

ROMANIA

# Life after 'Professor' Elena

## Bucharest & Cluj

ROMANIA is still in a state of shock three months after the bloody revolution that toppled late dictator Nicolae Ceausescu.

Whereas in Czechoslovakia crowds gather around public television screens to laugh at videotapes of the old Communist Party bosses, "in Romania there is nothing to laugh about", says cell biologist Maya Simionescu. Romanians still grieve publicly in the main streets of Bucharest and Cluj for the fallen.

The revolution was not exactly a surprise, say students in the medical faculty in Cluj, 300 km northwest of Bucharest. Tension began to build in May, when the government announced that, after 10 years of austerity, Romania's foreign debt had finally been repaid. But no relief measures followed. More pressure built after the Communist Party Congress in November, when the government did not announce any policy changes.

Euphoria has been replaced by fear and confusion in anticipation of the elections on 20 May. Dozens of political parties

## ROMANIA

Population: 22.8 million  
Area: 237,500 sq. km  
Per capita GNP: \$2,540  
Higher education: Six universities — at Iasi, Bucharest, Cluj, Timisoara, Craiova and Brasov — and 44 other institutes.  
Total no. of students: 157,174.



have registered. "All the parties agree that there will be a market economy", says Vasile Puscas, a historian at the University of Cluj, "but they don't have a clear idea of what it means. All they are interested in is power." The current government, which was put in place by the National Salvation Front after the Front seized power from Ceausescu, is only beginning to move clearly toward the most basic goals, such as establishing self-sufficiency in food production. Deputy Prime Minister Mihai Dragănescu, who is also

President of the Romanian Academy of Sciences, thinks this can be achieved in two years.

The destruction of the economy can be attributed to the policies of Ceausescu, who Dragănescu calls an "intelligent person with an evil spirit". Science suffered more than most fields because of the meddling of the dictator's wife, Elena Ceausescu, who fancied herself a chemist, despite her reported 4th grade education.

Elena obtained all her scientific credentials, including a doctorate from the Bucharest Polytechnic and many honorary doctorates, through exerting political pressure.

No one has received an academic promotion in ten years, says Dragănescu, because Elena insisted that she was the only one to have earned it. Elena even forbade using the title "professor" on television to refer to anyone but herself, explains Daniel Cocoră, a science journalist. Other academics had to be referred to as "Mr" because Elena was supposed to be the "only true scientist" in the country.

Those expecting to find tremendous technological resources stolen from the West by Ceausescu's spies will be disappointed, says Dragănescu, who has been a full professor of electrical engineering at the Bucharest Polytechnic since 1965. Romania did have some Western technology from firms like Texas Instruments, but it is not "vital", he says. Much of what Romania could not obtain directly through a licensing agreement with the French firm Thomson-CSF "diffused" into the country via East Germany.

## Reviving the Academy

The Romanian Academy of Sciences, which will celebrate its 125th anniversary next year, suffered terribly under Ceausescu. Its 51 research institutes were detached from the Academy and members elected for purely political reasons.

But instead of disbanding the Academy as a discredited institution, Dragănescu and others in government are attempting to revive it. In one of its first acts, the Front set up a 'Salvation Committee' for the Academy.

The Front drafted a new set of by-laws promising autonomy to the academy and ensuring that its purpose is to carry out basic research. Ever since the research institutes were exiled from the academy, they had to do more and more applied research to pay their bills. Consequently, they did less basic research, sometimes as little as 30 per cent in a given institute. The

## Life after 'death'

### Bucharest

RESEARCHERS and ordinary citizens can tell tales of being hounded, spied on, blackmailed, beaten, lied to, cheated and deprived of their rights by the corrupt Communist regime of late dictator Nicolae Ceausescu. But few can claim the dubious distinction of physical chemist Ilie Murgulescu, who in 1986 was officially declared dead for the convenience of the regime. Very much alive, Murgulescu, now 88 years old, was featured in a February article in a Bucharest newspaper, 22, which revealed this indignity.

After completing his doctorate in Cluj in 1930 and teaching in West Germany and in Timisoara, Romania, Murgulescu came to Bucharest in 1949 and was elected president of the Romanian Academy in 1963. He was elected to four other Eastern bloc academies as well as to the New York Academy of Sciences. Since his retirement, he frequently attended official functions at the embassies of the other countries.

But soon after that the invitations stopped coming. And in 1986, an official encyclopaedia, the *Mic Dictionar Enciclopedic*, listed Murgulescu as having died in 1983. "We knew about the encyclopaedia entry," says Murgulescu's wife. "And we knew it was intentional," she adds. "[The regime] did this so they could redirect those invitations to another member of the Academy."

So far, the revolution has changed little. The invitations to re-establish foreign contacts are not yet flowing. But Murgulescu is alive and kicking, awaiting the call. . . .

S.D.

transition government has already approved an increase in the administrative staff at the Academy from 7 to 90 people in order to support the institutes.

At the same time, the Front disbanded the notorious National Council for Scientific Research (NCSR). NCSR was the front organization that allowed Elena Ceausescu to manipulate all the scientific research in Romania. "They had to approve of everything beforehand", says Petru Filip of the chemistry institute ICECHIM. "There were so many forms", he recalls. "They must have burnt them to heat their offices." But Dragănescu will not settle just for a restoration of existing institutes. He would also like to found new institutes, especially in the biological and medical sciences, and to "attract Romanian researchers back" who left the country for political or professional reasons.

Dragănescu admits that it will not be easy to finance such a return to excellence. He would like to supplement the budget with income from up to ten "advanced study groups" working on specific problems like molecular engineering, materials

**IMAGE  
UNAVAILABLE  
FOR COPYRIGHT  
REASONS**

Leighton/Network

The Communist symbol used to adorn the flag. Celebrations in Bucharest, December '89.