

The Events of The December Revolution in Romania: Its Causes and Days

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Abstract

There were major reasons that led to the fall of the Nicolae Ceausescu regime, foremost among which was the impact of the communist economic crisis on Romania, as well as the effects of the global economic crisis and Romania's loss of Western support, in addition to the emergence of internal opposition calling for the restructuring of the Soviet bloc since the mid-seventies, due to the major economic crisis of the communist regime that was imposed on the peoples of the Soviet Union and which was exported to the Eastern European countries occupied by the Red Army at the end of World War II (1939-1945), as it was clear that the economies of the Eastern European countries were unable to keep pace with the technological progress taking place in the Western European countries.

Keywords: December revolution, Romania, World War II.

1. Introduction

Romania was the last country to emerge from communism in 1989, and the factors that delayed the development of social protest in Romania can be evaluated, that the Romanian regime after the period of Stalinist terrorism, worked to attract large segments of society continuously, so signs of dissent appeared only slowly, and class differences seemed only for a short time, only in December 1989, and although there were a number of common features in the Eastern European revolutions of 1989, Its specific course was characterized historically, politically, and socially by deterring the great differences between the ruling authority and its opponents, as the transfer of power was negotiated in Poland and Hungary between representatives of communist rulers and the opposition, or as happened by the nonviolent partisan coup in the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria, but what happened in Romania made it a unique case.

2. Causes and diaries of the revolution

All of the above reasons combined to create a major economic crisis in the communist countries of Eastern Europe, as these regimes were no longer able to fulfill their strong promises to their peoples of economic prosperity, and failed to respect the social contract they had concluded with their peoples. Therefore, the Marxist-Leninist ideology lost its legitimacy, and no longer had any control over the communist parties in power.

When analyzing the protest movement witnessed by some Romanian cities, we notice that there were cities whose protest movements were more intense. When the Romanian government issued new legislation on pensions on June 30, 1977, which included raising the retirement age from fifty to fifty-two years, and canceling sickness benefits and disability pensions for workers, which led to a strike by miners in Valea Giului on August 1, 1977. As a result of this protest, the first independent labor union was established on March 4, 1989, but the authorities' response was immediate, arresting the founders.

On November 15, 1987, Brasov witnessed a major strike by workers, which began with a spontaneous strike at the Strigul Strabal Raju truck factories in response to the wage cuts imposed by the management due to the failure to achieve production targets, and in the context of chronic food shortages and restrictions on heating. The announcement of the wage cuts sparked a workers' revolt, and when they headed from the factory toward the city center, a large number of residents joined them, indicating the deep dissatisfaction of the population with Ceausescu's rule.

On December 14, 1989, members of the Romanian Popular Front called on the residents of Bash to demonstrate in Uniri Square by distributing leaflets entitled "Appeal to all Romanians of goodwill," but the security forces sensed this movement and subsequently closed off the area and arrested the instigators, which led to the failure of the operation.

In Timisoara, the members of the Reformed Church went out on the morning of December 15 to support the priest Stephen Tokes and his son after the court decided to evict the priest in another area. The number of protesters increased in the evening, which prompted the mayor of the city to cancel the order to evict the members of the church to their homes.

The next morning, Radu Palan, the first secretary of the Timisoara district party committee, informed the party leaders about the events in Timisoara regarding the case of Pastor Toks, who in turn informed Ceausescu, who ordered Radu Palan to take adequate measures to restore order and security to Timisoara and expel Pastor Toks. Security forces were then sent to the pastor's house, which worsened the situation.(10)

After nine o'clock in the morning of Saturday, December 16, 1989, the first spark of the revolution was ignited in Timisoara when large groups of demonstrators began their march towards the city center. Demonstrators clashed with security forces amid clouds of tear gas and water cannons, vehicles were set on fire, and stones were thrown at riot police. Groups of demonstrators dispersed and then regrouped. The night of December 16/17 was filled with angry crowds roaming the streets of Timisoara while riot police, military patrols, and plainclothes security agents pursued and fought them and carried out arrests. There was no carefully planned

operation on the part of the demonstrators. According to military sources, 180 citizens were arrested (11).

On the other hand, the leadership of the Communist Party in Bucharest held an extraordinary meeting of the party's Political Executive Committee, chaired by Ceausescu himself. After the meeting, a delegation of generals from the Ministry of National Defense and the Ministry of the Interior was ordered to travel to Timisoara. The delegation consisted of: Major General Stefan Gosha, Major General Floria Carignano, and Colonel George Radu. The army was asked to patrol the streets, first to maintain order and then to suppress the rioting crowds in Timisoara and then in Bucharest. The information received by the commanders of the military units came only through official channels. Consequently, the first impression of many officers was that Romania was indeed facing a foreign military intervention supported by terrorist activities from within, aimed at provoking the secession of Romania (12).

At the beginning of the events, the forces of the Ministry of the Interior attempted to suppress the rebellion on December 16. The First Secretary of the Timi's District requested the provision of military forces and armored vehicles to patrol the city and restore order. At ten o'clock in the morning, the Ministry of National Defense sent five patrols to the city, each including ten soldiers, for a total of 50 soldiers. Accordingly, ten other patrols were sent, with a total of 100 soldiers. An anti-aircraft unit was ordered to provide nine more patrols (90 soldiers). All military patrols headed to the center of Timisoara to establish security there.(13)

Although the demonstrations in Timisoara on January 17 were in support of Father Toks, they quickly spread to express their anger against the Ceausescu regime. The crowd chanted, "We want freedom," "The shoemaker cannot rule us Romanians," and other things they shouted for, "Bread this evening for our children, medicine, a warm home and free elections." (14), At noon, 300 demonstrators surrounded the city hall and took over the city council. At 2:00 p.m., five tanks and helicopters arrived, machine guns were fired, and hundreds of people were reported killed and much looting by demonstrators (15). After 4:00 p.m. on December 17, 1989, during a meeting of the Political Executive Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, Ceausescu demanded that the security forces of the Ministry of the Interior use real ammunition to suppress the protests in a short time (16).

During a telephone conversation with the provincial secretaries of the Communist Party, Ceausescu referred to the events in Timisoara as an "attempted anti-socialist coup." Meanwhile, other revolutionaries were chanting anti-Ceausescu slogans and waving flags with a hole in the middle, meaning the removal of the Communist coat of arms. They confronted the security forces in the Opera Square in Timisoara. On the night of December 17/18, shootings were heard in the city. The residents of Timisoara were in a state of shock. The shooting of civilians led the authorities to decide to transport 40 bodies to Bucharest to be burned. The authorities wanted to do this to erase the traces of the bloody repression and avoid a reaction from the city's residents (17). to cover up the killings in Timisoara, Ceaușescu's wife Elena, together with Interior Minister Postelnicu and Party Secretary Emile Bobo, ordered most of the bodies to be transported to Bucharest, where they were burned. Despite Timisoara's almost complete isolation and the closed borders with Hungary and Yugoslavia,(18), However, international media reports indicated that the clashes resulted in thousands of casualties, and that hundreds of bodies were

seen scattered in the streets of Bucharest. In contrast, the Romanian media remained silent about the events (19).

On December 18, Ceausescu left for Iran (20) for a short three-day visit (21). This coincided with security measures taken by the Romanian government after the start of protests in Romanian cities. Romania closed its borders to all travelers except those holding diplomatic or official visas, and tourists, including school children, were turned away (22).

In an international reaction, Britain expressed its outrage on December 19 over the bloody repression of the demonstrators in Timisoara, and urged the Romanian government to intensify the work of the World Service of the British Broadcasting Corporation Romania to ensure that all Romanians are informed of the truth about the brutal killings, and to start with the Soviet Union a European campaign to expose Ceausescu's excesses, put pressure on his authority, impose economic sanctions on the regime, and launch a media campaign to ensure that all the people of Romania are fully aware that they are now living in the last Stalinist labor camps in Europe (23). Inside Romania, the army asked the demonstrating workers on December 19 to withdraw from the streets of Timisoara, and party officials tried to persuade them to return to work, but the workers organized their numbers and established a democratic forum for them in Timisoara, through which they demanded the resignation of the government, the resignation of Ceausescu as party secretary, the release of those arrested during the demonstration, the opening of the borders, and freedom of the press (25). On December 20, Ceausescu returned from his visit to Iran (24), and in a televised message to the Romanian people, he showed no sympathy for the victims of Timisoara, who were rumored at the time to number in the tens of thousands but described the demonstrations as the work of "fascists" and "rioters" inspired by Hungarian irredentism (26).

Another group of demonstrators temporarily occupied the balcony of the RCP District Council, and from that balcony the creation of the Romanian Democratic Front (RDF) was announced on December 20, as the first political organization of the opposition, and a meeting was held the same day between the demonstrators and Prime Minister Constantin Dascalescu in the RCP Council building.(27).

The Romanian Democratic Front, when it was founded, included seven members and an executive office of five people, of which Fortan became director. Later, committees were formed for agriculture, the economy, and other areas, whose job was to establish order and work on re-negotiating with the government to establish democracy in the country. The representatives presented several demands to the delegation sent by President Ceausescu, which included Ceausescu's resignation, holding free elections, freedom of the media, opening the country's borders to immigrants, freedom of religion and worship, reform of the economy, education and its development, and other demands. The demands were presented to Ceausescu, who in turn blamed the rioters and instigators from foreigners, "traitors," as he put it, which led to the negotiations collapsing due to Ceausescu's stubborn position towards the demonstrators (28). The Opera Square was filled with protesters again, and more importantly, the wave of protests spread to other Romanian cities from the west to the east of the country. On December 21, 1989, unrest broke out in the major cities (county centers) as follows: Arad (8:00 a.m.), Sibiu (9:45

a.m.), Tirgu Mures (11:30 a.m.), Resita (12:00 a.m.); Bucharest (12:40 p.m.); Brasov (1:00 p.m.); Cluj (3:00 p.m.); and Alba Iulia (10:30 p.m.)(29).

Accordingly, President Ceaușescu asked Colonel Dumitrako, head of the Bucharest Municipal Inspectorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, to organize a large public gathering and a mass march in Bucharest. His answer was affirmative. The mass gathering aimed to support the regime and blame the bloody events in Timisoara on “rioters.” Officials were mobilized to attend the march, and slogans were carefully prepared in advance, such as “We strongly condemn the traitors to our country” and “Stop the chauvinistic, irredentist actions of foreign circles.” In his speech, Ceaușescu referred to the need to protect patriotism and called for strength and unity in defending Romania’s independence (30).

As he was leaving Bucharest Square, Ceausescu called on the Minister of National Defense, General Vasile Melia, the Chief of Security, General Julian Vlad, and the Minister of Internal Affairs, Theodore. Ceausescu addressed them saying: “We will defend the cause, we will take up arms to defend socialism, because we are fighting a war more difficult than the war against Hitlerism, and therefore, we are in a state of war and not in a state of emergency, and the army, the interior and the security must do their duty immediately” (31). On the morning of December 22, Ceaușescu declared a state of emergency throughout the country. The Minister of Defense was found dead after Ceaușescu reprimanded him for not bringing troops from the province to Bucharest quickly enough. He then ordered the First Deputy Minister of Defense, General Victor Atanasi Stanculescu, to take command of the army. The suicide of General Vasile Melia on the morning of December 22 led several military leaders to change their allegiance.(32).

At noon, Ceausescu fled the rooftop in a helicopter, accompanied by his wife and two of his closest allies, Mania Minisco and Emile Bobo, as well as two of his bodyguards. Ceausescu ordered the pilot to land in Snagov, about 30 kilometres north of Bucharest, where he had a palace. He and his wife took a suitcase full of clothes. The bodyguards Mania Minisco and Emile Bobo remained on the ground, while the helicopter took off again with Ceausescu and their bodyguards in the direction of Pettest. Lack of fuel caused the plane to land on the road south of Targoviste. Here they commandeered a car driven by a doctor, which took them to the outskirts of the city. They then forcibly took a second car and tried to reach the local party headquarters, but they were recognized and the driver took them to an agricultural research station, where they were locked in a room until the local militia arrived. The couple were finally taken to the Targoviste garrison. They were tried and executed (33). On December 22, Bucharest and other cities were liberated from the grip of the security forces. The demonstrators removed the communist slogans from the Romanian flags and banners from public buildings, including the government and party headquarters. The demonstrators took control of the television and radio stations without any violence against the security forces who were guarding them. After that, the radio broadcast statements claiming to have seized the people's councils throughout the country and to prepare a document to broadcast to the Romanian people (34).

Romanian state television reported that the number of victims reached 80,000 killed by state security police and army forces, while French aid minister Pierre Nardkoechter said that Romanian health officials had informed him that the total number of known deaths in fighting across the country over the past two weeks was 746 dead and 1,800 wounded (35).

2. Search results

1. Many reasons came together for a revolution in Romania in 1989, including the economic and global economic crisis and its repercussions on the peoples of Eastern Europe, including the Romanian leadership and the Romanian people's lack of conviction that their leadership was taking it seriously as a result of economic turmoil, racial discrimination among the classes of the same people, and the lack of a clear vision and serious steps to save the economic deterioration and pay off foreign debts.
2. The Romanian revolution in December was not the only one in Romania, but came after several attempts at protests in different Romanian cities, and was a result of those protests and culminated in the downfall of the Ceausescu regime.
3. The economic policy pursued by Ceausescu exhausted the Romanian economy, controlled its capabilities, and made debt indicators rise over the years, which prompted the government to borrow from international banks at high interest rates, which increased the state's inability to pay off those debts.
4. The protests demanding the fall of the regime included all cities in Romania, which is an indication of the Romanian people's consensus to get rid of Ceausescu. They were not limited to one age group over another, as all age groups and classes of workers, intellectuals and university students participated.
5. The religious factor had a great and effective impact in stirring the feelings of the Romanians, unifying their ranks and rejecting racism. This was evident in their standing together against the coercive measures taken by the Romanian authorities against Father Tox, which reflected the extent of the government's influence on religious symbols in Romanian society.

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