that he was part of the Reformed Church, one of the most discriminated against in Ceausescu's time, but his father was also an outspoken believer against Ceausescu violation of basic human rights.⁵⁹ Reverend Laszlo Tokes was first excluded from the clergy in 1984 for "indiscipline," and reinstated two years later as priest of the Church in Timisoara. His trouble began earlier in 1989 when he expressed his anti-Ceausescu opinions, especially his opposition to Ceausescu's systematization plan in an interview with an international newspaper.⁶⁰

As punishment for his rebellion Pastor Tokes was ordered to transfer from Timis County to a small village with an even smaller congregation. Aware that his removal was purely political, Tokes refused to leave his house. On December 10th he addressed his

⁵⁸ Wake up Romanian, from the dead sleep in which the tyrants put you
Now or never tailor yourself another destiny, to which your enemies will hail too.

⁵⁹ Ratesh, Nestor, *Romania: the Entangled Revolution*. Pg 20

⁶⁰ I need to locate in my materials the name of the paper/

congregation and announced that the deadline for his eviction was set in five days.⁶¹

Tokes proposed to organize a vigil to protest the evacuation order. People were inspired by his refusal to evacuate and decided to act. Starting December 10th a permanent vigil was set up at the pastor's house. What first started as a simple demonstration against an eviction order soon developed into a full-fledged revolution. Tokes was the spark that lit up the underlying frustrations of the Romanian People.

In the beginning the ethnic make up of the demonstration was mostly Hungarian, but on December 16th something unprecedented in Ceausescu's Romania happened: many ethnic Romanian people joined hands with the Hungarian minority.⁶² This is an important aspect of the demonstration because his policies towards minorities, combined with the deterioration of living standards for ethnic Romanians, had made the Hungarian minorities appear as scapegoats.⁶³ While in the 1960's Ceausescu was more generous with minority rights, when his dictatorial tendencies bloomed, the freedom of minorities proportionately declined. For example, while in 1967 they could modify county boundaries and create two new Hungarian counties, by the mid 1980s the minority representation in the party was close to zero.⁶⁴ Romanian and Hungarians protesting together was an important defiant step because of Ceausescu's past policies.

The Hungarian origin of the initial protestors and of the priest was a very important factor. It attracted the attention of the Hungarian media and government. The Romanian news did not present the events in Timisoara until December 20, and even then it represented the official version. Romanian TV and Radio presented the events as an

⁶¹ Nestor Ratesh, 21.

⁶² Vladimir Socor, "Pastor Tokes and the Outbreak of the Revolution in Timisoara," Radio Free Europe 1, no.5 (2 February 1990): 21.

⁶³ Mary Ellen Fischer, 246

⁶⁴ Mary Ellen Fischer, 244.

insurgency, as hooligans attacking the city, while the Hungarian radio presented them as a valid anti-Ceausescu uprising.⁶⁵ At the same time the interest of the Hungarian government in the name of the Hungarian minority ensured that any kind of action against Hungarians in Timisoara would be monitored and publicized internationally.

The ethnic make up of the population assured that the Hungarian and other media gave full coverage to the events, but the location of the city facilitated the news exchange. Timisoara was located near the border with Yugoslavia and Hungary. This meant that traffic of news and people between Romania and the neighboring countries was much easier. While Brasov, the stage for the 1987 uprisings, is in the Carpathian Mountains, Timisoara is very close to the borders; therefore the word could spread faster and it could continue spreading all over Romania. Many Romanian people were able to capture on their TV's and radios the Hungarian news stations. The international media coverage made possible for the news about Timisoara to spread. Timisoara was also important because it was in a general a more open city, more homogenous and western oriented. This meant that people were more aware of the changes in Eastern Europe, and more willing to see them implemented in their own country. The make up of the city made possible the unification of Romanian and Hungarian people against Ceausescu.

Despite appeals from the mayor of Timisoara and a fake promise that the eviction order would be dismissed, on the night of December 16-17 young Romanians and workers reinforced the crowd. After occurred between the secret police, Securitatea, and the crowd, the mood of the people changed. For the first time in many years people were chanting "Freedom! Freedom!" and "Down with Ceausescu!"⁶⁶ The slogans of the

⁶⁵ FBIS files, 1989, get the page number

⁶⁶ Nestor Ratesh, 22.

masses radicalized. The crowd's requests transformed from defending a pastor's right, to demanding the end of the dictator. As the assembly moved towards the center of the city, where most of the later action unraveled, people broke into libraries and burned communist literature. Around 9:30pm the crowd encountered the police for the first time. Army and Securitatea agents tried to contain the crowd by using force, without shooting. Many of the demonstrators were severally beaten, some arrested and tortured. Nonetheless the first day of the revolution ended relatively quiet with no shooting reported.

In response to the events, Ceausescu held the infamous meeting of December 17th. The transcripts of the meeting indicate Ceausescu's detachment from the mood of the people. Ceausescu said: "I didn't think you would shoot with blanks; that is like a rain shower. Those who entered the party building should not leave the building alive."⁶⁷ During this meeting the dictator accused his generals of treason and told them that the punishment for that is "the firing squad."⁶⁸ He further ordered them to "immediately, right now, arm the troops [with live ammunition] and carry out the order to shoot."⁶⁹ The generals pledged to carry out the orders.

On Sunday December 17, 1989 around two pm police started blocking the streets and surrounding the demonstration from the day before. According to an eyewitness account after a few hours of just watching the crowd, the police started taking steps towards the crowd with their bayonets pointed at the people. This sign of confrontation was soon followed by more protests of the crowd and reinforcement in numbers. The

⁶⁷ Silviu Brucan, 168.

⁶⁸ Silviu Brucan, 169.

⁶⁹ Nestor Ratesh, 28.

youth started chanting: "No Violence! No Violence!" "Put down your weapons!"⁷⁰ During this peaceful confrontation, thousand more people were pouring into the Opera Square, from the University and factories. The workers and the students were protesting together. The slogans were becoming louder: "Liberty!" "Today in Timisoara, tomorrow all over the country!" Around 16:00 GMT the Securitatea forces moved in the square. The crowd was infuriated. The crackdown on the population began on the night of the 17 and continued through out the 18. The night of December 17 became the first bloody day of the revolution. By December 18, the city looked like a war zone; nonetheless, the anti-regime cries still echoed: "Jos cu Ceausescu!"⁷¹ The students and the workers kept coming back to reoccupy the Opera Square. But "as soon as they appeared, they were taken down by the bullets of the Securitatea."⁷² During that night the Romanian Secret Police shot down the people in the Opera Square.

After two bloody days a cleaning operation followed ensued. The wounded were taken out of the hospital and shot, while the dead disappeared from the morgue.⁷³ Ceausescu attempted to cover the events. Nobody was allowed in or out, the phone lines were cut, the border was closed. The people of Timis County were quarantined. At the same time the workers were besieged in their factories, and prevented from joining the demonstrators.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, these operations had the exact opposite effect, instead of silencing the people; Timisoara became more united against the dictator. At the same time rumors spread that Arad, Resita, Oradea, all very close to the border and to

⁷⁰ Dosarele Revolutiei, Romanian subject collection, Hoover Institution Archives, Box 4.

⁷¹ Down with Ceausescu

⁷² Dosarele Revolutiei, 10.

⁷³ Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Daily Report: Eastern Europe (FBIS-EEU), 21 December 1989, 72.

⁷⁴ FBIS-EEU-89-244, 21 December 1989, 72.

Timisoara, were preparing demonstrations to show support.⁷⁵ On the day of December 19 a general strike was in effect. The next day people gathered once more in the plaza, this time to reclaim their dead. To their amazement the army started retreating to the outskirts of the city, and during the night of the 20 some soldiers even fraternized with the demonstrators.⁷⁶

Although changes were happening in Timisoara, the Romanian news organs did not present the situation. Romanians got their news about the uprising from the Hungarian press, and many hoped that the events would spread further.⁷⁷ The escalation of the events was facilitated by a change of situation. On December 20, at 21 GMT, the Army retreated from Timisoara. At the same time the mayor of the town asked the revolutionaries to form a committee and put forth their demands.⁷⁸ By the night of December 22 a Democratic Front Committee took charge of Timisoara.⁷⁹

Many authors agree that the retreat of the Romanian Army from Timisoara, and the Army's abandonment of the dictator was the moment that crystallized the Revolution. Minister of National Defense Vasile Milea made the decision to withdraw.⁸⁰ The decision is surrounded by controversy. Some military generals maintain that the army withdrawal followed the pattern of the 1984 coup plans, which some say the December 1989 events are based on.⁸¹ There were many reasons for discontent among the Army. Due to Ceausescu's policies the Army took second place to the Securitatea, in terms of equipment, as well as pay. Furthermore, some military generals were the masterminds of

⁷⁵ FBIS-EEU-89-224, 21 December 1989, 72

⁷⁶ Vladimir Socor, "Pastor Tokes and the Outbreak of the Revolution in Timisoara," 21.

⁷⁷ FBIS-EEU-89-244, 21 December 1989, 75.

⁷⁸ FBIS-EEU-89-224, 21 December 1989, 76.

⁷⁹ Stokes, 164.

⁸⁰ Shafir, "New Revelations of the Military's Role," Report on Eastern Europe 1 (11 May, 1990): 24.

⁸¹ Shafir, 24

the 1984 coup, which further shows the underlining frustration among the army. The role of the Army in the 1989 Revolution is still under investigation.⁸²

In an attempt to dismiss and play down the Timisoara events, Ceausescu addressed the nation on the night of December 20. He told the people that a "band of hooligans" attacked the city, and tried to disrupt order. He continued his speech by blaming the insurgency on foreign elements and terrorists, which attempted to take over the leadership of the nation. Furthermore, he warned people to be aware of foreign elements trying to infiltrate the Romanian society.⁸³ This was the first time that the Romanian news presented reports of the commotion in Timisoara. The Romanian television and Radio, after broadcasting Ceausescu's speech, sent out warnings to the population to not disrupt the peace, and not become victims of the foreign insurgency.⁸⁴

The interesting part of Ceausescu's speech was not that he blamed the insurgency on foreign elements, but that during it he praised the army, instead of the secret police, which played a more active and important role during December 17 and 18. "The armed forces have fulfilled their duty towards the homeland, the people and socialist achievements."⁸⁵ By using the image of the loyal army corps and of them heroically fighting against foreign elements, he attempted to legitimize his orders and the shooting. While the people were afraid of the Securitate, they were not as afraid of the army, which

⁸² For more information go to: Hall, Richard. "The Uses of Absurdity: The Staged War Theory and the Romanian Revolution of December 1989." *East European Politics and Society Journal* 13 (1999): 501-542.

⁸³ FBIS-EEU-89-244, 21 December 1989, 66.

⁸⁴ Where did I get this from?

⁸⁵ FBIS-EEU-89-244-21 December 1989

was made up non-professional soldiers.⁸⁶ His tactic backfired when the army joined the Revolution.

A further attempt to keep control of the events was the organization of a pro regime demonstration in Bucharest on December 21, 1989. Bringing the factory workers out to demonstrate their support, Ceausescu hoped to show the rest of the country that he was still "the beloved leader." But he was not aware of one important thing: the news about the Timisoara events already reached other parts of the country. People were aware of the events in Timisoara, and of the clean-up operations. The Hungarian news sources had already reached the population. The Rally played a crucial role in bringing the revolution in Bucharest. Just like in Brasov in 1987, the workers were given the opportunity to gather by the ruler themselves. This is important because it shows Ceausescu's extensive control over public space. Without Ceausescu's order to have the public gathering the possibility of such great numbers in one place was limited. By brining all the people in one place Ceausescu made a huge mistake: he facilitated the travel of news, rumors. The rally gave people the opportunity to give their support to Timisoara.

As previously noted Timisoara is located very close to the border with Hungary, which facilitated the travel of news to independent news sources. Through their access to alternate media the people of Bucharest were aware of the real means employed by the dictatorship against the people in Timisoara. During the first few minutes of the speech, commotion among the demonstrators interrupted Ceausescu, and eventually made it

⁸⁶ Everybody of 18 years of age or older, had to serve for 2 years in the army. The fact that it was not a professional army, can also explain why the army went on the side of the population faster than the Securitatea forces.

impossible for him to continue.⁸⁷ It began when a group of young people started protesting around Athenee Palace, which was near the rally. When the police used tear gas to stop the students from entering the rally, some also hit the workers. This produced commotion in the square, while at the same time some of the workers joined the youth and started chanting anti-Ceausescu slogans.⁸⁸ The uproar was scattering through out the square. Since the speech was televised, people from all over Romania become aware of changes. For the first time in over 20 years Ceausescu's speech was interrupted. This was an important sign that Ceausescu was loosing control of his power. For almost 20 years Romanian people saw on TV the dictator, for the first time the dictator was reduced to silence. Ceausescu's impotency, as well as the army joining the crowd crystallized the initial victory for the Romanian Revolution.

From then on the events escalated quickly. The number of the people gathered in the square swelled. The dictator was forced to retreat in the Central Committee building, and stayed there until he fled by helicopter at 11:30 GMT on 22 December 1989. The shooting in Bucharest started around 13:00 GMT on December 21.⁸⁹ But just like in Timisoara the army started retreating around 11:05 GMT, and the people started entering the Central Committee building. A Few minutes later Ceausescu fled by helicopter from the roof of the same building accompanied by chanting: "Rat!" "Rat!"⁹⁰ According to Russian news sources "Well known Romanian Actors rode on tanks going to the Television Building."⁹¹ We now know that the "famous actor" was Ion Caramitru, whom together with the famous poet Mircea Dinescu announced Romanians "We have won!

⁸⁷ FBIS-EEU-89-244-21 December 1989

⁸⁸ FBIS-EEU-89-245, 22 December 1989, 77.

⁸⁹ FBIS-EEU-89- 245, 22 December 1989, 72.

⁹⁰ FBIS-EEU-89- 245, 22 December 1989, 72.

⁹¹ FBIS-EEU-89- 245, 22 December 1989, 72.

We have won!"⁹² By this point the revolution spread all over Romania, in Sibiu, Arad, Craiova, Resita, Targu/Mures etc.⁹³

The revolution was well on its way. According to an eyewitness interview Ceausescu "(did) not have any chance."⁹⁴ Why was December 1989 different than 1987, or 1984? The main reason behind it is the context of the 1980s. People were angry and aware of the changes happening around them. They expected reform in their own country and did not get it. Another important factor in 1989 was Timisoara. The location of the city was crucial, and the way the events were handled there made a big difference. The people were aware of the number of deaths and the cover up operation.⁹⁵ One of the slogans heard in Bucharest and in other cities united the people under one cause: "Timisoara! Timisoara! 15 November we will no forget!"⁹⁶ The Timisoara events, and the circumstances around the Reverend Laszlo Tokes created a context for the Romanian people to express their frustrations with the dictator.

The study of the mass movement around December 1989 indicates the leaderless and popular origin of the events. People gathered in Timisoara to defend a reverend, and instead started a revolution. The first anti-Ceausescu slogans were heard in Timisoara, and embraced further by the people in Bucharest as an outcry against the way the situation was handled. As Michael Shafir points out "the resistance, did not come from any organized political or social segment of society."⁹⁷ The unraveling of the events shows that the revolution was leaderless until the night of the 22, when Ion Iliescu made

⁹² FBIS-EEU-89-245, 22 December 1989, 73.

⁹³ FBIS-EEU-89-245, 22 December 1989, 72.

⁹⁴ FBIS-EEU-89-245, 22 December 1989, 71.

⁹⁵ FBIS-EEU-89-245, 22 December 1989, 71.

⁹⁶ Dosarele Revolutiei, 47.

⁹⁷ Michael Shafir, 5 January 1990, 28.

his first appearance on TV, not as the leader of the revolution, but as a spoke-person of the newly organized National Salvation Front. None of the people that became part of the NSF leadership played a role in the original uprising. Besides Tokes, who was named on the list of NSF representatives due to his newly acquired fame, none of them were in Timisoara during 16, 17 or 18 of December 1989. Tokes was actually removed from the leadership of the revolution. The Securitatea took him to a small village outside Timisoara, and stayed there until the 22, when the events were already on their way. The uprising had a popular and unorganized character from the beginning. It was motivated by the people's ultimate hatred against the dictator and his system.

The different accounts by various news sources further illustrate that the Revolution did not have an initial well established leader. Yugoslavian news sources first mention Mircea Dinescu as the leader of the revolution.⁹⁸ Later on around 15:20 GMT AGERPRESS announced that an Action Committee was formed with Doina Cornea and Emil Stancu as leaders.⁹⁹ Nonetheless, around 10:46 GMT the same day of December 22, 1989 a French news organ announced that a National Salvation Front took power with General Manescu as leader.¹⁰⁰ The leaders were as many as the news sources. Until 15:30 GMT when Iliescu announced that they will set up the Council of the National Salvation Front, there was no one leader, but a multitude of them.¹⁰¹

The leaderless character of the revolution is based on two factors. One Ceausescu's policies left no place for plots, as shown in 1984. Second the potential leaders, the dissidents, were kept isolated by Ceausescu. This left a power vacuum that

⁹⁸ FBIS-EEU-89-245, 22 December 1989, 73.

⁹⁹ FBIS-EEU-89-245, 22 December 1989, 73.

¹⁰⁰ FBIS-EEU-89-245, 22 December 1989, 68.

¹⁰¹ FBIS-EEU-89-245, 22 December 1989, 75.

could be filled only by someone with name recognition among the Party and the Army. The army was on the side of the people, but it would only stay if their wishes were also taken into account. Due to the lack of alternative democratic organizations that could take power, Iliescu and his fellow communists were able to fill the void. Their communist background and the connections between the new leaders led to the belief that what happened in Romania was a coup.

The New Leaders and the Coup d'etat

"Our revolution has a special particularity. It is an outcome of the masses' spontaneous action, an expression of discontent accumulated over the years that has grown through attempts at repressing mass movements, the youth first of all. The idea is completely false that it could have been a coup performed by some organized forces supported even from abroad. The truth is that this Council of the National Salvation Front is an emanation of the movement and did not precede it." – 26 December 1989¹⁰²

On December 22nd 1989 Ion Iliescu announced live on Romanian Television that the dictator was gone. He also declared the formation of the National Salvation Front (NSF), which would take responsibility for the leadership of the country until free elections were set up. In the first address to the nation NSF talked about democracy, freedom of speech, freedom of thought, free elections, extinction of one party rule, human rights, the basic rights of a democratic state.¹⁰³ This address reflected the euphoria of the population. Its platform was built around the famous slogans of the revolution: "Liberty! Freedom! Down with communism! Free elections!"¹⁰⁴ Famous dissidents, intellectuals, as well as many former communists were among Front leaders.

¹⁰² FBIS- EEU- 89-247, 27 December 1989,

¹⁰³ FBIS- EEU- 89-247, 27 December 1989,

¹⁰⁴ Nestor Ratesh, pg 45

The Romanian revolution seemed to have happened under the best conditions: a popular uprising followed by the replacement of the leadership with all the revolutionary elements in Romania. However, this vision could not last. In the end the leadership of the NSF was made up of members of the old nomenklatura. This led to the questions of whether or not revolution really happened in Romania. By analyzing the backgrounds of some of the NSF leaders, as well as their ascension to power one can further explore and understand the context behind the speculations around the Romanian Revolution.

Ion Iliescu and the NSF first made their appearance on the scene of the Revolution on December 22, 1989 around 15:30 GMT. After announcing that the Army was on the side of the people Iliescu and General Gusa announced, "they will now withdraw to set up the council of the National Salvation Front."¹⁰⁵ The suspicion surrounding Iliescu was obvious from the beginning. After reaching the Central Committee building Iliescu was confronted by the people who were waiting for him there. When Iliescu told them that they will go "to the hall to discuss," the young revolutionaries promptly replied, "No! You must talk here... We want to have control."¹⁰⁶ It seems that there were reasons to worry. In the meeting hall that Iliescu was going towards there were many former close associates of Ceausescu's, like Iulian Vlad the chief of the Securitatea. Nonetheless, Silviu Brucan, who was present at the meeting, said that nothing of importance was decided at the meeting.¹⁰⁷

The main reason behind the fears was that the most powerful people in the front, Ion Iliescu, Petre Roman, Brucan, Militaru, were former members of the Romanian Communist Party. It seemed that the true dissidents were used by National Salvation

¹⁰⁵ FBIS-EEU-89-245, 22 December 1989, 75.

¹⁰⁶ Nestor Ratesh, 53.

¹⁰⁷ For further information go to Silviu Brucan, 170.

Front as a facade, while the people implementing changes were the ones that were part of the previous system.¹⁰⁸ The fears and suspicions were further heightened when well-established dissidents like Ana Blandiana and Doina Cornea resigned from their positions within the Front. Let us turn to an important question of the revolution: who were the leaders of the National Salvation Front?

The first figure of the National Salvation Front is Ion Iliescu. Iliescu was a veteran official of the defunct Romanian Communist Party, who although had differences with Nicolae Ceausescu, never voiced them openly. He started his career within the party very young as the head of his high school communist youth organization from 1948 to 1949. Later on he moved up the party ladder by studying in Moscow, and by becoming the head of the Communist Federation of Romanian University Students from 1956 to 1959. From then on, until 1971, Iliescu was the young star of the Romanian Communist Party, considered by many as the next natural leader of the Party, Ceausescu's likely successor. After serving for eight years in the Ideology and Propaganda department of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, he became a member of the Central Committee in 1965. Iliescu went above and beyond his duties, by being one of the first party officials to foster and facilitate the growth of Ceausescu's personality cult.¹⁰⁹

Early in 1971 Iliescu was promoted as Secretary for Ideology of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, but shortly lost his position after a disagreement between him and Ceausescu over the "minicultral revolution," that the dictator was pushing forward. He was a deputy to the Grand National Assembly from

¹⁰⁸ Ana Blandiana, *Eastern European Oral History Project*. Hoover Archives.

¹⁰⁹ Vladimir Socor, "The New President," *Radio Free Europe*, 1, (June 8, 1990): Pg 38

1957 to 1984, and a member of the State Council, nominally the highest state body, from 1979 to 1984.

1984 was the year of disgrace for Iliescu. He fell out of favor with the Ceausescu clan after disagreeing with the Dictator on the construction of the Danube Bucharest Canal. He was demoted and assumed the position of Director of the Bucharest Technical Publishing House, a post he occupied until December 1989. Although he had disagreed with the dictator on a few occasions, and was demoted in 1984 Iliescu was not well known for taking a public stance against the system.

He did not fit the definition of a dissident, someone who took a public stand against the dictator and his policies.¹¹⁰ When he was given the opportunity to rise and voice out his disappointment with Ceausescu he declined to do so. He did not speak out to condemn the atrocities against the workers in Brasov in 1987, and failed again by not signing the letter of the six in 1989. In the eyes of many Romanian anti-communists Iliescu was seen as a loyalist to the system. Even Silviu Brucan when talking about the attempted coup d'etat of 1984 presents Iliescu as someone that would only act within the system. Brucan gives the impression that Iliescu was willing to change the leader, but not the system.¹¹¹ Many revolutionaries saw Iliescu's biography as a sign of perpetuated one party rule, based on a well establish nomenklatura.¹¹²

The second in power in the National Salvation Front was Petre Roman. He was seen by many as the person to bring reform in a system of communists. Although, some believe that Roman was chosen by Iliescu as the prime minister due to their past connections, Iliescu and Roman came from different backgrounds. While Iliescu was

¹¹⁰ Ratesh Nestor, 52.

¹¹¹ Silviu Brucan, 133.

¹¹² Vladimir Socor, "The New President", 38.

directly connected with the Romanian Communist Party through his activities, Roman was connected through his family. His father Valter Roman was a veteran of the Spanish War and an activist of the Comintern in Moscow; nonetheless he died in 1983 without ever reaching the highest echelons of the Romanian Communist Party.¹¹³ Through his father Roman made the acquaintance of many important communists, like Brucan for example.

Petre Roman, although a member of the Communist Party, was never politically active. He pursued an academic career, and according to his accounts of the Revolution he participated as an active member in the events. He was one of the first people to read a declaration from the balcony of the Central Committee building, in the name of one of the many organizations that sprung up during the revolution the People's unity Front.¹¹⁴ According to his recollections his students pushed him up on the balcony of the Party headquarters, which led to his active participation in Romania's political life.¹¹⁵ Brucan points out that Roman was picked as Prime minister due to his connection to the youth, his role on the Central Committee building balcony, but most importantly his lack of a "political ballast of a communist past."¹¹⁶

Another important person among the NSF ranks was Silviu Brucan. He established himself as the ideologue behind the NSF program. His career as a public figure started in 1944 when he became the editor of *Scanteia*. From 1956 to 1966 he held different high positions from Romania's ambassador to Washington DC, to chairman of the Romanian television. When Ceausescu came to power he resigned and became a

¹¹³ Nestor Ratesh, 123.

¹¹⁴ Nestor Ratesh, 45.

¹¹⁵ Petre Roman, *Eastern Europe Oral History Project*, Hoover Archives.

¹¹⁶ Silviu Brucan, 176.

professor of social sciences and international relations at the university of Bucharest. His first act of dissidence was in 1987 when he spoke against the handling of the Brasov riots, but he is better known for the Letter of the Six, which he drafted and signed it. Subsequently Brucan was put under house arrest and evicted to a rural locality outside Bucharest.¹¹⁷ He resurfaced on December 22, 1989 as one of the NSF leaders. The main controversy around Brucan, besides his communist past, is his connection with the 1984 coup. In late 1990 Brucan in an interview with foreign newspaper put forth the idea of the 1989 events following the blueprint of the 1984 coup. This added further to the suspicions around the new leadership.¹¹⁸

Other leaders of the NSF surrounded by controversy are Dumitru Mazilu and General Militaru. During the December events Mazilu was in exile due to his report criticizing Ceausescu's violation of human rights. On December 22, 1989 after hearing the news of the revolution, and after his guards dispersed, he went to the Central Committee building. There, just like Roman, he read a program in the name of the Civic Forum. After doing so he met up with Iliescu who convinced him to be part of the NSF, and the NSF adopted the program of the Civic Forum.¹¹⁹ General Militaru was one of the leading figures of the 1984-attempted coup. He was a general in Ceausescu's Army, and was retired by the time of the revolution. He reemerged as the Minister of Defense, until February 1990.

One of the main controversies around the leaders of the NSF was their connection to the 1984 coup. Some of the NSF leaders knew each other, and during 1984 plotted together. Although, Iliescu refused to act as a conspirator, due to his unwillingness to act

¹¹⁷ Silviu Brucan, Eastern European Oral History Project, Hoover Institution Archives.

¹¹⁸ For further information see Michael Shafir article "Preparing for the Future by Revising the Past."

¹¹⁹ Nestor Ratesh, 55.

outside the system he was acquainted with Brucan and Militaru since 1984. The connection between Militaru and Brucan was discussed earlier on. They became acquainted in 1984 while planning the attempted coup. Brucan also knew Dumitru Mazilu, but only from different official conferences. After Brucan and Mazilu's house arrest they did not have any contact.

What must be underlined is that Iliescu, Brucan, Mazilu or even Roman did not have the opportunity to communicate and therefore put together a plan that would resemble a coup. Brucan and Mazilu were under house arrest, while Militaru was a retired general, and Roman a professor. Also, neither of them were in Timisoara when the Revolution started. Iliescu first made his appearance on TV on December 22, 1989, after Militaru sent for him. The coup could have only be set in motion after December 22, when the population already started the revolution, and after Ceausescu fled the building. The communist in the NSF leadership saw an opportunity and seized it.

The speculations that 1984 was just a rehearsal for 1989 seem plausible at first.¹²⁰ The Romanian Revolution unraveled for many Romanians on TV. The "Televised Revolution," as some call it, was a decisive factor. By going on TV Iliescu asked the people to come and defend the revolution; the people responded promptly. Did they respond because of Iliescu or simply because of their wish to participate? Iliescu used the television to solidify his power by becoming the central figure of the "televised revolution."¹²¹ From this point of view Iliescu was partially responsible for the development of the continuation of the Revolution. Mircea Dinescu announced Ceausescu's fall, but Iliescu kept the people informed. The people in Timisoara started

¹²⁰ For a blue print of the 1984 attempted-coup see the 1984 subsection.

¹²¹ For a time line of Iliescu's appearance on TV see FBIS-EEU-89-244/245.

the Revolution, and Iliescu continued it on the Romanian television. However, the appeal on TV was made only after Ceausescu fled, and the popular uprising had a first victory, and not to start a popular uprising as in the 1984 plans.

The other aspect of the 1984 failed coup similar to 1989 events is that the armed forces joined the population in Timisoara on the night of the 18th, when Ceausescu was on a visit to Iran. Nonetheless, the difference is that the revolution had already begun in Timisoara, before the generals put anything in motion. The start of the revolution had a purely popular character. Furthermore, some of the generals, like General Vlad, stayed faithful to Ceausescu even after supposedly joining the revolution. General Vlad was eventually arrested.¹²² It seems that the order to retreat was given to the Army by General Milea who either committed suicide or was murdered by the Securitatea.¹²³ Suspicions continue to surround Iliescu's ascent to power.

By looking at the way the events unraveled, one can conclude that the leaderless character of the Revolution facilitated Iliescu's ascension to power. The empty power vacuum had to be filled in order to avoid political chaos. The person fit to fill it had to be recognized by both the army and the former political organ. This precondition was necessary in order to avoid complete confusion. Both the party and the army recognized Iliescu due to his preeminent party status, and he eventually gained the recognition of the people due to his role in the "Televised Revolution."

After the NSF communiqué of December 22, 1989 the new authority in the country was Iliescu and his associates. Although in the beginning known dissidents were on the list of members it was obvious that Iliescu was the one giving the orders. He was

¹²² Silviu Brucan, 180-181.

¹²³ Controversy still surrounds his death

the one appealing to the population to come fight and defend the Television headquarters, in order to defend the Revolution.

In his first speech on the Romanian TV when presenting the platform of the newly created NSF Iliescu's promises reflected the requests of the revolution.¹²⁴ The main theme presented in the first lines of the speech, is the removal of the dictator. The communiqué reads "The Ceausescu clan, which has led the country to disaster, was removed from power."¹²⁵ This started a trend of centering the goals of the revolution on the removal of the Dictator. Iliescu deemphasized the role of the communists in the implementation of policies. In the early editions of the newspaper *Adevarul* all the attention was centered on the dictator and his clan.¹²⁶ What they did, what measures they put in place in order to limit the liberties of the Romanian people; no word was said about the nomenklatura, the party activists and their role in the downfall of the economy and of the Romanian society in general. By establishing the blame of Ceausescu in the first days of the revolution, Iliescu was able to draw attention away from the fact that old communists were filling Ceausescu's place without any noticeable protest.

Further on in the communiqué he addressed the issue of the old power structure. Iliescu underlined that "The government has been dismissed. The State Councils, and its institutions are ceasing their activity, all state power has been assumed by the Council of the National Salvation Front."¹²⁷ Nonetheless, he stated that all the ministers are to keep their positions and the old power structure of the central bodies will be sustained, and they are to continue "their normal activity." In later speeches, both Iliescu and Petre

¹²⁴ FBIS-EEU-84-246, 26 December 1989, 65

¹²⁵ FBIS-EEU-84-246, 26 December 1989, 65

¹²⁶ *Adevarul* 26 December 1989- January 1989

¹²⁷ FBIS-EEU-84-246, 26 December 1989, 65

Roman underlined the importance of holding on to the old structure of power in order to maintain the stability of the country. Although overshadowed by the theme of throwing out the dictator Iliescu set the stage for continuity in the power structure. The maintenance of old communists, old power structure is what determined many people to call the Romanian revolution as unfinished. Basically the revolution upheld the system but not the dictator.

The later part of the speech concentrated on basic necessities of the Romanian people. The speech talked about the need for electricity, food, heating, water, medical assistance, as well as basic human rights and freedoms. The National Salvation Front first addressed the issue of democracy. This included upholding the ideal of party pluralism, by abandoning "the leading role of a single party," and by promising to establish a "pluralistic system of government."¹²⁸ They promised free elections in April 1990 and the separation of all branches of power. Some of the promises made on December 22nd were not kept. For example, shortly after the revolution the NSF decided to become a party and participate in the elections. Its landslide victory assured that the party was in charge of the country. For many it was reminiscent of the Romanian Communist Party. Furthermore, the oppositions reported having been intimidated through the state controlled media, even though they were termed "free elections."¹²⁹

However, the NSF kept some of the promises they made. They legalized foreign travel, and eliminated several laws that were damaging to Romanian civil society. At the same time, although economic reform, as they promised in their program was slow to

¹²⁸ FBIS-EEU-84-246, 26 December 1989, 65

¹²⁹ Dan Ionescu, "Violence and Calumny in the Election Campaign," Radio Free Europe 1, (25 May, 1990): 37-41.

happen, it did start. In the eyes of many revolutionaries the speech on December 22nd 1989 was a stepping-stone for Romania, because for the first time words like democracy, free elections, freedom and human rights were mentioned loud and clear.¹³⁰ Many believe that although some of the promises were not kept, starting with that night the Romanian people were able to take advantage of their freedoms. The communiqué declared that this was a revolution of the people, by the people for the people, and that they will receive all the rights that they fought for.

Due to the explosive environment around the events there was no need for a general, or a politician to start a riot. This indicates that the participants in the 1984 plot, which resurfaced in 1989, simply rode the wave of the revolution up to the top. The list of NSF representatives included dissidents, communists, and young people. Iliescu and his associates integrated all groups in order to ensure initial power, and then by excluding each group, minus the communists, guaranteed power after December 1989. The old nomenklatura assumed power set in motion the mechanism of a coup, nonetheless the youth and the dissidents rallied and expanded the original scope of the coup.

Many dissidents continue to say that the Revolution failed because the old communists are in power. For example, Romulus Russan and Ana Blandiana believe that the revolution was taken over by a group of old communists who clearly defeated the revolution. They uphold the opinion that the revolution existed parallel with the coup d'état, but that in the end the coup d'état had a clear victory over the revolution.

However, Blandiana continues to say that although the communists were able to gain power, they completely lost control over the public opinion.¹³¹ I argue that their loss

¹³⁰ Interview with Gheorghe Craciun, participant in the Romanian Revolution.

¹³¹ Hoover Archives, Stanford Library, Eastern Europe Oral History Project. Box #1; transcripts

over the public opinion led to the failure of the coup d'etat. By creating the opportunity for political and social dialogue the youth and the dissidents created an opening for change, thus reviving the revolutionary goals.

The revival of the Revolution

*"Mai bane haimana decat tradator
Mai bine huligan decat dictator
Mai bine un Golan decat un activist
Mai bine mort decat communist."*¹³²

Two groups in particular, the youth and the dissidents, facilitated the rebirth of political dialogue in Romania. I analyze the ways the youth and the political dissidents forced change within the system. By modifying the goals of the popular revolution from just replacing the dictator to changing the system, they were able to bring changes within the political and social structure in Romania. At the same time by exercising their civil rights, of freedom of speech and freedom of assembly, they were able to engage the Romanian public in the political discourse, and create the basis for a free press. This culminated in the victory of the 1996 elections when the old communists were removed from power and replaced with a new democratic coalition.

■ The Student Movement

The students played an important role in the first revolution of December 15, 1989, as well as in the revival of the revolutionary goals after December 22, 1989. Like the other elements of the population, before 1989 there was not a strong revolutionary movement among the students. This changed in 1987 with increased protest. In March

¹³² Better rascal than traitor
Better hooligan than dictator
Better Golan than activist
Better dead than communist!" the hymn from the University Square, sang by the young students gathered to pretest the communists in charge of the country.

of that year a large demonstration was staged in Iasi, requesting an improvement in living conditions. Later in the year the students rallied in Brasov to support the worker's earlier protest there. In December of the same year student demonstrations erupted in Timisoara. In 1989, the students were among those who actively participated in the removal of the dictatorship. In Timisoara the workers marched towards the student dorms during the first days of the revolution, while in Bucharest they started the unrest near Ceausescu's rally, which eventually spread in the whole country.

The participation of youth in the revolution is widely recognized. For example, Doina Cornea characterized the revolution as something "youth have conquered."¹³³ In the initial NSF communiqué Iliescu mentioned and gave praise to the youth and their sacrifices.¹³⁴ Brucan, Roman and other personalities of the Front followed suit. The Romanian people also have erected many monuments commemorating their sacrifice and the victory in the revolution.

The first step that the students took towards protecting and reviving the goals of the December 15, 1989 revolution was by sacrificing themselves. Many people used the sacrifice of the youth as a way of stimulating open political discourse and change. For example, in a Press Conference Doina Cornea stated:

"The miracle worked by these young people is not a victory of weapons against weapons, but a victory of the mind against blind power. We, who have not fought, who have done nothing for years, have at least the sacred duty to defend the rights and freedoms, which these children have won at the cost of their life and blood. Their sacrifice obliges us now to a radical change of behavior, to a radical change of our petrified mental forms. Every moral error we will do will be a new moral bullet we shoot at these youth. We no longer have the mean right to fear, to cowardice, to

¹³³ FBIS-EEU-89-249, 29 December 1989, 75.

¹³⁴ FBIS-EEU-89-245, 22 December 1989, 74.

compromise and to being trapped by various maneuvered that still are a pressure on us."¹³⁵

By drawing attention to the sacrifice of the youth Cornea wanted to inspire change in society and in the way people think about their hardships. She speaks of change in life style, but mostly in mentality, as a duty towards the sacrifice of the youth. This is an important symbol in post-December 1989 Romania. The theme of sacrifice is often brought back in the popular literature as an important reason for change.

Although after the revolution the youth were included in the NSF, they soon realized that they served as a way for the Front leadership to legitimize the coup.

Immediately after the first phase of the revolution concluded the students formed different organizations. The two groups that survived the constant reorganizing of the first days are the Students' League and the Student's Union, later known as the Free Trade Union of Students.¹³⁶

The students restarted the fight against the neocommunists in power on January 7, 1990. The Students' League, together with other national and international student groups, organized a meeting at the Bucharest Polytechnic. The students had political as well as educational demands. The political demands reflected their dissatisfaction with the leadership that took power. The first thing that students requested was fair representation in the NSF council. They already had a student representative, Marian Mierla, but even he admitted in front of the crowd "most student members of the Executive Committee are puppets."¹³⁷ While some complained that the NSF "hijacked the younger generation's revolution," their main political request that of removal of all

¹³⁵ FBIS-EEU-89-249, 29 December 1989, 75.

¹³⁶ Carmen Pompey, 26.

¹³⁷ FBIS-EEU-90-005, 8 January 1990, 80.

communists from any leadership position was taking shape.¹³⁸ This became the central theme of their future demonstrations and protests. The first step was holding a meeting that brought attention to the presence of old communists at the top of the country. Furthermore, they made their presence felt and their opinions heard.

The next step that the students took to force change among old communists was the participation in the demonstrations of January 12, 1990. During the rally the crowd posed questions to Iliescu and other NSF members regarding their past and the future free elections. The main issues brought up at the rally concerned the abolishment of the death penalty and the outlawing of the Romanian Communist Party.¹³⁹ After Ceausescu's trial and execution, NSF outlawed the death penalty. However, many Romanians wanted to see the "terrorists" brought to justice in form of death, while fearing a revival of the Romanian Communist Party. The crowd also addressed the issue of multipartitism. When asked about the often-imposed registration of the National Peasant Party, Iliescu had to promise that registration would be conducted with no hindrance.¹⁴⁰ The NSF promised that the issues brought forth would be decided in a referendum. In a radio address the next day, Iliescu blamed the demonstration on elements trying to destabilize the new power, and reneged on his promise of a referendum.¹⁴¹ However, this was the step of the second wave of revolution. By forcing changes, the meeting made Iliescu and the NSF aware that opposition existed.

Furthermore, the demonstration produced changes among the NSF leadership. During the rally when Dumitru Mazilu, the Minister of Defense attempted to speak,

¹³⁸ Carmen Pompey, 27.

¹³⁹ FBIS-EEU-90-011, 17 January 1990, 70-72.

¹⁴⁰ FBIS-EEU-90-011, 17 January 1990, 70-72.

¹⁴¹ FBIS-EEU-90-011, 17 January 1990, 73.

shouts were heard from the crowd: "Down with communism," "A new Revolution! A new Revolution! And Mr. Iliescu and Mr. Mazilu will tremble!"¹⁴² A few days later the newspaper *Romania Libera*, printed an open letter requesting the demission of Mazilu due to his communist past, his involvement as a high ranking official with the Securitatea, as well as his refusal to answer the questions of the crowd.¹⁴³ Due to pressure, Mazilu resigning on January 26, 1990.¹⁴⁴

The January 12 demonstration was the first of a chain of protests staged by the students in order to object the communists taking over power in Romania. Although this gathering did not receive the most international news coverage, it marked a shift in the NSF quest for legitimacy. Iliescu's power came under attack almost immediately after he took charge. On the night of December 22, 1989 people gathered in the Central Committee building and Iliescu to have an open meeting regarding the forming of the NSF Council. That was the first sign to the neocomunist that power must also be earned.

This gave birth to Iliescu's need to appear as one of the revolutionaries. His own propaganda machine made him sound like a dissident, some one who took a public stance against Ceausescu. Immediately after he was accused of being a communist, the media published letters to rehabilitate his image. One in particular described Iliescu as "a remarkable figure, of great professional and moral probity."¹⁴⁵ Aware that he was not well known for his dissident activities, Iliescu tried to appeal to the people by presenting himself as a revolutionary, but most importantly by emphasizing the theme of the popular

¹⁴² FBIS-EEU-90-011, 17 January 1990, 70-72.

¹⁴³ FBIS-EEU-90-011, 17 January 1990, 70.

¹⁴⁴ FBIS-EEU-90-230, 29 January 1990, 103.

¹⁴⁵ Dan Ionescu, "Politics and Horoscope," *Radio Free Europe* 1, (April 20, 1990): 30.

revolution. He and his close advisors denied any involvement in any a coup, stressing their roles as revolutionaries. He was hoping that by having people to believe that he came to power as a revolutionary he would be accepted as the leader of the revolution.

Due to the quest for legitimacy the NSF had to try to maintain power. This led to the NSF's quest for validation through other means than democratic ones. One of the clearest examples of this is the manipulation of the miners. By driving a rift between the workers, the students and the intellectuals, the NSF was able to manipulate the power of the workers. The miners intervened in the favor of the NSF more that just once. On January 28, 1990 they broke the anti-NSF demonstrations, while in June 13 they plundered everything in their way. This change in NSF goals from just solidifying power to simply being able to keep the power they gained in 1989 produced a change in the pace that the country was changing at.¹⁴⁶ Their focus on maintaining power slowed down reforms, which made the youth and the dissidents even more aware of the stagnant communism, and made them fight even harder.

The demonstrations started on April 22, 1990 are an example of how the fight between the students and the people in power intensified. On April 22, 1990 a marathon demonstration was set up in Bucharest's University Square. The crowd was requesting that Iliescu be removed from power, and that the communists be banished from power for at least 10 years.¹⁴⁷ At the same time they were protesting the NSF's refusal to postpone the elections set for May 20, 1990. The organizers of the protest were mainly students and intellectuals. Among the demonstrators there were also 119 hunger strikers. On May

¹⁴⁶ Stephen Fischer-Galati, Rumania in transition, Romanian Subject Collection, Hoover Library Archives, box #5

¹⁴⁷ Crisula Stefanescu, "Marathon Demonstration in Bucharest's University Square," Radio Free Europe 1, (15 June, 1990): 42.

Day, the first day off of the workers, demonstrations were staged in other three major cities. At the same time the main political parties threatened to withdraw from the elections if the election did not get pushed back. After Cornea's appeal to them that the first free elections were to important to boycott the political parties withdrew their ultimatum.¹⁴⁸

Through their marathon demonstrations the youth were able to draw the attention of the country and of the international news press on Romania. Many news organizations carried the story of the hunger strikers, some of them remaining in that state for over 33 days. At the same time international governments put pressure on the NSF to implement changes concerning electoral law, and conduct. The demonstrations also brought renewed attention to Iliescu's communist past. Through their requests they were able to shift the discourse of the revolution from the dictator to the system, which made people more aware of the changes that needed to be implemented. They brought attention to the danger of communist resurgence, and the transformation of the NSF into another Romanian Communist Party.¹⁴⁹ The demonstrations continued even after the May 20 elections, which the NSF carried with over 80% of the votes.

The demonstration brought attention Romania and its elections, but the way the demonstrations were broken created an even a bigger uproar. On June 13 miners attacked the antigovernment demonstrations. For a few days the miners represented the power in Bucharest. If someone looked like a student or an intellectual she or he was beaten; the headquarters of antigovernment newspapers and political parties were ransacked. The leader of the Student movement, Marian Munteanu, was almost beaten to

¹⁴⁸ FBIS-EEU-90-085, 2 may 1990, 19.

¹⁴⁹ Crisula Stefanescu, 44.

death. Controversy still surrounds the crack down of the miners; nonetheless many believe that high government officials staged it.¹⁵⁰ To deepen these suspicions Munteanu was arrested under charges of "inciting a riot, participating in riots, and organizing the groups which had attacked public institutions on June 13,"¹⁵¹ while Iliescu publicly thanked the miners for their patriotic intervention, and accused the student demonstrators of being part of fascist organizations.¹⁵²

Although the demonstration did not postpone the elections and the NSF won by a landslide the protests brought attention to Romania. At the same time, the miner intervention caused many to become disenchanted with Iliescu and the NSF and to turn towards alternative political organizations. It also drove a wedge between the NSF itself, which translated in the splitting of the party in two different branches. After the elections the NSF was forced to start implementing economic reform due to the discourse started by the students. By bringing attention to Iliescu and the NSF the students increased awareness among the population concerning their policies, and therefore made the NSF leaders aware that a Revolution happened and change in that system was expected.

▪ The Dissident Movement

The second group that played an important part in reclaiming the revolution were the Romanian dissidents. Ana Blandiana, Doina Cornea, Mihai Sorea and Mircea Dinescu, to name a few, played important roles among the dissident movement against the old nomenklatura. Through their outspoken acts of rebellion against the Ceausescu

¹⁵⁰ For more information go to: Sturdza, Mihai. "The Miners' Crackdown on the opposition: A Review of the Evidence," Radio Free Europe 2, no.2 (11 January, 1991): 25-33.

¹⁵¹ Carmen Pompey, Dan Stancu, "Student Leader under arrest," Radio Free Europe 1, no. 29 (july 20, 1990): 35.

¹⁵² Mihai Sturdza, "The Miners' Crackdown on the opposition: A Review of the Evidence," Radio Free Europe 2, no.2 (11 January, 1991): 25-33.

system they created hope among the Romanian people, while through continued outspokenness against the new system they succeeded in introducing political pluralism, free political dialogue and free press in the Romanian society. By doing so the dissidents created in 1996 the opportunity for a change of government. One could argue that the revolution truly ended in 1996 when Iliescu was removed from power and replaced by Emil Constantinescu, the candidate supported by the Civic Alliance.¹⁵³

The Group For Social Dialogue (GSD) was the first step that the dissidents took towards bringing change within the old system. Initiated a few days after the revolution the purpose of the organization was to facilitate the creation of a civil society in Romania.¹⁵⁴ Michael Shafir points out that the GSD analyzed the problems that surfaced in Romanian society after December 22, 1989 from a social point of view, rather than a political one.¹⁵⁵ This offered an important alternative to people who did not wish to be politically involved. Through the adoption of "politics from below," the GSD eventually produced the Civic Alliance, which succeeded in uniting the "extraparliamentary opposition forces."¹⁵⁶

As Gail Kligman points out in her article "Reclaiming the Public: A Reflection on Recreating the Civil Society in Romania," the civil society in Romania was taking full advantage of then newfound liberties. People were speaking freely on the streets, at cafés. If not for the Revolution this kind of democratic discourses would not have been possible. The reemergence of public discourse was rebuilding the Romanian civil society,

¹⁵³ I discuss the Civic Alliance further down.

¹⁵⁴ Gail Stokes, 173.

¹⁵⁵ Michael Shafir, "Oppositional Regrouping: The Democratic Antitotalitarian Forum and the Civic Alliance," *Radio Free Europe* 1, (14 December, 1990): 12-21.

¹⁵⁶ Michael Shafir, "Oppositional Regrouping: The Democratic Antitotalitarian Forum and the Civic Alliance," *Radio Free Europe* 1, (14 December, 1990): 12-21.

while sending a message to old communists in the NSF leadership, that civil liberties need to be protected and enforced. The birth of GSD and of the Civil Alliance helped the public regain its voice. Kligman points out that the public was expressing freely and loud their concerns regarding the ties between the political leaders and Securitatea, as well as about other issues.¹⁵⁷

Besides stimulating public discourse, GSD founded the editorial 22. It soon became the leading voice of the oppositions. GSD also lent its support to *Romania Libera*, another anti-NSF newspaper. They establish a base for a free Romanian press. Through their editorials they brought the attention of the people to the issue on the importance of free press in a democratic society. It was well known that the Romanian Radio and Television stations, as well as numerous newspapers, were under NSF control. One example of the NSF control over Romanian news organs is the Romanian Television role in the May 1990 election campaign. During the campaign competing political parties were allotted a shorter time frame, while the Romanian Television presented anti-government, or anti-communists demonstrations as anti-establishment.¹⁵⁸ By bringing attention to the issue of free press GSD made people aware that false news could exist even under a democracy. With the help of the GSD a citizen's committee was set up to monitor the Romanian TV.¹⁵⁹ An independent news station was eventually set up in 1991, marking an important victory for GSD.

Through their discourse the youth and the dissidents also switched the focus of the revolution from the dictator to the communists in power. The Romanian press

¹⁵⁷ Gail Kligman, "Reclaiming the Public: A Reflection on Recreating the Civil Society in Romania," *East European Politics and Societies Journal* 4 (1990): 404-407.

¹⁵⁸ Crisula Stefanescu, "Romanian Radio and Television Coverage of the Election Campaign," *Radio Free Europe* 1, (8 June, 1990): 42-44.

¹⁵⁹ Gail Kligman, 412.

portrays this switch clearly. In the beginning the discourse of the revolution centered on the Dictator and his wrongdoings, while after the open protests of the youth, and the organization of the dissidents the focus shifted to communism and communist legacy. The change in discourse was important because it made people aware of the reemergence of communism in Romania.

One example is the newspaper *Adevarul*. Every issue had a rubric in which people could read about Ceausescu's palaces, his lies concerning the agriculture, the economy, his foreign bank accounts, or about his fake educational credits. After January 12, next to those articles, one could find open letters to Ion Iliescu concerning communism and the existence of communist influence at the local level.¹⁶⁰ While in the newspaper *Adevarul*, most of the issues concerning former communists still in power dealt with communists in lower level of government, in the free press, the attacks were more blatant against Iliescu and the NSF leaders. For example in the editorial 22, on every front page there is a small rubric keeping tabs on what the NSF is doing, and how their actions are influencing the economy. One of the editorials accused the NSF of narrowing the scope of the revolution to that of the nomenklatura.¹⁶¹ What the editors did not realize was that they were broadening the scope of the nomenklatura by pointing out their attempts at halting change.

This change of dialogue forced the NSF to implement reforms, and by doing so it stopped the coup to expand its goals. The NSF was constrained to adopt a multiparty system, to recognize the rights of minorities and of protesters. For example, although in the beginning the NSF tried to halt the registration of certain political parties they had to

¹⁶⁰ *Adevarul*, 26 December 1989- 14 January, 1990.

¹⁶¹ 22 1, no. 50 (28 December 1990,): 1.

give in and allow their registration. Although, the process of change was slow, and sometimes superficial, this change was deeply felt in the Romanian society, where rights were non-existent before.

On November 7, 1990 the foundation was set for the Civic Alliance. This organization became the most important umbrella organization for political parties of the opposition. The support among the population was extensive. Within a few days from announcing its foundation, the Civic Alliance received over 1,000 new memberships a day.¹⁶² This showed that the GSD did their job in reaching the population. The main purpose of the organization was to defend the society from the danger of being taken over again by communism.¹⁶³ In the summer of 1991 the initiative was taken by some of the members, led by Nicolae Manolescu, to form the Party of Civic Alliance. Due to the initial attraction to the Civic Alliance, and its decline in subsequent months, the initiative was seen as an attempt of revival. Although the party confused many of the Civic Alliance followers it also created the opportunity for more people to participate in the political discourse. The main and most important accomplishment of the Civic Alliance was the victory in the 1996 elections.

▪ Conclusion and Small Discussion of the 1990 and 1996 Elections

Change in the Romanian society started in Timisoara on December 15, 1989. After it was taken to Bucharest and the whole country. When the dictator fled the country the victory of the revolution crystallized. The first stage of change of the popular, leaderless revolution from December 15 to December 22, 1989 ended when Iliescu and the National Salvation Front took power. The second step of change, on the

¹⁶² Michael Shafir, "Oppositional Regrouping," 18.

¹⁶³ For a complete list of goals go to : Shafir, Michael. "Oppositional Regrouping: The Democratic Antitotalitarian Forum and the Civic Alliance," Radio Free Europe 1, (14 December, 1990): 12-21.

political scene, happened starting December 22, 1989. The leadership changed, from a dictator to a neocomunist. After Iliescu came to power and until about the end of December 1989 the second stage of the coup came to an end. The military, the people, the party and eventually the Securitatea accepted Iliescu as their leader. Nonetheless, the youth and the dissidents remained unconvinced. They ignited the third stage of the Romanian revolution the expansion of the coup intentions through open political discourse and demonstrations. This is the story of the Romanian Revolution.

Many still say today that due to the results of May 1990 elections, where the NSF, led by Iliescu obtained a smashing electoral defeat, the old communists succeeded in taking over the revolution. If one looks at the reasons behind their win, and at subsequent elections one can see that such is not the case. The NSF victory in 1990 can be explained through one word: exposure. During the revolution many people stayed home glued to their television sets where they were inundated by Iliescu's image. They could hear his voice and his promises. Right after December 23, 1989 apartments had heat, food was in the stores and electricity was free for all. In the beginning the Iliescu and the NSF spoke a language that people could understand: more food, more freedom, more space, and more electricity, more of everything. The other parties did not stand a chance in front of this Front of more. They were unknown, and furthermore their leaders were expatriates and old. The people voted for a familiar face, that of Iliescu and communism.

Although the NSF gained victory in 1990, they did not gain legitimacy and the freedom to rule in peace. The students and the dissidents made them aware that the public is watching and expecting change. Therefore the gears of the coup of December 22 had to be switched from maintaining the communists system, to changing it. The

rebirth of political discourse set the foundation for the Romanian Civil Society that led to many victories for what I call the second revolution. The biggest victory is that of revival of Romanian politics, but in more practical terms the victory over Iliescu in 1996.

By 1996 Iliescu and the NSF, which by the time splintered in many different parties, realized that economic reform was necessary in order to be able to keep power. Economic reform brought with it the transition from a communist economy to a market economy. This left deep scars among Romanian workers who were accustomed with the communist way of everyone having a job no matter what. The economic depression together with the political discourse led the Romanian opposition to victory in 1996. The Democratic Convention of Romania, the party to win the 1996 elections, learned from being in the opposition that change had to happen. They promise this change and won, while Iliescu and his new party, the PDSR, played the same tune, which was fully exposed by the Civic Alliance.

The victory of 1996 marked a victory for the revolutionary elements. Although a coup took place in December 22, this coup was possible only due to the popular revolution. The December 22, 1989 event was not a fight between the Revolution and the communists, but a fight between "crazy poets and intellectuals," and the old nomenklatura.¹⁶⁴ The one with the army support won momentarily, but the faction with the popular support forced change and in the end came out on top. In the end I dare say that the second revolution, of the youth and the dissidents, expanded the goals of the coup enough to be able to claim victory.

¹⁶⁴ Michael Shafir, "The Revolution: an initial assessment," Radio Free Europe 1, no. 4 (26 January, 1990): 39.

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