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EARLY 1990S ROMANIA REVISITED: POWER, TRANSITION, AND FOREIGN POLICY IN THE DIARY OF IOAN MIRCEA PAȘCU

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Abstract

This essay revisits early-1990s Romania through the first volume of Ioan Mircea Pașcu's political diary, which covers the period from June 1990 to October 1992. It argues that the diary should be treated not merely as a political memoir, but as a major documentary source for reconstructing Romania's early post-1989 politics, foreign policy, and transition. Moving beyond a conventional book review, the essay reorganises the diary's chronological entries into an analytical structure centred on four themes: (1) the domestic struggle for power, (2) the political role of the informal group 'A Future for Romania,' (3) Romania's foreign and security policy in a dangerous grey area between the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the still uncertain post-Cold War order, and (4) the political personalities who dominated the period. The analysis shows that the diary challenges several later retrospective myths, especially concerning the June 1990 events, the Iliescu–Roman conflict, Romania's alleged alignment with the Soviet Union, and the assumption that rapid integration into the collective West depended mainly on the will of the Romanian leadership. Instead, Pașcu's account reveals a far more contingent and insecure setting, marked by institutional fragility, economic and social crisis, regional instability, and limited Western interest in Romania. The diary is thus highly relevant not only to historians and political scientists, but also to sociologists concerned with transition, state formation, political recruitment, and post-Cold War regional order.

Keywords: Romania, transition, Ion Iliescu, foreign policy, mineriads, post-Cold War order.

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Résumé

Cet essai propose une relecture de la Roumanie du début des années 1990 à travers le premier volume du journal politique de Ioan Mircea Pașcu, qui couvre la période allant de juin 1990 à octobre 1992. Il fait valoir que ce journal ne doit pas être considéré comme un simple mémoire politique, mais comme une source documentaire majeure pour reconstituer la vie politique, la politique étrangère et la transition de la Roumanie au lendemain de 1989. Dépassant le cadre d'une recension classique, l'essai réorganise les entrées chronologiques du journal en une structure analytique articulée autour de quatre thèmes : (1) la lutte interne pour le pouvoir, (2) le rôle politique du groupe informel « Un avenir pour la Roumanie », (3) la politique étrangère et de sécurité de la Roumanie dans une dangereuse zone grise, entre l'effondrement du pacte de Varsovie et l'ordre encore incertain de l'après-guerre froide, et (4) les personnalités politiques qui ont dominé la période. L'analyse montre que le journal remet en cause plusieurs mythes rétrospectifs, en particulier au sujet des événements de juin 1990, du conflit entre Iliescu et Roman, du prétendu alignement de la Roumanie sur l'Union soviétique, ainsi que de l'hypothèse selon laquelle une intégration rapide à l'Occident collectif dépendait principalement de la volonté des dirigeants roumains. En revanche, le récit de Pașcu révèle un contexte bien plus conjoncturel et précaire, marqué par la fragilité institutionnelle, la crise économique et sociale, l'instabilité régionale et un intérêt limité de l'Occident pour la Roumanie. Le journal est d'une forte pertinence donc non seulement pour les historiens et les politologues, mais aussi pour les sociologues qui s'intéressent à la transition, à la formation de l'État, au recrutement politique et à l'ordre régional de l'après-guerre froide.

Mots-clés: Roumanie; transition; journal politique; Ion Iliescu; politique étrangère; minériades; ordre de l'après-guerre froide.

Introduction

Political memoirs are a rare breed in contemporary Romanian politics. This was not always so. Interwar and even communist-era politicians left memorable contributions, either in memoirs and diaries for the former or in interviews for the latter. The generations that entered and left politics in the aftermath of the 1989 Romanian Revolution seem rather averse to telling the story of their times. Although not necessarily accessible to the casual reader, this book is one of the best and a must-read for any researcher of Romania in the early 1990s, during its troubled transition back to capitalism and the path towards the collective West.

Ioan Mircea Pașcu, the book's author, is a veteran politician with a career spanning almost 30 years (1990-2019). Pașcu was a presidential advisor (1990-

1992), a member of the Romanian parliament (1996-2008), and a member of the European Parliament (2007-2019). He served in the executive branch as Minister of Defence (a high-ranking cabinet member, equivalent to the US or British Secretary of Defence) from 2000 to 2004 during Romania's NATO accession. Previously, from 1993 to 1996, Pașcu was the secretary of state for defence (mid-tier ministerial level, equivalent to a US undersecretary or a British minister of state). His high points in politics include the vice-presidency of the European Parliament, the first Romanian to reach this position, and being in the final contention for his party's (the Social Democrats) nomination for the presidency in 2004, which he ultimately lost. An international relations scholar, Pașcu made an important contribution to Romania's NATO accession.

The first in a series of several planned volumes, the political diary covers the period from June 9, 1990, to October 2, 1992. From the first entry, the author reveals that his goal was to leave a document for those who would like 'to know more about the truth'. The diary is written in a serious, no-nonsense style. Unlike some other Western political diarists, the author had no intention of entertaining the reader with amusing insights into politics through witty or self-deprecating remarks. The bulk of the diary entries follow the author's daily schedule as a presidential adviser for foreign relations: working meetings at the presidency, meetings with President Iliescu and foreign leaders and diplomats, foreign trips, and various meetings with other politicians or high-ranking officials. An interesting insight is the interaction as a presidential advisor for foreign relations with diplomats, both in the formal setting of the presidency, at embassy receptions, and even in informal settings. Sometimes, but not often, the entries also cover his 'other' professional life in academia as a university professor of international relations – the parallel with Henry Kissinger is drawn from the first entry – and his personal life.

A highly relevant, must-read book for a better understanding of Romania in the early 1990s

The book's relevance lies in its valuable insights into early 1990s politics, especially in foreign and security policy. At the time of the book's publication in 2024, about 37% of Romania's population was born after the events described in the book. If one also includes those who were not yet of school age in 1990-1992, the proportion of readers with no lived memory of that world becomes considerably larger (NIS, 2026; author's calculation). For the younger generations, Romania's status as a NATO and EU member state is a given. A world in which Romania was not part of the collective West – at the start of the book, it was part of a different, competing political and military bloc, the Warsaw Pact, even if about to dissolve itself – seems like a tale from another dimension. The dissolution of the Warsaw Pact (July 1, 1991) was soon followed by the dissolution of its main political and military power, the Soviet Union (December 1991). Romania found itself in a grey

area, with no great power guaranteeing its borders, and with two wars, one on its Western border (Yugoslavia) and one on its Eastern border (Moldova). In this new context, Romania was desperately trying to be relevant to the West, especially the United States, the lone remaining superpower in the international system.

The Pașcu political diary fully delivers on its stated goal. The reader, from academics in a wide array of fields, from political science, sociology, and history, to the casual reader, will find numerous 'nuggets' of truth, offering insight into Romania at the start of its transition towards capitalism and integration into the collective West. The book, however, is not necessarily an easy read, especially for the casual reader. Its characters are 'yesterday's men', politicians active three decades ago on the national and international stage. The younger reader would have to repeatedly browse the Internet or ask the AI, 'Who are these people?' While the book provides some context about the deep economic and social crisis that engulfed Romania (as well as the other former Warsaw Pact or Communist countries), today's reader would be challenged to be fully immersed in a world with rampant, three-digit inflation, mass unemployment, and virtually no international migration of the labour force. Therefore, a good knowledge of the period is needed to get the most from the book.

Argument, structure, and methodological framing

This essay goes beyond a conventional book review. In my view, Pașcu's political diary should be regarded not just as a memoir by a former presidential adviser, but rather as a major source for revisiting Romania's early 1990s politics and transition. The diary is especially valuable on three levels. First, it offers a firsthand account of the domestic struggle for power during the turbulent period between June 1990 and the 1992 elections. Secondly, it provides rare insight into Romanian foreign and security policy at a time when the country found itself in a dangerous grey area between the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the still uncertain post-Cold War order. Thirdly, it sheds light on the formation, mentality, ambitions, and rivalries of the dominant political actors during the early transition period.

Accordingly, the essay uses the chronological diary entries as building blocks for an analytical reconstruction. Instead of offering a simple summary, the essay reconstructs and interprets the book's most important themes and uses them to revisit Romania's early post-1989 political and international trajectory. We begin with the workings of politics in the early 1990s and the struggle for power around President Ion Iliescu and Prime Minister Petre Roman. We then turn to the informal group 'A Future for Romania', which offers insight into the political role of academics and experts in the period. The largest section addresses foreign and security policy, with special attention to Romania's relationship with the United States, the collective West, the Soviet Union, and the regional crises in Yugoslavia and Moldova. The essay also discusses the political figures who dominate the diary,

especially Ion Iliescu, Adrian Năstase, and Mugur Isărescu, before concluding with the diarist's own political and professional trajectory.

This essay treats Pașcu's diary primarily as a documentary source for anyone interested in early 1990s Romania, the transition period, and international politics during and immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union and the beginning of the United States' unipolar moment. This choice – to regard the book as a documentary source rather than a political memoir – shaped the decision to quote and paraphrase the diary extensively. The key argument is that the diary contains factual material about Romanian foreign and domestic politics that has not yet entered the scholarly record. It will not do so until the state archives from the 1990s open in the 2040s. Pașcu's diary belongs to a category of historical knowledge that exists only in the heads and private papers of participants. This is the category that becomes accessible to scholars first. The second category comprises state archives. The former is interested, maybe even biased, partial in scope, but contemporaneous with the events. The latter is less interested or biased, but filtered through whatever the state chose to preserve and whatever the participants chose to write down for the file rather than for themselves. Pașcu's diary belongs to the first category. This essay intends to make it citable in the currency of the second category. Consider that in the 2040s, all scholars interested in this subject would no longer be contemporaries to the events, and no participants from the political leadership would be able to put the archives into context. Therefore, the long enumerative passages, especially in the foreign-policy sections, are designed to perform quasi-source archival work and to guide future researchers. The paper deliberately keeps theoretical apparatus to a minimum, since its contribution is documentary and analytical rather than theoretical. One last point is that the book is available in Romanian and only in print. So, another goal of this paper is to make its documentary source content available as widely as possible in English and on the internet.

A second point about the methodological framing of this paper derives from the nature of Pașcu's diary as a political memoir. Even if it is a diary rather than a memoir written decades after the events, the source still has an author who is interested in presenting his story, perhaps even his biases. It is a fact that readers of political memoirs should always keep in mind. Pașcu was a participant in the events he describes, a political adviser, aspiring to become a political player, who felt increasingly marginalised by President Iliescu, and a direct rival of Foreign Minister Năstase for influence over foreign policy. These positions colour several of the diary's portraits, most visibly in the Năstase section, and the reader should weigh them accordingly.

This essay advances several analytical arguments that are based on the source material. The first category covers Romanian foreign policy from 1990 to 1992. First, I put forward the concept of 'conditionality without commitment' to describe the relationship with the collective West, both the United States and Western Europeans. Western expansion in Central and Eastern Europe (NATO and EU

enlargement) was not on the table. Moreover, the EU itself did not exist until the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht. As such, Romania was monitored, judged, and conditionally assisted, but not politically embraced. Western economic support was the main leverage in the conditionality regime. The 'conditionality without commitment' dispels the myth that Romania's path towards the collective West was available, even set in stone, starting with the Revolution of December 1989 and that it depended solely on the will of its political leadership.

Included in this foreign policy category is the evidence provided by the diary that dispels another political myth: that Moldova's reunification with Romania was a realistic option, lost by either poor decisions or a lack of political will on the part of the Romanian leadership. On the contrary, Pașcu's account shows that Western interest in Romania was limited and heavily conditional, and that Western governments privately and explicitly warned the Romanian leadership against any move toward reunification. This pressure left no public trace and has remained largely invisible to later researchers. Moreover, the emergent Moldovan political leadership preferred to have its own nation-state and only gave lip service to the unionist option to gain political, diplomatic, economic, and military support from Romania.

The second argument deals with political sociology, specifically the social composition of the Romanian political leadership during the 1990s. The prevalence of academics in executive political leadership, i.e., cabinet-level politics, is documented (Stănescu, 2014), but this book offers, for the first time, a key account of the mechanism behind this peculiarity. Pașcu's diaries provide an account of the 'A Future for Romania' group, which was not an accidental network, but a deliberately cultivated one, chiefly by President Iliescu. The book reveals how it formed and gained access to power. A related contribution concerns the personalities and leadership styles of the main political leaders of the 1990s, especially President Iliescu. This is prime material for everyone interested in the interplay between power and personality (Lasswell, 1948/2009), as well as analysis of political leadership and careers.

Politics in the early 1990s

Precarious politics, weak institutions, and emerging networks of power

The period leading up to the ratification of the Constitution (in December 1991) stands out for the precarious hold on political power. Politics, in the sense of the struggle for power, was often played out in the streets rather than in Parliament. Political institutions were very weak. There was a permanent risk of insurrection and mass protests. Political plotting was rampant, to the point that cabinet members circulated historical papers on previous coups (p. 166). On top of everything, security officials repeatedly whispered about infiltration by foreign intelligence

agencies and about foreign powers aiding and abetting insurrections against the provisional government (p. 399). Some of these bordered on bizarre, such as a briefing on CIA and Mossad plots to assassinate the president (p. 49). Another perceived coup threat was the possibility of restoring the monarchy. The return of former King Michael was always a politically sensitive issue; one such trip was made with British, not American, backing (p. 161).

The French semi-presidential system was the model for Romania's 1991 constitution (Iorgovan, 1998). A diary entry from October 1990 shows President Iliescu meeting the famous French legal scholar Robert Badinter, who advised against a parliamentary system, 'which would be inefficient and a catastrophe given our problems' (p. 99).

The systemic political, economic, and social changes of the early 1990s saw the emergence of new power networks, some of them hidden. Pașcu believed that most of the money supposedly stored by the former Communist regime in foreign banks was, in fact, in the country and being used by people well-connected to the former regime, including security officers. In an entry dated September 1992, Pașcu concluded that a new economic elite had formed, including 'exes' (former security services officers and Communist Party activists). This new elite had ramifications in the interior ministry, police, and other key institutions. It was also able to control appointments in key positions (p. 522).

Iliescu's political project and the stakes of the transition

A revealing passage concerns the decisive role President Iliescu played in shaping the emerging multi-party system. Iliescu wanted to 'quickly and decisively' transform the catch-all party of the Revolution, the National Salvation Front, into a Social Democratic party. The arguments were that it was an unoccupied space in the political spectrum and that it would be viewed positively in the international scene; it would be a natural party of government, closely linked with unions (p. 93; Iliescu, 2014). In my view, Romania would not have had a strong centre-left party without President Iliescu, a left-wing politician with a huge personal popular vote.

While not one of the book's main themes, the state of the economy is often mentioned. The economy deteriorated so severely that it came to the attention of the presidential advisor for foreign relations. As early as the autumn of 1990, the country found itself in a deep crisis, triggered in part by international factors (Georgescu, 2018). The Soviet Union, at the time by far the country's main trading partner (Buga, 2019), halved its energy supplies, leading to shortages. The situation was worsened by ageing electricity and water networks (p. 191). In late spring 1991, the economy minister and the central bank governor briefed the President that the situation was catastrophic. Energy imports alone were valued more than all exports combined (p. 258). A choice had to be made: either print money to pay the wages of state-owned enterprise employees, or break the IMF loan terms and face all the consequences (p. 269). Prime Minister Petre Roman was completely

devastated by the dire economic situation. He lamented that the people did not want anything but Ceaușescu's [former regime] system: order and being taken care of from the top (p. 269).

Besides the economy, the transition also involved political and moral stakes. The elder statesman Alexandru Bârlădeanu, President of the Senate, told his younger colleagues that the only viable goal in politics was to raise living standards. He warned that politics without morality breeds monsters (pp. 187-188). The leading opposition politician of the time, Corneliu Coposu, president of the National Peasant Party, appeared to the diarist as deeply influenced by his mentor, Iuliu Maniu, an interwar politician renowned for his obstructionist and divisive style of opposition politics. However, the central struggle for power in this period was not between the government and the formal opposition, but within the ruling camp itself, between President Iliescu and Prime Minister Petre Roman, together with their respective political allies (Pasti, 1995).

June 1990: insurrection, miners, and the first major rupture

The first major crisis in the struggle for power was the 13-15 June 1990 events, which occurred at the very beginning of the diary. The insurrection on 13 June is narrated from within the presidency. President Iliescu and his advisers were surprised by events. The insurrection left the leadership 'groggy', including the President. In effect, the diary undermines the later political myth of a planned attack by security forces against the protesters. Another major point is that, on June 14, the miners came to Bucharest of their own accord. Neither President Iliescu nor Prime Minister Petre Roman summoned them. 'Soon, we realised they were acting on their own and could not be controlled'. Pașcu concludes that the 13 June 1990 insurrection was planned by Opposition parties aided by foreign powers (more on that in the following sections), but that the miners' intervention foiled the plan. The international (Western) reaction was to ignore 'the rebellion' [insurrection] and focus exclusively on the miners' intervention against it (pp. 20-29, 98). One year later, Pașcu concludes that the *Tiananmen* scenario had been only the second-best, not the first-best, outcome. The Army was not supposed to intervene at all (to protect the incumbent government), but the miners messed up all the calculations of those who planned the insurrection (p. 284). Pașcu also concluded that the Romanian intellectual elite would be forever lost to 'us' [President Iliescu and his allies]. In his view, the Front was a party of the many, of the 'deplorables', with whom the 'elite' was no longer willing to rub shoulders after having been forced to do so under Communism (p. 283).

From policy disagreement to power struggle: Iliescu versus Roman

The power struggle between President Iliescu and Prime Minister Roman stemmed from the choice of economic and social policies underpinning the transition from a Soviet-style to a market economy. Their political allies and foreign powers deepened the rift. The first clear signs of a rift appeared in July

1990. At that time, Romania was fast approaching the depletion of its foreign-exchange reserves. In September, it had to turn to the IMF (Văcărel, 2001). The diary entry of 21 July 1990 is especially revealing. In a meeting with his advisers, President Iliescu accused 'the young group in the government' of going against the [May 1990] election manifesto and criticised the 'adventurism' of their privatisation plan. People voted for him, not for Roman, but the president would be blamed for the consequences of the fast privatisation plan (p. 43). Iliescu appears to have wanted to avoid an open clash, not least because he had known Roman since the latter's youth; later, he even published some of Roman's scholarly books (p. 62). The struggle intensified in late autumn 1990, when the IMF agreement policies began to bite, especially through price liberalisation.

Iliescu's political allies saw Petre Roman as ambitious, lacking the patience to climb the ladder. The main critics of the Roman government's IMF-backed economic reforms were the two parliamentary speakers, Alexandru Bârlădeanu (Senate) and Dan Marțian (Chamber of Deputies) (p. 179). President Iliescu was in basic agreement with them, but was sorry he could not go public (p. 236).

Foreign powers further widened the wedge between Roman and Iliescu by turning the former's charm and multilingualism into political capital. For instance, US diplomat Bob Wylie told Pașcu that Roman was well regarded and pitied for compromising his career by associating with President Iliescu and his team, or seen as a victim of manipulation. Another diplomat reported on the saying of US Senate leader Bob Dole that 'Petre is OK, Iliescu not so' (p. 73). After seeing Roman in meetings with foreign leaders and diplomats, the Romanian UN Ambassador quipped that Roman was ambitious and impatient, but charming with foreigners. Prime Minister Roman began competing with the President over foreign policy. For instance, the Foreign Ministry received orders to put Prime Minister Roman in a positive light and President Iliescu in a negative light, according to the Romanian ambassador to the UN, who strongly advised replacing the Prime Minister (p. 219). The Prime Minister began taking foreign trips to counter President Iliescu. One such instance was Roman's visit to Brussels at the very time of the President's visit to the United States. Pașcu concludes that Roman was 'an ambitious man with a good education, but it was not difficult to persuade him that he should run Romania instead of Iliescu. A pity, but dangerous!' (p. 85). By June 1991, the idea to replace Prime Minister Roman with Theodor Stolojan had already surfaced (p. 290). The diary later reveals that the first such proposal came from economist and academician Postolache (p. 406).

September 1991 and the fall of the Roman government

The second miners' violent protest in Bucharest, on September 25, 1991, is again narrated from within the presidency (pp. 325-355). Prime Minister Petre Roman announced his resignation during a crisis meeting at the presidency, following a phone call from President Iliescu to the miners' leader, who warned

him of the severity of the internal and external consequences of his actions. No one present objected to his resignation. Faced with the loss of office, Roman immediately sought to reverse the consequences of his resignation. First, he argued that the resignation would take effect only upon the president's acceptance, which was quickly granted. Secondly, he tried to continue as interim prime minister until a new prime minister was voted in by parliament. Roman's allies suggested a tough approach against the miners, including the army opening fire on them. The military top brass and Iliescu's advisers fully rejected this. Roman stated that under these conditions, his resignation would be valueless and suggested a national union cabinet, likely under his leadership. On September 26, the situation seemed to be spiralling out of control, with calls for the President's resignation. The only hope was the FSN parliamentary caucus. If it had caved, the likely result would have been a return to the 1923 Constitution and the monarchy. In the end, the meeting between President Iliescu and the miners' leadership ended with a signed agreement. Among others, it confirmed the resignation of the Roman cabinet. Following the miners' retreat, protesters from Bucharest tried to assault the presidential palace but failed, and the crisis subsided.

In a later diary entry, Pașcu offers a more explicit interpretation of the crisis. He concludes that, through his own defiant behaviour towards the miners, Roman sought to bring them back to Bucharest and channel them against President Iliescu, who was supposed to order a repression against them. Thus, the real aim was to topple President Iliescu. 'A perfect game!' (pp. 380-381) This is reinforced by a confession from President Iliescu to his advisers that Petre Roman pushed him not to talk to the miners, but to shoot at them (p. 383). The diarist reinforces this interpretation through a report that Stelian Tanase, from the [opposition] Civic Alliance Party, told someone that there had been a secret deal with Petre Roman, before the miners' protest, to overthrow President Iliescu (p. 382). As for the miners, the diarist views them as used by others: they put forward 'communist' economic demands while protesting under the slogan 'Down with Communism' (p. 332).

After the end of his premiership, Petre Roman remained the leader of the National Salvation Front (FSN) party and quickly advanced his own interpretation of the crisis. As early as September 28, 1991, he advanced the narrative of a left-wing coup at a party leadership meeting. He claimed, among other things, that President Iliescu betrayed him. Roman also claimed, incorrectly, that he never said he would resign. He went on to criticise the agreement with the miners, which enabled a bloodless end to the conflict. (pp. 334-336)

To bring the crisis to an end, Pașcu advised President Iliescu to designate Theodor Stolojan as candidate for Prime Minister on October 1 (p. 338). Once in office, Stolojan came under heavy criticism for his role in the 1980s foreign debt repayments and for his Communist Party background. Inexperienced in politics, his nerves were about to break, yet he held on (p. 390).

The FSN split and the emergence of the new centre-left party

The diary follows the next phases of the Iliescu-Roman political struggle up to the 1992 election. The first phase was the struggle for control of the National Salvation Front, the party that overwhelmingly won the 1990 election with Iliescu as its presidential nominee (p. 352). Roman smeared Iliescu as a committed Communist opposed to [economic] reform (p. 379), broke with him definitively (p. 382), and engaged in what Pașcu calls 'gangster'-like politicking to control the party (p. 436).

The endgame was at the March 1992 FSN convention. Roman and his allies secured a comfortable win with 64% of the delegate tally, but the convention was 'fixed'. President Iliescu asked his allies inside FSN to form a new party. Their initial reaction was to reject this and fight on within FSN (pp. 438-442). Despite initially being the unattractive option, the first tentative steps towards establishing a new party were taken in early April 1992 (pp. 443-445). This was the party that would later become the Social Democratic Party, the largest party in Romanian politics for the next three decades. As for Roman, the first volume of the political diary ends with the first signs of his alliance with the parties of the formal opposition (p. 445).

The labour unions that emerged after the Revolution also played a role in politics. In September 1990, Senator Sergiu Nicolaescu warned the diarist that the Front lost the unions because their leaders had been bought off with hard currency by the opposition parties (p. 86). Another meeting with labour leaders in May 1992 confirmed earlier suspicions: they received extensive financial aid from foreign countries, lately from England, and struck a deal with one of the opposition parties. The aim, according to the diary, was to restructure Romanian politics around the three major political internationals: social democrats (the splinter FSN party), liberals, and Christian democrats (by reforming the National Peasant Party, seen as too closely associated with the interwar far right, pp. 458-459). Pașcu's embittered remark sums up the interplay between domestic and international politics: 'Romanians… due to petty political considerations, did all they could to isolate post-revolutionary Romania internationally' (p. 319).

A Future for Romania Group

One of the book's major insights concerns the informal group later institutionalised as 'A Future for Romania'. The name comes from a foundation established in 1992 by a circle of academics, university professors, and researchers in law, political science, sociology, and economics. Born around 1950, the Group members were in their early 40s during the timeframe of the book. The group

was founded as an informal entity in the late 1980s, based on membership of the Association for International Law and Foreign Relations (ADIRI). More information about the Group and its members is available in the afterword, signed by another of its members, Dan Mircea Popescu – presidential advisor, minister of labour, leading parliamentarian. As both the preface and the afterword suggest, chance and personal encounters played an important role in politics, especially in revolutionary times.

The Group's political opportunity stemmed from its introduction to Ion Iliescu, the country's provisional president and the political leader of the December 1989 Revolution. The person who made the introduction was Virgil Măgureanu, who in the 1980s was a more senior colleague of the group's members in academia. This encounter was pivotal not only for the political careers of the Group's members but also for the wider role of academics in high politics during the transition era, a role that would later decrease. The book thus provides a unique insight into why academics were dominant in Romanian high-level politics in the 1990s and early 2000s (Stănescu, 2014).

Many diary entries cover the Group's meetings. Their topics included political analysis, policy debates, and the members' career options in politics and the professions. Most of them reached key positions in the state (ministers, presidential advisers, the National Bank, and other institutions) after being introduced to Iliescu. In later years, the Group and its members' relationship with the President had its ups and downs. Individually and collectively, at times they felt let down by President Iliescu and were even ready to stop supporting him (pp. 225-226).

After the Iliescu-Roman split, the Group tried to position itself as the 'third force' in the FSN internal struggle, but it was 'too weak and fearful to play decisively' for the party leadership (p. 424). Other parties, like the Liberals, also invited Group members to join them because they were 'high-quality intellectuals'. Ultimately, after an internal debate, most of its members accepted President Iliescu's invitation to join the new party established by his supporters after they had lost the party struggle within FSN (pp. 452, 456, 461-63). Group members had second thoughts about joining FDSN due to internal strife and perceived low chances of entering parliament. Additionally, Group members were critical of the FDSN leadership. The relationship remained unstable, especially when negotiations turned to the allocation of eligible parliamentary seats (pp. 498-499). The leading Group member to join the new party (FDSN) and run in the 1992 parliamentary election was Dan Mircea Popescu, the author of the book's afterword (p. 507).

The Group played an important role in the 1992 presidential election. Its members were part of the core strategy team of President Iliescu. They also contributed to the presidential platform. In addition to the diarist, sociologist Vladimir Pasti and international relations political scientist Vasile Secăreș are repeatedly mentioned in the campaign strategy meetings, later joined by Dan

Mircea Popescu and Adrian Năstase. The diarist was highly confident that President Iliescu would secure a convincing, landslide win in the 1992 election (p. 529), as indeed proved to be the case.

After many discussions about institutionalising the group, it officially launched on September 22, 1992, as the 'A Future for Romania' Foundation (p. 529). The Group was open to new members but highly selective in its admissions. Some notable 'applications' that were rejected (p. 527): Dan Pascariu (leading banker), Adrian Severin (close ally of Petre Roman at that time, future Foreign Minister), and Daniel Dăianu (macroeconomist, future central bank chief economist and minister of finance).

The standing and the influence of the Group were recognised in the diplomatic circles. US embassy staff were aware of the Group and explicitly expressed their trust in it (p. 261). The diary entry after a meeting with US diplomat Dan Nelson: 'the Group saved Romania from chaos, but once we are gone, the problems would come out' (p. 532).

Foreign and security policy: Romania in a grey area

This is the main topic of the book, as it encompasses the diarist's brief as the presidential advisor for foreign affairs. The diary entries cover a wide array of formal and informal meetings with foreign diplomats, national security meetings at the presidency, briefings by and discussions with other policy makers and officials from the national security and foreign affairs establishment, foreign trips, and meetings of President Iliescu with other world leaders or their representatives at home and abroad.

Much of this book is about Romanian foreign policy in the early 1990s. The book dispels the political myth that Romania could have joined the collective West earlier had it pursued a different set of policies and had a different political leadership, rather than President Iliescu and his allies. After the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, Romania was, in effect, in a grey area, with no military alliance to guarantee its borders. It had a difficult relationship with Hungary over the status of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania. Soon, two conflicts emerged, one on its Western border - the dissolution of Yugoslavia – and the other on its Eastern border – the civil war in the newly independent Republic of Moldova. This was a dangerous, anarchic world (in the sense that there was no higher authority to enforce rules or police borders). As we shall see, Romania's political leadership perceived the country's territorial integrity as at risk. Arguably, the most important truth 'nugget' of the book was the West's lack of interest in Romania. Another main topic is the relationship with the United States, which was at the start of its unipolar moment (Krauthammer, 1990). Other major subtopics are the relations with the Soviet Union, China, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Moldova, and Türkiye (Turkey).

The United States

The most frequent diary entries on foreign policy are about the United States of America. Once more, this dispels the political myth that President Iliescu and his allies sought alignment with the Soviet Union. Moreover, it shows that the Romanian foreign policy makers of the era correctly assessed the US as the lone superpower. In part, the book tells the story of Romanian-US relations from 1990 to 1992 and is a must-read for any researcher on this topic.

The book begins with relations with the US at their lowest. US embassy official Aggie Kuperman asked the diarist to dissociate from the government's action regarding the June 13, 1990, insurrection. The pressure turned personal: she reminded him of his children's future. Kuperman said the Romanian government should have resigned rather than react to the rebellion (p. 28). While revealing the real-life diplomatic language during a political crisis, the reader is left wondering whether this was a personal message or of the US government. The first meeting between President Iliescu and US Ambassador Alan Green, together with the deputy chief of mission, took place on July 23, 1990, following the June 13 insurrection and the June 14-15 miners' riot. The ambassador's last point was the 'democracy lesson'. Iliescu, visibly irritated, replied that Romania really wished to become a democracy. The president followed up with questions about support for the opposition and the disregard for the positive review of the election by US observers. The Americans responded that they intended to improve the relationship (p. 45). Shortly after, the diarist makes a comparison between a Japanese envoy and the 'arrogant behaviour of the Americans' (p. 52).

Backchannel diplomacy took place through the Protection Service (the Romanian equivalent of the US Secret Service or the UK Special Branch) and the Americans. The GHW Bush administration regarded President Iliescu as honest, acknowledged that he had no alternative course during the June 13 insurrection, and would welcome unofficial consultation before some initiatives, including a request for communications equipment. The US administration was convinced that the Romanian side was not afraid of them.

Romanian relations with the US markedly improved during the First Gulf War. During the crisis, Romania was a member of the United Nations Security Council and even chaired it during the diplomatic phase. On August 6, 1990, US President GHW Bush sent a letter asking Romania to join the UN resolution on the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Iraq offered to supply oil in exchange for its sovereign debt to Romania: first tranche, USD 65 million; second, USD 150 million. The economy minister advised that without this contract, the economy would collapse. The diarist, as foreign affairs advisor, recommended that Romania take the pro-US position, 'otherwise our situation would be more difficult than after June 13-15'. The Iraqis sent a special envoy. The Americans appreciated Romania's position and asked about the economic losses we had incurred (pp. 54-56).

President Iliescu had a productive visit to the US in October 1990, including meetings with US President GHW Bush and British PM Margaret Thatcher (p. 86). Iliescu also met Henry Kissinger, who said he had read 5 pages of praise about him but that he had image problems (the reality being different). Moreover, 'we have unnamed friends' (p. 88). Another meeting between President Iliescu and US Ambassador Green, during which the latter formally handed over a letter with the 'democracy exam', which was reduced from 10 to 5 points. President Iliescu received 98 Romanian-born US businessmen. According to them, the ice was slowly beginning to thaw at the US State Dept. They advised a strategy to foster US business interest, which would, in turn, pressure the US government. U.S. Congressman Tom Lantos, with a Jewish Hungarian background, wanted to champion Romania in the US and Hungarian-Romanian reconciliation. He submitted a list of demands to President Iliescu (p. 127).

Another milestone in improving relations was the meeting between Foreign Minister Năstase and US Under Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger. As a result, the US would no longer object to loans to Romania in G-24 meetings. In March 1991, the US agreed to a USD 40 million bridge loan. The US was favourable to Romania but expected clear moves: continued reforms and centrist policies. The real message was the need for quiet in Romania (p. 203).

The deterioration of Gorbachev's position within the Soviet Union led the US to improve relations with Romania. The Romanian ambassador to the UN warned that we must choose whether to go with the West or with the developing world. This was our last chance. After Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, we would be next. At the moment, there was no one stronger than the West. It would be the only way (p. 217).

The relationship with the US was not linear. Messages and gestures towards a closer relationship were mixed with rebuffs, usually using economic leverage. The administration was more open to better relations than Congress. In March 1991, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) decided to postpone a Stand-by agreement with Romania. Furthermore, the US announced that it would not take part in the G-24 financing for Romania. Most likely, the reason was that Romania did not answer whether 'we were with them' or not (p. 233). A warning from central bank governor (and Group member) Mugur Isărescu: for the first time since the Revolution, the Americans announced that they had political doubts about us. The financial problem was paramount. Postponement of the IMF loan would trigger a foreign exchange payment default.

US embassy official Aggie Kuperman was strongly opposed to President Iliescu. She admitted to having made a major contribution to organising the opposition parties and regretted that, as a diplomat, she could not do more (p. 259). This was soon followed by a contentious meeting between President Iliescu and the US ambassador. Iliescu was 'in great form', but 'his old anti-Americanism manifested' (p. 266). A university professor [who later chaired the Soros Foundation in

Romania] revealed that the Civic Alliance was organised into a political party by the Americans, exasperated by the inefficiency of the opposition parties, which they would no longer materially support. 50 activists would be trained through the Civic Academy by September 1991. The 'great battle' would be between the Americans and the French; therefore, Prime Minister Petre Roman (regarded as pro-French) would be targeted. President Iliescu seemed safe in his position (p. 269).

In May 1991, President Iliescu was exasperated by the inefficiency of the efforts to improve relations with the US (p. 274). All bridges were burned with the US, according to the Romanian UN ambassador, due to the new treaty with the Soviet Union and a proposal by the Romanian Foreign Minister for a Central European grouping of states, which the US perceived as a disguised attempt to re-establish the Warsaw Pact (p. 275). On June 13, 1991, the US blocked the OECD-G24 loan to Romania. According to the diarist, the goal was not regime change, but keeping Romania on the right track. The Japanese contribution of USD 200 million was also cancelled at the US's suggestion. Two rating agencies graded Romania as unstable. CEE (future EU) also cancelled its loan, likely at the US's advice. 'The Americans would not give us anything as long as President Iliescu was in office' (p. 282).

US diplomat Shifter revealed the motives for which Romania was perceived distinctly by the Americans: (1) there was no trust for those that took power (during the Revolution) due to no anti-communist opposition [in the 1980s], (2) lack of democratic traditions for over half a century, (3) low level of political education, especially in the countryside, where, through the lack of opposition presence on TV, the population massively voted FSN and Ion Iliescu. The GHW Bush Administration needed positive 'munitions' to persuade Congress (p. 295). US embassy diplomats met with President Iliescu. Journalist PM Băcanu intervened in Washington, urging the GHW Bush administration not to cancel the Jackson-Vanik amendment. Embassy staff returned the letter to the Romanian authorities that had been handed to them by Băcanu (p. 315).

During the August 1991 Soviet coup attempt, the US President called for the continuation of the democratisation process exclusively in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, but left out Romania and Bulgaria (p. 306). According to the Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister, the Americans are not interested in the Balkans and have no major interest in the area (p. 320).

Another meeting of President Iliescu with US Ambassador Shifter took place on October 7, 1991. Conclusions: Secretary of State Baker was interested in Romania; the US side would like to hear President Iliescu's assessment of the September 25-26 crisis and the resignation of the Roman cabinet; US guarantee of Romania's borders; the US government wanted a free and fair election, but was going to support the Civic Alliance (p. 344).

In late October 1991, President Iliescu received Alfred Moses, president of the American Jewish Committee. Moses was concerned that mass unemployment

caused by the transition to a market economy could turn to violence and extremism, leading to anti-Semitism. As a result, the Jews wanted to help Romania overcome its difficulties. The Americans accepted President Iliescu as the right person for the current period. Without him, there would be chaos. But the US side did not want him to figure this out or see it as a free hand. Moses proposed that Premier Stolojan, who is well regarded by the Americans, visit Washington. He also complimented President Iliescu for avoiding bloodshed at the latest miners' riot (pp. 350-351).

Talks with the Americans at the Foreign Ministry before the US sent an envoy to Ukraine. Topics: maintaining a military balance, the start of negotiations on [Romanian] territories illegally occupied by Ukraine, and recognition of the Romanian minority. The diarist suggested keeping an avenue open by referring to the consequences of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, as in the draft treaty with the USSR (p. 385). NBR governor Mugur Isărescu: the US would make a symbolic participation in the G-24 loan, and that, volens *nolens*, they accepted President Iliescu, but wanted to keep him under control, and that all the security issues were put in place so we could willingly call them to come here (p. 387).

The Americans asked for Constanta South harbour as a naval base, but the Army refused, reasoning that others would make similar requests. The President was not aware of this. The diarist thinks it was, most likely, just a test for us, which we flunked. A lobby offer in the US was presented to the Romanian presidency in February 1992 (p. 416). The leaders of opposition political parties were summoned for consultations in the US (p. 430).

In April 1992, the US issued a declaration praising Moldova and strongly recommending against foreign military intervention. The diarist asks himself whether it suggests the US resolve to exit the Malta deal and take Romania into its camp!? It would be good for us, but we needed to hedge against US withdrawal after 1996 [election year] through good politics towards Germany and the UK. Also, don't offend the Russians too much by long-term deals with the Americans. (p. 445). Also in April 1992, another meeting with US diplomat Bob Hutchins. Message: if the general election were to take place quickly and on good terms, the US would not only be ready but also willing to massively turn to Romania.

In May 1992, US Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger visited Romania. A minor opposition party leader explained to him the stance against simultaneous presidential and parliamentary elections: with President Iliescu in the race, nobody would care for the parliamentary poll. The meeting between Eagleburger and President Iliescu was rated 'very good'. Outcomes: the elections were vital for the most-favoured-nation clause; USD 10 million unblocked for the G-24 loan; defence: the offer of a naval base passed to the Department of Defence. The diarist notes that our economic and security problems would be largely resolved. A US Treasury official travelling with Eagleburger said Romania was 'a diamond in the dirt' (pp. 471-72). A June 1992 meeting with the US military attaché and an American military delegation on a fact-finding mission. The diarist's

definition of Romania's security problem: to manage a difficult transition between two open military conflicts, Yugoslavia and Moldova (p. 486). Also in June 1992, US diplomats warned that attacks were being prepared in the US against Romania for not complying with the embargo against Yugoslavia (p. 493).

US Ambassador Davis Jr. rebukes the diarist for saying to British diplomats that the US backs Emil Constantinescu (p. 497). On September 2, US Ambassador Davis Jr. gave the text of the US government declaration regarding the Romanian elections - 'in places, some very tough words' (p. 517). US diplomat Bob Wylie was concerned about split voting - Iliescu for president and CDR for Parliament - and the impact of several messages from President Iliescu not to vote for CDR - association with property restitution and revenge, both deeply unpopular with the voters (pp. 522-523).

Meeting with US diplomat Dan Nelson (together with Mugur Isărescu) about the incoming Democratic administration following the 1992 US presidential election. Recommendation: an effort to 'reconquest' the US from scratch; expectations of intransigency on minority rights, Serbia, and the prevention of the reunification of Moldova with Romania (p. 532). Outgoing US Secretary of State Eagleburger made a very good statement in support of Romania [for the most-favoured-nation clause]. Desperate efforts by US Congressman Tom Lantos to block this in Congress (p. 536). Ion Talpeș: The US proposal to open a military base in Romania came after President Iliescu's decision (recommended by him) to send a major signal of our interest in cooperating with them. Our negative answer means 'we are not selling our country'.

The Collective West and Western Europe's limited interest in Romania

One of the most important insights of Pașcu's diary is that Romania's path toward the collective West was far more uncertain than later retrospective narratives suggest. The historical context is very specific and unfamiliar to contemporary readers, especially those born since the mid-1980s. This is Europe after the revolutions of 1989 (the fall of Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe), but before Maastricht and the emergence of the European Union. EU expansion into Central and Eastern Europe was unthinkable. The Soviet Union was in crisis, but its disintegration was still to follow.

In this fluid moment in international politics, Romania did not yet appear to Western Europe as a clear candidate for integration, but rather as a problematic and unstable country placed between several potential crises. The diary repeatedly suggests that the West, and especially Western Europe, did not yet know what to do with Romania. In the context of US-Soviet talks about a future security architecture of Europe (Sarotte, 2010; Shifrinson, 2016), at the September 1990 NATO seminar in Brussels, the West was clearly not willing to give up NATO, but, as far as Romania was concerned, there was only an 'awkward silence' (pp. 80-81). Even when Deutsche Welle announced that the West's self-imposed isolation

regarding Romania was about to end (p. 83), the broader picture remained one of hesitation. In Pașcu's rendering, the current Romanian leadership and the Front were 'not desirable' to the West (p. 29), and, more importantly, there was still no Western 'OK' as the internal struggle for power continued (p. 142). The book makes clear that Romania, under the leadership of President Iliescu and his allies, sought to become part of the collective West. For instance, in July 1991, former Foreign Minister Sergiu Celac, then ambassador to the UK, recommended that Romania should start preparing for Common Market accession and analyse the actors and problems it would face as a member state (p. 303).

Conditionality without commitment

The general pattern that emerges from the diary is one of conditionality without commitment. Western actors monitored Romanian developments, attached conditions to financial support, reacted strongly to domestic unrest, and expected political moderation, but they were not prepared to invest decisively in Romania. The conditionalities attached to much-needed OECD and G-24 loans are highly revealing: no violent events until 31 January 1991, no difficulties for Gorbachev in Moldova, and no further deterioration in relations with Hungary (pp. 160-161). In the same spirit, central bank governor Isărescu reported a British requirement for relaxing conditionalities that would have involved giving some responsibilities to the former King and to [Opposition politician and loser of the 1990 presidential election] Ion Rațiu (p. 209). Jacques Attali's recommendations to President Iliescu after the June 1990 events - amnesty and an official report - also belong to this wider framework of Western political conditionalities (p. 139). The overall effect was to place Romania under scrutiny, even political pressure, but without offering it a stable horizon of inclusion.

The diary also suggests that the West was waiting to see who would prevail in the domestic power struggle before making firmer choices. Pașcu repeatedly returns to the feeling that Western governments and diplomats were less interested in Romania as such than in the outcome of its internal power struggle. His notes speak of strong signals from the West in favour of the opposition (p. 224), of the Dutch ambassador as a particularly active figure in opposition politics (p. 133), and of Western diplomats who, after the September 1991 crisis, appeared far too ready to believe Roman's narrative of a conservative plot against reform (pp. 342-343) – 'The credulity of foreigners is monumental!'. From the diarist's perspective, this was not simply a misunderstanding, but a form of strategic hesitation: the West preferred to reserve judgment rather than commit itself to Romania as it was.

Security relevance without real inclusion

Romania was not invisible to the collective West from a security viewpoint. Romania's relevance increased as Yugoslavia began to break apart and the Soviet

Union entered its terminal crisis. NATO contacts multiplied, and Romania's location between two crisis zones was explicitly recognised. Yet this security relevance did not amount to inclusion in security arrangements. The message was that Romania mattered strategically, but remained outside the circle of real guarantees. This is visible in the meeting with a NATO parliamentary delegation, which advised Romania to count on NATO rather than the Western European Union (p. 386), and again in Manfred Wörner's message from a February 1992 meeting with President Iliescu, that, so long as Romania remained on its current course, it would benefit from NATO support (p. 425). Even in January 1992, when a German CDU deputy suggested that Romania was 'in the cards' and that NATO would not leave an eventual attack unanswered, this still fell short of any clear institutional or political anchoring (p. 409).

The limits of Western commitment are especially clear from the November 1991 talks between the Chairman of the NATO Military Committee and President Iliescu (p. 358). 'The West has no intention to sacrifice its standard of living for us, Easterners'. That sentence captures the diary's broader atmosphere. Romania's geopolitical position was acknowledged; its instability was monitored; its conduct was judged, but the costs of deeper engagement were to be borne, above all, by Romanians themselves. The same gap between security relevance and political inclusion appears in a national security council meeting in June 1991 (pp. 484-485). When Prime Minister Stolojan objected to the 'permanentisation' of NATO, he only understood the seriousness of the issue when told that the IMF would cut financing for Romania. In other words, even the security discussion was mediated by economic dependence and external constraint.

France, Germany, Britain, and the secondary Western actors

Compared with the US, the major Western European actors appear uneven, less important, and rarely decisive in Romania's favour.

France offered prestige, but symbolism more than substance. François Mitterrand's April 1991 visit to Romania was the most important visit by a Western head of state or government since the Revolution. Yet the talks between the two presidents struck the diarist as rather 'banal', despite the public success of the visit and the French satisfaction with it (pp. 247-250) and President Mitterrand's image as a world statesman. After being presented with the pros and cons, President Iliescu decided on Romania's accession to the Francophonie. Likewise, it had symbolic importance. The President saw it as a way of underlining Romania's traditional relationship with France (p. 360), but it was not a substitute for hard security or economic anchoring. The French also appear in the diary as pursuing their own agenda inside Europe. At one point, 'the French want the Americans out of Europe' (p. 296), while the French Socialists were looking for a point of support in Romania and found it in Petre Roman and the FSN (p. 363). Even the French

ambassador's later understanding of Romania's difficulties over Trans-Dniester and the Yugoslav embargo (p. 495) did not fundamentally alter the larger picture.

Germany, by contrast, appears as indispensable but reserved towards Romania. Its importance was obvious, yet the diary repeatedly notes distrust from German politicians toward Iliescu and the Romanian government. The signals in the West for the opposition were said to be extremely good (p. 224), Romania's rating in Germany was described as virtually zero (p. 264), and a German politician frankly admitted that Germany did not trust either President Iliescu or the new government, while also refusing any meaningful engagement on Romania's side in the dispute with Hungary (p. 350). Later contacts were more nuanced: Peter Hartmann, Kohl's foreign policy adviser, is described in very positive terms (p. 409), a German cultural attaché even reports a NATO consensus that Iliescu should remain in charge because he ensured stability and unity (p. 417), and Genscher's April 1992 visit confirms Germany's centrality (p. 450). During talks with President Iliescu, Genscher, 'an old fox', made an interesting remark foreshadowing the elites' project towards a federal Europe: we should be open to a Europe of regions, not states. President Iliescu was 'annoyed' by the remark. The overall impression of Germany remains one of caution, distance, and reluctance to commit fully.

Britain appears episodically, but somewhat increasingly favourably. John Major's message after the failed Soviet coup stated that Romania was high on the British agenda and that its requests would be considered with great care (p. 312). In August 1992, Foreign Intelligence Service director Talpeș would go so far as to claim that Romania was the only Eastern European country enjoying the full trust of Great Britain (p. 514).

Greece also appears as a potentially friendly actor. Prime Minister Mitsotakis wanted to develop relations with Romania despite American, EEC, emigration-related, and domestic political constraints (p. 201), and later invited Iliescu for secret talks (p. 380).

Canada offered only encouraging rhetoric, with Prime Minister Mulroney telling President Iliescu that Romania had a unique opportunity to become a bastion of democracy in the region, while still being reminded of the need for financial and commercial aid, including the G-24 loan (p. 374).

Japan, though not part of Western Europe, belongs to the wider collective West. Japan was particularly politically supportive after the August 1991 Soviet coup attempt (p. 307), interested in future investment (p. 97), and at times even more eager than some Western states to provide financial support (pp. 160-161). However, it stopped short of actual financial support or investment at the behest of the US.

Western readings of Romania's internal power struggle

A final important point is that the diary presents the West not just as the main reference player in international politics and Romania's foreign policy, but as an

actor entangled in Romania's internal political struggle. Pașcu repeatedly notes that Western diplomats were perceived as encouraging the opposition, amplifying anti-government readings of events, or at least failing to dispel the impression that the West preferred a different political outcome. The Dutch ambassador is the clearest example in this respect (p. 133). Belgian observers and diplomats are also shown reading Romanian politics through a legitimacy framework in which opposition gains were taken as a healthy sign for democracy and investors (pp. 418, 448). By the end of the period, Pașcu even warned Western diplomats that, by doing nothing to dispel the impression that the West endorsed the opposition parties in the runup to the 1992 election, they would bear some responsibility for the consequences if figures such as Ticu Dumitrescu came to power (p. 523). Opposition parties accused the government of fraud after losing the 1992 election, asking for a cancellation and a repeat. The result was not to their liking, 'especially for outside forces that poured huge sums of money into the Opposition and are clinging to anything to try to turn the result. How much vile in this world and how many traitors we have…' (p. 535).

Taken together, these notes strongly support the conclusion that Western Europe had, at best, a limited and cautious interest in Romania during 1990-1992. Romania was too important to ignore completely, but not important enough to command a major Western European commitment. It was watched, judged, and conditionally assisted, but not yet politically embraced. This is one of the book's most valuable contributions, because it helps explain why the Romanian leadership of the time experienced the country's position not as one of imminent integration into the West, but as one of marginality, uncertainty, and prolonged waiting in a dangerous grey zone, with civil wars pulling apart borders to its West (Yugoslavia) and East (Moldova).

The Soviet Union

The frequency and content of the diary's notes on the relationship with the Soviet Union strongly undermine the narrative that President Iliescu and his allies pursued a policy of alignment with the Soviets. The book starts with Romania in the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact and Comecon. However, the 'East has its own problems' (p. 29). During the first visit to Moscow by President Iliescu and subsequent meetings, the Soviets were focused inward, on their problems. The tone was friendly (especially toward Gorbachev), but there was none of the old, pre-1985 relationship between the leader of the Socialist camp and its junior allies/satellites. For instance, it was the Soviets who asked for the dismantling of the Lenin statue in Bucharest.

The emphasis was that the USSR would not 'hit' its friends economically (raw materials such as oil would no longer be traded under Comecon terms and prices, favourable to Romania, but at world-market prices). At that time, Romania was included in the list of friendly countries. In mid-1990, there was

still an expectation to increase trade (p. 41). In October 1990, the Soviets refused when the US Ambassador to Moscow asked for pressure on Romania over human rights issues (p. 99). Both the US and China recommended good relations with the USSR. Romania was looking to support Gorbachev, as this would improve its relationship with the US.

During a meeting with Soviet embassy staff, the diarist was told that the US ambassador to Moscow asked for Soviet military intervention in Romania during the 1989 Revolution, but the Soviets refused. The Revolution was a surprise to the Soviets and the Americans alike, according to the diplomats (p. 262).

Economic and political relations further eroded as the Soviet Union's crisis intensified. In February 1991, Soviet natural gas deliveries halved (p. 191). PM Roman twice tried to go to Moscow, but without success. Roman decided to break the emergency dependency on the Soviet Union and, ostensibly, shift the bulk of trade to the West (p. 195).

On negotiations for the Romania-USSR treaty, which was never ratified, during a foreign ministry-level meeting with the Soviet delegation, the Romanian delegation asked that, if the article regarding the interdiction on joining another alliance without consulting the USSR were dropped from the treaty with Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland, then Parliament would not vote in favour of the Romania-USSR treaty (p. 303).

A contentious point in the relationship with the Soviet Union was Moldova. The Soviet Chief of General Staff asked, 'What are we up to regarding Bessarabia?' (p. 198). A Soviet note of protest signed by Gorbachev was issued following a statement made by Foreign Minister Năstase in Japan, according to which the Romanian-Moldovan relationship would feature three stages: cultural community, economic, and unification (p. 305).

President Iliescu criticised the Cabinet's draft declaration on the coup against Gorbachev. The President argued that Russians were Romania's neighbours (i.e. the closest major power), not the Americans (p. 306). After the coup attempt, Soviet embassy diplomats warned that 'we will not remain as weak as we are now' (p. 314). Following the coup attempt against Gorbachev, Turkish President Turgut Özal was pessimistic about the Soviet state's future (p. 320).

On the dissolution of the Soviet Union in late December 1991, the diarist notes that the West lauds Gorbachev, while the Chinese – the last bastion of Socialism – curse him. In the final meeting with Soviet diplomats, who were about to become Russian diplomats, they stressed that Germany should not forget that it was the Soviet Union, and then Russia, that had allowed its reunification. The diarist concludes that great powers do not have a long memory when they owe something (p. 399).

A final revealing remark about the former Soviet Union comes from the meeting with Eduard Shevardnadze, the former Soviet Foreign Minister and then President of independent Georgia. Shevardnadze came across as extremely refined, soberly

dressed but elegant, and measured in speech. He warned that generations would have to pass before Russians would get used to treating former [Soviet] republics as independent states, as they should (p. 490).

Yugoslavia: we are next

The breakup of neighbouring and friendly Yugoslavia and the civil wars that followed were of major concern for Romanian foreign policy, given the perceived risk that Romania would be next in line to lose territory.

Yugoslavia was President Iliescu's first foreign visit after the 1990 election. In March 1991, the Romanian ambassador to the UN warned that 'after Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, we are next!' (p. 217). As the internal crisis reached its climax, Austria and Hungary supported the separatists, the diarist notes. 'Humanity does not want to learn to live peacefully. We will never escape war!' (p. 290).

Yugoslavia mattered less as a bilateral relationship than as a warning scenario for Romania. As the diarist noted, 'In the depths of the soul, I am afraid we are next with Transylvania.' (p. 295). One conclusion at a Supreme National Defence Council meeting was that Hungary was waiting for the right moment to get its prey – Vojvodina [a region in Northern Serbia]. Romania requested information from Serbian intelligence about Hungarian involvement in the breakup of Yugoslavia (p. 300). Turkish President Turgut Özal was pessimistic about Yugoslavia's future because of its Muslim population (p. 320). The Europeans understood that the Americans were pushing them and seeking a way out of the Yugoslav crisis, even by resorting to force (p. 360). The Romanian declaration recognising the new Yugoslavia [Serbia and Montenegro] was drafted by the diarist (p. 453).

In May 1992, a Yugoslav diplomat briefed about a Russian warning that Kosovo would be next (to be split from Yugoslavia). He also asked for a back channel with the US through Romania (p. 461). An army general warned about new troubles in the Hungarian minority and in Bucharest: after Yugoslavia, we are next (p. 461). The same general repeated the warnings that we would likely be next after Vojvodina broke away from Yugoslavia. In his view, the civil-war scenario did not work in Romania. The army was ready to crush any provocation within 24 hours, at any cost (p. 469). Yugoslav diplomats confirmed their ties with *România Mare* magazine. They claimed the English started a crusade against them to maintain EEC unity against Germany. They also claimed that Muslim involvement was growing, intending to turn Bosnia-Herzegovina into an Islamic state (p. 525).

Turkey

Against the background of limited Western interest in Romania, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and an ongoing economic crisis that no longer allowed Bucharest to cultivate relations with the Global South, Romanian foreign policy found a partner in Türkiye (Turkey). There was hope that Turkey might act as a

guarantor of Romania's borders against Hungarian revisionist pressure (p. 323). The diarist notes 'very good relations with Turkey, expected to improve further. The feeling of Western arrogance and injustice strongly binds us, besides interests' (p. 369).

President Turgut Özal was personally interested in good relations with Romania (p. 234). The Turkish president visited Romania in September 1991. Turkey pursued closer relations with Romania through trade, permanent political consultations, frequent telephone contact, and readiness for quick visits and meetings (p. 320). Özal told President Iliescu in a private conversation that Westerners are incapable of understanding our problems (p. 321).

During the June 1992 Black Sea Conference, President Iliescu reminded the Turkish hosts that the meeting of the four heads of state on the Trans-Dniester issue took place in Istanbul thanks to them, and that Romania was now confronting the consequences. The Ottomans ceded Bessarabia to Russia under the 1812 peace agreement signed at Bucharest. 'The Turks replied that their diplomats at that time were… Greeks!?' (p. 491).

Moldova

Once more at odds with later nationalist mythmaking, the book shows that there was no real window of opportunity for the (re)unification of Moldova and Romania. Western powers strongly advised against such a move, while the Moldovan political leadership preferred an independent state rather than unification with Romania. Even before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Moldova was seeking territorial bargaining with Ukraine — Trans-Dniester in exchange for Southern Bessarabia and access to the Danube — while Romania offered support, but no hard commitments (pp. 135-136).

Early high-level meetings pointed toward the Moldovan leadership's preference for an independent state. In January 1991, the Moldovan prime minister stated that the older generation was anti-Romanian, while the younger generation was more favourable to Romania, though inclined toward the opposition. Moldova would not sign the new Soviet Union Treaty and would require Romanian economic support, but discreetly. In Bucharest, some political figures, such as Senate President Alexandru Bârlădeanu, still interpreted the moment through the analogy of 1917-1918, that is, as a context potentially favourable to unification (p. 179). Pașcu's own conclusion was more sober: the current generation of Moldovan leaders wanted independence from Moscow, not union with Romania, while demographic changes linked to Russian settlement would take at least two generations to work through (p. 304).

This became even clearer after the outbreak of the Trans-Dniester conflict. Moldova sought Romanian military, economic, and diplomatic support, but the Romanian leadership was unwilling to cross certain thresholds. In March 1992, President Snegur, alarmed by the role of the former Soviet 14th Army, asked

whether Romania could provide military assistance, including tanks, to defend the capital. President Iliescu refused direct military aid on three grounds: Romania's own military weakness, the risk of a negative international reaction, and the danger of legitimising a Hungarian scenario in Transylvania through internationalisation and autonomy claims. Instead, he argued for conflict management through the CSCE. When Foreign Minister Năstase asked, rather naively, about unification, Snegur replied that it might be possible, but that the time was not right (pp. 434-435).

Romania nevertheless remained heavily involved. In May 1992, Moldovan officials requested economic aid and munitions, which Iliescu approved, while later admitting publicly that Romania had sent military advisers to assist Moldova (pp. 465-466, 471). Yet even within the Romanian leadership, there were clear limits. At a national security council meeting, the Army top brass complained about Moldova's increasingly insistent requests for arms, and a decision was taken to continue deliveries only in a controlled form and only with defensive weaponry. Prime Minister Stolojan even suggested that, if Romania were to bear such costs, the 'price' should be unification, though this remained only a reserve option. Năstase, by contrast, believed that the Moldovans were inflating the danger to drag Romania into the conflict (p. 484). The overall picture is one of intense Romanian involvement, but also of caution, hesitation, and internal disagreement.

At the subsequent conference on Trans-Dniester, Yeltsin and Kravchuk appeared closely coordinated on the issue of autonomy. The Russian side tabled a new document, disregarding the one previously agreed upon, while Yeltsin warned that, if the meeting produced no concrete result, he would be unable to keep the 14th Army in check. Its officers' council had reportedly already decided to fight, which introduced a further note of alarm and uncertainty into the talks (pp. 489-490). It remains unclear whether the 14th Army was acting as a semi-autonomous force in its own right or as part of a broader Russian negotiating tactic. The Ukrainian side, for its part, accepted only reluctantly the Romanian insistence on replacing the term 'minority rights' with 'human rights' in the final communiqué (pp. 489-490).

In light of the later Russian-Ukrainian war, the position of Ukrainian leaders revealed by this book is particularly important for future research. Read today, these passages are striking because they already reveal a regional logic of territorial insecurity, competing sovereignties, and strategic bargaining in which both Russia and Ukraine appear as decisive actors. In this respect, the Moldova section is important not only for understanding Romanian-Moldovan relations in the early 1990s, but also for the broader post-Soviet regional order that was taking shape before the current war.

China

In the book's introduction, Pașcu remarks that today's reader would be surprised by the close relationship with China in the early 1990s. In effect, Romania and

China had a very close relationship during the Cold War, especially from the early 1960s when Romania pursued its own policy of distancing from the Soviet Union in the context of the Soviet-Chinese split (Budura, 2008; Abraham, 2016). Among the great powers, China was by far the friendliest towards Romania in the early 1990s. However, because it was not yet the 21st-century economic superpower, it could not provide solutions to Romania's economic and foreign policy problems.

The first visit to China as a presidential adviser took place in 1990 (pp. 102-108). The diarist notes a distinctive feature of the talks with the Chinese: their introductory analysis, only apparently simplistic, was in fact profound and detailed. The Chinese saw the US as set to become the world policeman, the Soviet Union about to hand over second-most-powerful-great-power status to Germany and Japan, and to become a friend of the US. The Chinese message was: let's analyse and act together! Close to the end of talks, the key questions were: what would the socialist orientation of the National Salvation Front (FSN, the dominant party following the 1990 election) be, and was the re-creation of the Communist Party underway? Pașcu answered that a market-socialist outlook was the only possible option for Romania at that moment. In other words, Western Social Democracy. Once more, the book dispels the political myth that President Iliescu and his allies were seeking some Soviet Perestroika in Romania, i.e., a reformed Soviet system. However, I would argue that Iliescu's choice for Social Democracy was made at a time when it was already in decline and no longer a viable model due to the neoliberal (Reagan-Thatcher) revolution. Looking back, the Romanian leadership at the time was unaware of the neoliberal revolution and believed it had greater leeway in choosing its economic system. In its reply, the Chinese delegation distinguished the friendship between the two countries and Romania's internal political choices. The US tended to see the world selfishly, based only on its interests. It would be necessary to democratise international relations and move beyond great-power politics.

Another trip to Beijing followed in January 1991. The Chinese President and the Premier received President Iliescu. Iliescu told his hosts: 'We count on [your] support, now when everyone is strangling us for political reasons'. The Chinese Premier, Li Peng, replied that it was good that Romania had good relations with the Soviet Union, even if they were not without acrimony. China was firm in its pursuit of Socialism with Chinese characteristics and of a reform that blended planning with market mechanisms, thereby prioritising domestic policy objectives. Romania and China share long-term interests that go beyond governments or leaders. China offered a USD 30 million financial loan. 'Quite low' compared to Romania's financing needs, notes the diarist (pp. 175-177). As noted above, China was not the 21st-century economic superpower. Consequently, it did not have the financial resources to provide more loans to Romania. In late January 1991, China decided to grant a USD 300 million loan at an interest rate 0.8 pp above LIBOR, i.e., very favourable terms (p. 190). Li Peng was a roommate of President Iliescu at Moscow State University in the early 1950s. It is noteworthy

that the Romanian leadership placed greater emphasis on the meeting with Li Peng than on the meeting with the President of China and Chinese Communist Party Secretary General Jiang Zemin, who had studied in Romania and spoke Romanian.

September 1991 miners' riot (see above) stoked fears of international isolation and territorial breakup of Romania. The diarist made a personal appeal to the Chinese ambassador during their farewell meeting, urging China not to abandon Romania, especially at the UN. The ambassador's personal reply: Romania must be firm, not give up; his country would not allow interference in internal affairs.

Hungary

A recurring subtopic in the book is Romania's difficult relationship with Hungary. Within the Romanian foreign-policy and security establishment, Hungarian irredentism is not merely a rhetorical exaggeration but a concrete and persistent threat to the territorial integrity of the Romanian state. President Iliescu even proposed establishing a task force within the presidency devoted to this issue (p. 272).

The perceived Hungarian threat was closely linked to the wider regional crisis triggered by the breakup of Yugoslavia. At a meeting of the Association for International Law and Foreign Relations [ADIRI, the main foreign-policy think tank], one of the main threat scenarios discussed was that of an unchecked incident in Transylvania, followed by a request for NATO intervention, the creation of a Hungarian autonomous zone, and the eventual international recognition of that outcome. Significantly, even the leader of the opposition National Liberal Party reportedly regarded this scenario as plausible and dangerous. In his view, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany might support such a development, while France would remain the only possible counterweight (p. 273).

The diary suggests that, in the eyes of the Romanian leadership, the Yugoslav crisis and the Hungarian irredentism issue were deeply interconnected. The proclamation in Budapest of a so-called provisional government of Transylvania, reportedly confirmed by Army intelligence, appeared to fit into a wider pattern: the September 1991 miners' crisis as another attempt to destabilise Romania internally, followed by international condemnation and possibly by the recognition of a separatist political structure (p. 235). In this sense, Hungary did not appear in the diary merely as a difficult neighbour, but as the principal external actor around which Romanian fears of territorial revision and international isolation crystallised.

At the same time, the relationship was not reduced to pure hostility. Despite the frosty bilateral climate, high-level contacts still took place. President Iliescu, 'in great form', received Gyula Horn, described by the diarist as 'an old fox' (p. 385). But the broader strategic response imagined by Pașcu was not bilateral accommodation alone. He recommended that President Iliescu deepen contacts first with the Slovaks and then with the Serbs, in effect seeking to recreate a regional balancing arrangement reminiscent of the interwar Small Entente associated

with Titulescu (p. 518). The implication is clear: for Romania's foreign-policy establishment in the early 1990s, Hungary was not simply a diplomatic irritant, but the central territorial challenge against which the country had to think in alliance terms. This was the logic of foreign policy in a dangerous grey area between the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the still uncertain post-Cold War order: Romania's leaders were not yet thinking in terms of NATO, or of alignment with the United States or the Soviet Union / Russia, as a counterweight to the Hungarian threat.

Other developing countries

Beyond the major powers and the immediate regional crises, the diary also records Romania's efforts to preserve links with other developing countries. Iran was one such case: the Iranian vice-president offered oil for refining and sale in Europe, a commercial credit of USD 100 million, the purchase of Iraq's debt to Romania, military production cooperation, civil engineering contracts, and natural gas deliveries through the Soviet Union and Turkey (pp. 204-205). The significance of this episode lies less in the individual proposals than in the fact that Romania was still trying to mobilise relationships outside the Western orbit at a moment of acute economic vulnerability.

The relationship with Bulgaria was of a different kind: not strategic realignment, but the management of a sensitive bilateral issue. In a meeting with Bulgarian President Jelev, Foreign Minister Năstase proposed an exchange of public assurances whereby Romania would reiterate that it had no territorial claims to Southern Dobrudja. At the same time, Bulgaria would reassure the Romanian side about the safety of the Kozlodui nuclear plant (p. 491). Even at this late stage, the diary suggests, neighbourhood diplomacy remained shaped by a mixture of territorial sensitivities and practical security concerns.

Political personalities

Ion Iliescu: leadership style, political personality

The main character of the book is former President Ion Iliescu (1930-2025). With an age difference of about 20 years, he is 'Mr Iliescu'. The book highlights some of the late president's known traits but also presents new information. Let us begin in this order. Iliescu was a charismatic politician. He liked meeting ordinary people and enjoyed campaigning (p. 449). He was also renowned for his high stamina. During a visit to the US, he was in better form (shape) than all the members of the Romanian delegation, all younger than him (p. 88).

President Iliescu was an international statesman, recognised as such by leading politicians of his era, even though they had different ideological orientations, such as Margaret Thatcher (p. 303). During high-level meetings, he spoke in foreign languages, without a translator. This greatly increased the effectiveness of head-to-head meetings, especially important for minor countries. For instance, François Mitterrand was pleasantly surprised to hear him speak in French during their meeting on the occasion of Romania's accession to the Francophonie in November 1991 (p. 373). During [Yugoslav leader] Slobodan Milosevic's visit to Romania, President Iliescu was 'encyclopaedic and enveloping', hiding a deep-down toughness otherwise unsuspected in domestic politics (p. 423). He had a frank, truthful manner in meetings with foreign dignitaries. Although counterintuitive, this is how high-level international politics is actually carried out (Mearsheimer, 2011). However, the Romanian UN ambassador advised changing this manner (p. 219).

Like many politicians who climb to the top of the greasy pole, Iliescu carefully prepared his steps. Before the Revolution, he asked Virgil Măgureanu to select well-prepared young people. Instead of non-scientific conspiracy thinking about how he could have done this before the Revolution, during Ceaușescu's dictatorship, this is how top-level politicians actually operate: planning for the long term, seeking the best minds of the day as political aides. The selection of authors for the book on political power edited by Măgureanu before the Revolution was not a random event. Also, from Măgureanu, he found out about the Group (p. 536).

His personal brand of 'poor, but honest' was the real deal. For instance, his wife would have wanted to join him on an Istanbul visit, but their household could not afford her clothing because all the money was spent on his clothing (p. 481). Economic setbacks and the decline in the people's standard of living upset him personally. As a left-wing politician, he deeply empathised and cared about the common people. For instance, he was deeply upset and regretted the destruction of agriculture caused by demagoguery (p. 359).

Let us not turn to the less well-known traits, some of which were flaws. Iliescu was not good at choosing whom to trust, his political allies. In other words, his people-reading skills were poor, a common trait among politicians with an intellectual background. At one point, he confessed that he no longer knew whom to trust (p. 508). The President's 'trusted' advisers were old Communist activists who excelled in deception and routine (p. 417). He showed a high level of tolerance for their gaffes (p. 501).

Arguably, the most important, lesser-known trait of the former president was his failure to inspire political loyalty in his allies and aides. One recurring issue in the book is that he failed to consider his subordinates' personal and career problems. Personally, he was not interested in making money. Still, there was a fine line between this and a kind of indifference toward the material situation of his allies and subordinates, to the point that they felt he did not think about or

care about them. When discussing the wages of presidential advisors, he blamed them for infighting and for making money (p. 153). During a period of triple-digit hyperinflation, he offered a token, even insulting, bonus of ROL 1,000 to his advisers (pp. 159-160). This made them think he did not care about them and that they were on their own, career-wise. Another reason he failed to inspire loyalty among his allies was his failure to keep them in the loop on their briefs. There are numerous entries in which the diarist complained that the President decided to make the schedule on his own. Deliberately, he removed the foreign policy adviser from real decision-making, which he handled with Foreign Minister Năstase (p. 241). Another instance was that Iliescu did not inform his advisors about the attempt to improve relations with the US via the Israeli leadership (p. 277). President Iliescu asked for the documents directly, bypassing his advisers (p. 352). Sometimes he just ignored his advisors, even if they were present (p. 413). Closely linked to this was the practice of having parallel chains of command. During the 1992 election campaign, two teams worked independently with the candidate: one headed by Iosif Boda, the other by Group members. The result was that, as time went on, his aides increasingly felt unimportant or undervalued, both professionally and in maintaining the President's trust. On the plus side, President Iliescu was also open to criticism, including regarding the communication with his staff. He wanted his staff to be rigorous and to have an easy-going environment at work (pp. 250-251).

Another important weak spot was that Iliescu lacked the ruthlessness found at the highest levels of politics. For instance, the diarist noted that 'Petre Roman is an underworld guy and should be taken out of the game with methods according to this world. Unfortunately, such methods are repugnant to Mr Iliescu' (p. 433). In other words, he was not a political killer. His leadership style was prone to compromise or to waiting for things to sort themselves out, rather than taking decisive action, even if it meant a political fight or firing someone. During the 1992 election campaign, the President used two separate campaign teams, one led by Iosif Boda, the other comprising Group members, who rejected working with Boda (p. 508). While such an arrangement worked for the 1992 campaign, it clearly was unusual and raised questions about leadership skills.

Despite his high level of stamina and public smile, Iliescu was not infallible. There were moments when he seemed to age and be quite unsure of himself (p. 449). As noted above, he was 'groggy' during the early stages of the June 13 insurrection. As early as the 1992 campaign, Viorel Hrebenciuc, the future political wheeler-dealer and at the time prefect of Bacău County, said Iliescu had lost his touch with voters during an electoral event perceived as less successful (p. 500). The first recorded use of the 'Grandma' nickname for President Iliescu is on September 26, 1992 (p. 531). Overall, President Iliescu comes across as more human than his public image suggests. The root causes of the setbacks in his later career, including the 1996 presidential election loss, the painful party leadership

defeat at the 2005 party congress, and the gradual sidelining by later generations of party leaders, become much clearer in this book.

Adrian Năstase: the foreign policy rival

The future Premier and Social Democrat Party leader from 2000-2004 served as Foreign Minister for almost the entire period covered in the book. A Group member and a year younger than the diarist, he is mostly called by his first name. Since the diarist was the presidential advisor for foreign relations, there was a tension, even rivalry, between the two. Năstase was the clear winner. Therefore, the great majority of the diary entries about him are critical. The book puts Năstase's tenure as Foreign Minister in a new, less favourable perspective. To date, many researchers and analysts, including the author of this essay, have viewed Năstase as one of the best, if not the best, Foreign Ministers since the Revolution of 1989 (Stănescu, 2014).

Năstase became Foreign Minister in the aftermath of the June 13-15 crisis. The Foreign Ministry sabotaged the October 1990 US visit of President Iliescu. Năstase admitted his errors (p. 89). He made a poor impression in China because he arrived with his wife, who, under the guise of a migraine, went shopping, a fact known by the Chinese (p. 103). It seemed Năstase listened to his wife, as did Petre Roman (p. 505). Năstase was rude towards Foreign Office employees (p. 417), but showed servile subordination to Premier Roman at a Euro-Atlantic Centre meeting (p. 445).

The diarist feared 'Năstase would betray [President Iliescu] for [Premier] Petre Roman… [he] fascinates Iliescu, who therefore was absorbed by him' (p. 192). President Iliescu had no intention of giving his foreign affairs adviser more input into foreign policy, which was led by Foreign Minister Năstase. Later on, Năstase felt who would gain the upper hand in the Iliescu-Roman power struggle. Therefore, he sought to cultivate President Iliescu's support, including by improving relations with IM Pașcu (p. 362). The diary entry for September 7, 1992, is telling: 'President Iliescu was totally under [Adi] Năstase's influence' (p. 522).

There were repeated discussions in the Group and with foreign diplomats about replacing Adrian Năstase as Foreign Minister (p. 228). Although a Group member, Năstase sent word that he was aware that the President had informed him of the Group's intention to replace him as Foreign Minister (p. 243). He was disloyal to the Group. Another group member and key Roman ally, Adrian Severin, complained about Năstase's superficiality and politicking (p. 457).

As Foreign Minister, he occasionally made blunders. The Soviets sent a note of protest, signed by Gorbachev himself, following a statement by Năstase in Japan, in which the Romanian-Moldovan relationship was described as featuring three stages: cultural community, economic, and unification (p. 305). As Foreign Minister, he revised a previously agreed diplomatic note issued by the President's office, replacing it with the Foreign Ministry's version (p. 291).

Over time, the rivalry got no better. Năstase was 'false' towards the diarist: yesterday wanted better relations, today 'forgets' to invite to the discussion on Romania's foreign policy strategy (p. 457). President Iliescu asked the diarist to persuade Năstase to join the new party, arguing that otherwise it would not take off. The diarist maintained his reservation, and no result was achieved (p. 463). The diarist is also critical of Năstase as an international relations scholar. For instance, US academic John Mroz was dissatisfied with Năstase for his inaction on an academic board (p. 479).

The book closes with the 1992 election campaign. In August 1992, Hrebenciuc said he had definitely persuaded Năstase to run for Parliament and campaign for FDSN, the new political party established by the President's political allies (p. 515). The diarist speculated that Năstase sought to improve his standing on the FDSN parliamentary candidates' list by leveraging his affiliation with the Group (p. 527). The book ends with Năstase 'hit hard' by President Iliescu's assessment of the parliamentary election result and its implication that he would lose his position as Foreign Minister (which ultimately happened).

Mugur Isărescu: the grey eminence at the central bank

Mugur Isărescu was another Group member, born in the same year as the diarist. During the book's timeframe, he was the governor of the National Bank of Romania (NBR). Isărescu would go on to be the longest-serving central bank governor. He was also Prime Minister from December 1999 to December 2000.

Most of the entries about Isărescu concern the state of the economy and international economic relations, in particular with the West and US-controlled organisations such as the IMF. The NBR governor faced 'ridiculous attacks' for spending the foreign currency reserves left over from the former regime. In fact, it was cabinet ministers who made the decisions. Instead, Isarescu was the one who highlighted the upcoming balance-of-payments and foreign currency crisis in the summer of 1990 (p. 390). With Romania experiencing a prolonged foreign reserves crisis (Văcărel, 2001), the governor received a mission from President Iliescu to accompany Paşcu to China in early 1991 with a personal message to Premier Li Peng seeking support, especially financial (p. 148).

Regarding the relationship with the IMF, the governor provided the President with top-notch briefings. After a meeting with President Iliescu, the IMF delegation confided that Iliescu was the best-briefed president they had ever met. Kudos to Isărescu and the diarist. In March 1992, Isărescu once more briefed the President about the grave IMF situation. The IMF would grant a loan of only about USD 300 million at very high interest rates, effectively bringing the country to its knees (p. 439).

Another issue involving the governor was 'Ceaușescu's accounts', i.e., money suspected of having been taken out of the country by the former dictator. Under

the governor's guidance, Romania hired a private detective agency to find the money (p. 359) [but nothing was ever found].

The governor comes across a professional deeply concerned with policy, not politics. Isărescu was appalled by the Roman cabinet's blunders. The country needed 'real leaders' (p. 128). The governor repeatedly criticised the cabinet's amateurish approach to reforms, but believed the situation was not completely compromised and that 'we might still gain control over events' (p. 182). Isărescu rejected the premiership during the September 1991 miners' riot, as it would have entailed breaking the IMF agreement (p. 334).

By the end of the book, pressure was mounting on Mugur Isărescu's position as NBR governor amid debates, both international and domestic, over the economic transition policies pursued by the IMF and the World Bank. The Group intended to protect him (pp. 511-512).

A political career and life in the 1990s

The final topic of the book covers IM Pașcu's professional and personal life. In parallel to his political career, the diarist continued his academic career as a professor of international politics. For the Western reader, this would seem odd and impractical. However, this was common practice in the era. There were two reasons for this. First, the continuation of the academic career, as one's foray into politics could have a swift and unexpected end; secondly, a much-needed supplement to the presidential advisor's salary, which was not that much. Therefore, multiple entries recount feelings of tiredness, exhaustion, and loneliness.

One striking observation is that throughout the diaries, politicians and politics trump both personal gains and spooks (the deep state). Politicians were preoccupied (almost) exclusively with politics, not with making money or personal gains. There is a single entry about politicians seeking personal gain, but in the form of protocol and travel expenses, and housing. At the beginning of the 1990s, things were in a 'romantic' or incipient stage. People had not discovered that public office could lead to huge personal wealth. An entry from November 1990: 'Personally, I maintain the view that both we [the political class or ruling circles] - through the immense mistakes we make so casually - and the citizens, so easily manipulated and divided, fully deserve the fate that awaits us. (…) My God, we are heading downhill by our own doing. Unfortunately, however, it is also at the expense of this country…' (p. 120).

In the balance of power between elected officials and the security services, the former clearly were in full control. The pervasive ascendancy of the latter, decades later labelled as 'the deep state' (Demiroz, 2025), would have been unthinkable back then. The only role of the security services was limited to briefing, even if some of it was in the bizarre registry (see sections above). Diplomats also played a far more active and important role than intelligence officers. Meetings and contacts with foreign diplomats that would arguably be scandalous or at least under

the surveillance of security services in the 2010s and 2020s went about as usual business. One notable security incident did occur during a visit to Germany, when the diarist was asked to share a room with a Hungarian. Following his refusal, the German embassy attaché left him with no support in the middle of Germany (p. 506).

The diarist had two goals during this period. On the academic front, attaining the title of professor and re-election as dean (p. 463). In politics, the position of Foreign Minister: 'Things are clear for me: foreign minister or nothing!' (p. 503). For the latter, the diarist repeatedly reports having declared support from foreign diplomats stationed in Romania (pp. 259, 456). Repeated encouragements and praise from foreign diplomats kept him going, culminating in his becoming the presidential advisor with the longest tenure (pp. 266-267, 399, 525). All of this despite calls to dissociate from President Iliescu and even join the Opposition parties, both from foreign diplomats and Romanian politicians (pp. 418, 448, 518).

In the end, fatigue, losing the rivalry with Năstase, the President's preference for 'people like Boda' (p. 496) and being kept out of the loop, including about intelligence (p. 476), led to the decision to leave politics, even if temporarily. Being out of the loop was the most painful. Here is an entry from January 24, 1992, 'a day of frustration', as the foreign relations adviser was left out of the trip to Bulgaria: 'President Iliescu treats me as a negligible amount. Wipes out everything I did. I do not think he deserves my professionalism and loyalty… everything makes me sick. I will try to postpone the break until I find a safe and reasonable job.' (p. 410).

The off-ramp from the presidency and Romanian politics took the form of an academic scholarship to Japan, supported by the Japanese ambassador (p. 531). In June 1992, the diarist had told the President he would leave for Japan in the autumn and would stay on at the presidency until the election, concluding that he would not run for parliament and was not interested in the position of ambassador to Brussels. Iliescu expressed his regrets, but did not force the issue (p. 482). The book ends with the diarist content with his successful disengagement from politics and the professorship title as a goal for the immediate future (p. 508). During the farewell meeting with President Iliescu, IM Pașcu said he was open to entering a technocratic government (p. 534) [following the 1992 election].

Final remarks

'History is always stronger than we, the people in high office; we are part of its development' (p. 314). The first volume of Pașcu's political diary is not merely a memoir by a former presidential adviser. It is a major source for the reconstruction of Romania in the early 1990s. This was a period marked by institutional fragility twinned with acute struggle for power (Pasti, 1995), economic and social crisis (Zamfir, 2004; Georgescu, 2018), and deep uncertainty in foreign and security policy. Its value lies not only in the new factual details it brings to light, but also in its capacity to nuance, correct, and at times undermine later retrospective simplifications or political myths about the period. This applies especially to the June 1990 events, the Iliescu–Roman power struggle, Romania's position toward the Soviet Union, and the widespread assumption that the collective West was either ready or willing to integrate Romania on anything like a clear or rapid basis, depending only on the political will of the Romanian leadership. In this respect, the diary deserves to be treated not simply as testimony, but as a major documentary source for future research.

One of the book's strongest contributions is that it captures, within a single narrative, the constant interaction between domestic power struggles and international constraints. The diary shows a Romania that was not moving linearly towards a collective West supposedly waiting for it, but rather navigating a dangerous grey area created by the collapse of the old political, military, and economic bloc, the uncertain shape of the post-Cold War order, regional instability, the failing borders of neighbouring states with a risk of contagion, and the limited interest of major Western actors. At the same time, it reveals how the internal struggle for power interacted with foreign actors and external constraints. The result is a far more contingent and insecure picture of the early transition than the one suggested by later narratives written from the vantage point of NATO and EU accession.

The diary is equally significant for the study of state formation and political sociology in Central and Eastern Europe during the transition period. It provides rare material on the role of advisers, experts, academics, ministers, diplomats, and intelligence briefings in the actual workings of power. It also sheds light on the mentality, ambitions, rivalries, and career strategies of the dominant political actors of the early 1990s. For this reason, the book is highly relevant not only to historians and political scientists, but also to sociologists concerned with transition, state transformation, political recruitment, and Romania's insertion into the post-Cold War international order.

Precisely because of the richness of this material, *Note zilnice: Vol. I: Consilier prezidențial (1990-1992)* is more than a valuable political memoir. It is one of the most important published sources for understanding Romania in the early 1990s and should become a reference point for future research on the country's politics and foreign policy during those turbulent times.

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