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# The Triumph of Democracy: THE ROMANIAN REVOLUTION IN 1989

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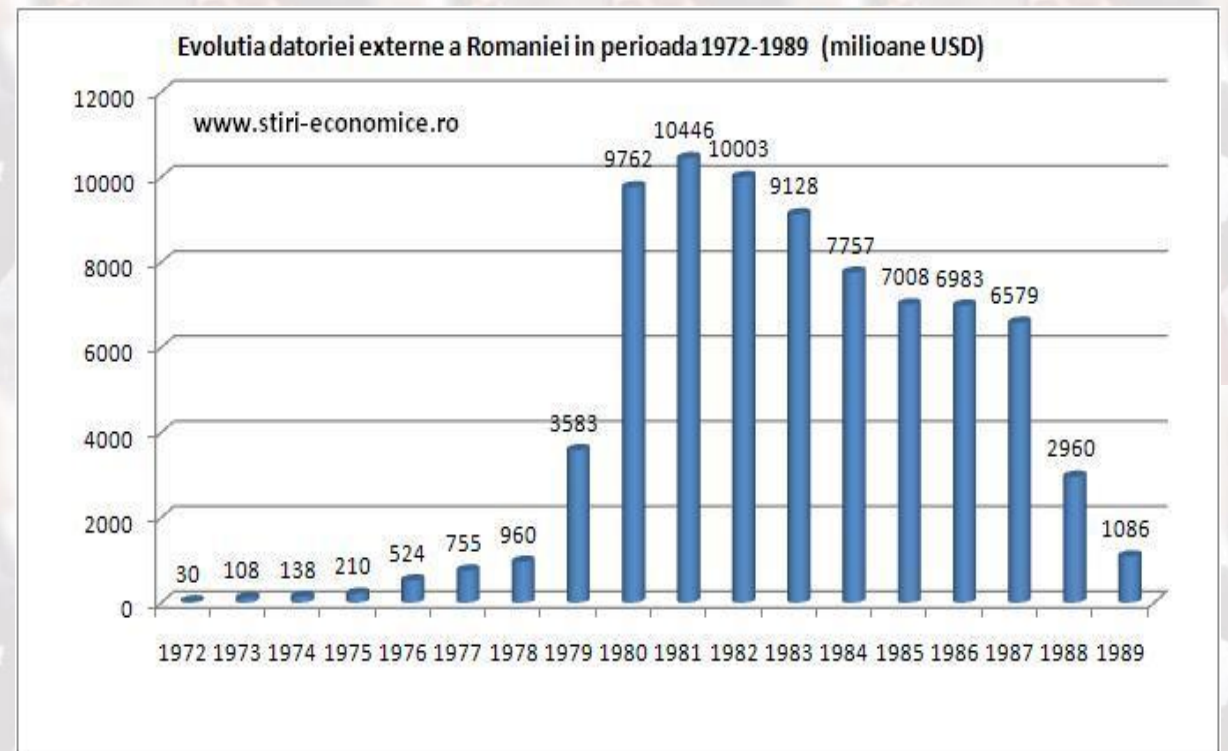
Romania's Revolution was the bloodiest of the entire East Europe's anticommunist uprisings.



- As the winds of change buffeted the communist world in the 1980s, Nicolae Ceausescu, Romania's Stalinist-style dictator, hunkered down.
- The “Genius of the Carpathians” had once been genuinely popular at home and lauded abroad for his refusal to toe the Kremlin's party line, but Ceausescu and his wife Elena were soon living the cliché of absolute power and absolute corruption.

During the last decade of communist rule, the Romanian population experienced rising levels of poverty as the regime rushed to repay its foreign debts so as to mask the failures of the regime's economic policies behind the achievement of financial independence.

Obsessed with paying off the country's debt, Ceausescu sold much of the country's raw materials to foreign creditors, leading to extreme shortages of food, heating and electricity.

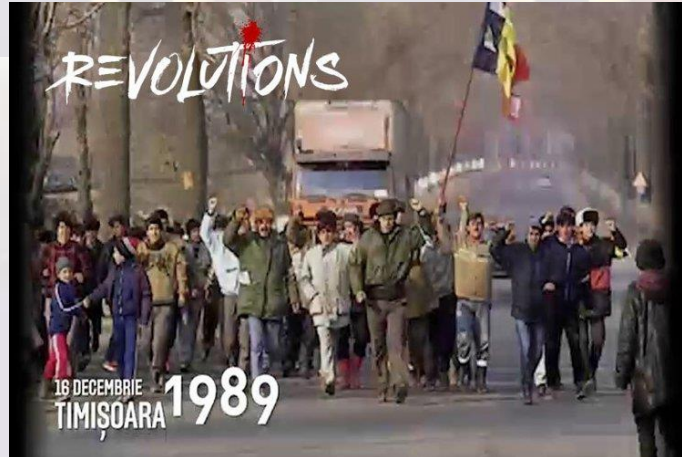


The evolution of Romanian external debt in 1972-1989, in millions USD

Drastic food and energy shortages were coupled with grandiose construction schemes, pervasive surveillance, and an extravagant cult of personality focused on Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife, Elena.



The Romanian revolution began in Timișoara, located in western Timiș County and in the former Habsburg province of Banat, close to the Yugoslav and Hungarian borders.



- It began with demonstrations against the harassment of a dissident ethnic-Hungarian priest, Laszlo Tokes.
- These soon swelled into a mass protest, in which slogans like "We want bread" soon turned into "Down with Ceausescu".

Soon all of Timișoara was on strike, while protesters tried to outwit tanks and armored vehicles. A frequent slogan during these street scenes was “Without Violence!”



Between December 16 and 19 over sixty people were killed in Timișoara, and more than 700 were arrested, but the insurgents stood their ground. Some corpses were transported to Bucharest to suppress evidence of the crime. This in turn fed rumors of wildly exaggerated numbers of dead. The slogan “Azi în Timișoara, mâine-n toată țara!” (“Today in Timișoara, tomorrow in the whole country”) was prophetic.

Ceaușescu portrayed the disturbance in Western Romania as the work of foreign agents.



In televised speeches on December 20 and 21, he called for national unity in defending Romania's sovereignty against foreign foes.

Bud the popular anti-government mobilization had spread beyond Timișoara.

In Bucharest, the authorities organized a noontime rally on December 21. Thousands of people were bussed to the Communist Party Central Committee (CPCC) square to show their support and thus legitimize the harsh repression in Timișoara. The rally was broadcast on national television, but when Ceaușescu addressed the crowd from the CPCC balcony ...



For Ceausescu, that balcony and the square had been symbolizing for years his absolute, undeniable power. The gesture of some demonstrators too boo had paralyzed and put him into the position to simply have no reaction.



Although order was temporarily restored and Ceaușescu announced raises and subsidies for workers, mothers, and pensioners, the partly televised incident had made Romanians realize the fragility of the dictatorship.



The very same day spontaneous demonstrations broke out in other parts of Bucharest. Among their slogans were: “Freedom” , “Timișoara” and “We Want Free Elections.”

# Olé, olé, olé, olé, Ceaușescu is no more!

Twenty-four hours later, unable to reestablish control, the Ceaușescu fled by helicopter from the rooftop of the Communist Party headquarters. The couple was caught the same day. The Ceausescu were taken to a military base in Targoviste and held for three days.



Celebratory demonstrations continued in the whole country with young people in particular expressing both joy and fury. The musical rhymed slogan that typified many late December street demonstrations was “Olé, olé, Ceaușescu nu mai e!” (Olé, olé, olé, olé, Ceaușescu is no more!).

Soon the army went over to the revolution and the secret police *Securitate* submitted to army command, although deadly shooting continued for several days.

Battle scenes in the street, near the National television headquarter:

*"The Army is with us!"*



The identity of the “terrorists” that fired at civilians and various buildings has remained a mystery.

Within a few days the National Salvation Front, headed by a then little-known communist figure Ion Iliescu, had assumed power and announced the abolition of the one-party system.

**The Council of the National Salvation Front proclaims the Victory of the Revolution and announces the complete and immediate cease of fire throughout the country.**

**Ion Iliescu signs the decree of establishing an "Exceptional Military Court", which will judge Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu.**





# 25th December 1989 – Death of a dictator

The Ceausescu couple has been brought before a military court in Targoviste on Christmas Day.

After just a one-hour trial, they were found guilty of genocide and other crimes, and sentenced to death. They were placed against a wall and, before they could be blindfolded, shot multiple times by three soldiers. Others present would fire shots at the couple after the execution.



**Shortly after the execution, the hostilities of the "terrorists" cease almost entirely.**

**With more than 1,000 people killed, and a ruthless end for the Ceausescus, Romania's revolution stunned the world for its violence.**

# Return to Democracy

After the fall of the Communism, the political parties that were abolished by the communists were re-established.

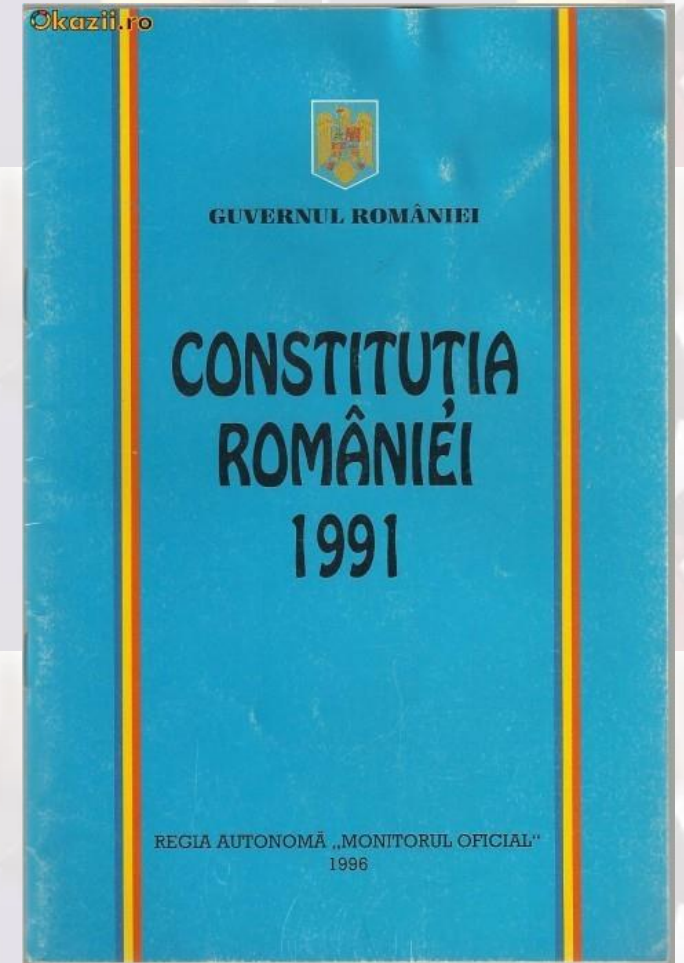


The first free election were held on 20 mai 1990. Ion Iliescu and the group who gain the power on 22th December 1989 and became a political party, The National Salvation Front (FSN) won with the largest majority ever existed since 1990 (85%).


# Return to Democracy

After the elections, the Parliament became the Constitutional Assembly, which has written the democratic Constitution (1991):

*Art. 1: Romania is a democratic and social state, governed by the rule of law, in which human dignity, the citizen's rights and freedoms, the free development of human personality, justice and political pluralism represent supreme values, in the spirit of democratic traditions of the Romanian people and the ideals of the Revolution of December 1989, and shall be guaranteed.*







With accession into the European Union in 2007 and—until the recent global downturn—a growing economy, Romania's integration into a pluralist and prosperous Europe seemed assured. Questions about the 1989 Revolution have remained unanswered but they have receded into the past as Romanians try to look to the future.

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