Series D: International Relations Activities. 1961-1992
Box 70, Folder 11, Romania, 1978-1979.
Jewish movement out of Romania -- or, rather, the lack of it -- is a key issue at Congressional hearings continuing the next several weeks on whether the United States should continue to give preferential trade treatment to Romania.

President Carter has asked Congress this year, as in previous years, to waive the Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the U.S. Trade Act. By Jackson-Vanik terms, certain nations cannot get Most Favored Nation (MFN) trade treatment if they deny their citizens the right to emigrate, or if they put special obstacles in the way of departure.

When Congressional hearings on MFN for Romania were held a year ago, Jewish organizations expressed concern at the then low rate of exit of not quite 100 persons per month. They forebore from opposing MFN, however, in the hope that Romanian emigration policy would be liberalized.

Instead, the already low 1978 rate dropped precipitously. Only 251 Jews were permitted to leave Romania in the first five months of 1979, as against 457 the same period in 1978.

Romanian government representatives argue that the drop in departure is the result of objective factors, not Romanian policy or government obstacles. Many of the estimated 35-40,000 Jews in Romania today are elderly people who may have wanted to leave years ago but are not now ready to pick up and start life over again elsewhere, they declared. Still others have decided to stay and complete studies, and others have assimilated into Romanian society. Virtually any one who really wants to emigrate now can do so in a reasonable period of time, is the official claim.

Others with knowledge of the Romanian scene, dispute this. Government emigration procedures, it is pointed out, are such as to discourage would-be emigrants, who must appear before a preliminary commission before even getting an emigration form. In some instances, the authorities have refused to accept applications from people wishing to go and it is said knowledge of the negative government attitude makes people chary to apply.

Complicating the picture, are varying estimates as to how many Jews actually remain in Romania. The government authorities set the figure low, at about 25,000; which, of course, means a diminished potential for departure. The Jewish community itself cites a figure in the neighborhood of 37,000. And others would put the number still higher, nearer 45,000. The range probably reflects differences in how one considers the non-Jewish mate in intermarried families.

What is not in dispute, though, is that Romanian Jewry today comprises only about a tenth of the 425,000 who survived the war and pogroms of Romania's fascist-like Iron Guard. The overwhelming majority managed
to make their way to Israel in post-war decades, with the Communist authorities sometimes permitting emigration, sometimes blocking movement completely.

The emigration allowed in the past several years, it was clear, was always less than the number who wished to go at any given time. The same situation prevails today, it is felt, for even the casual visitor to Romania usually can meet some Jews who say they want to go. "Give us names," the Romanian authorities declare, but in most instances there is reluctance to do this. Nor should the Romanian government act on a case-by-case basis, it is argued, but on the more general humanitarian ground of family reunion.

Romanian Jews today maintain a network of religious, cultural and welfare institutions, under the aegis of the Federation of Jewish Communities headed by Chief Rabbi Moses Rosen. About half the Jews live in Bucharest, the rest being scattered through some 67 organized Jewish communities in the rest of the country. According to the Romanian Jewish Federation figures, there is full exercise of religion, with services being held in 120 synagogues and temples; Talmud Torah courses where Hebrew is taught in 24 towns and cities; and community choirs and orchestras. Cooperating with the Federation in the welfare field, is the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. A major new home for the aged is being opened in Bucharest this coming month.

Romania, too, it must be noted, is the only Communist country to maintain diplomatic relations with Israel, the others in the Soviet bloc having broken ties after the 1967 War. While calling on Israel to withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza, and recognizing the PLO, Romania has refrained from the kind of attacks on Israel and Zionism made by the Soviet Union and other Communist lands. Indeed, Romania's President Ceausescu is credited with having played an important role in helping set up negotiations between President Sadat and Premier Begin, leading to Sadat's trip to Jerusalem.

There are several other ethnic and religious minorities in Romania. The desire to see that others of these groups, such as the ethnic Germans, stay put, is believed to be one of the causes of the more restrictive Romanian emigration policies that also affect Jews.

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there are tombstones in the cemetery with dates as far back as 1457. At its height the Jewish community comprised 800,000 souls. Half were killed in the Holocaust. Of the balance some 350,000 are estimated to remain.

"It was the greatest Aliyah," Rabbi Rosen said. "More than 90 percent went to Israel. They were mostly the young and the able. Every wave of emigration went like an earthquake to Jewish life in Rumania."

Rabbi Rosen estimates that there are now 40,000 Jews in Rumania, spread out over 68 communities and organized into the Federation of Jewish Communities of Rumania. There are 130 synagogues, of which more than 70 are in daily use. There are 24 fully functioning synagogues in Bucharest alone. Rabbi Rosen’s synagogue, the Choral Synagogue, was badly damaged in last year’s earthquake but has been fully repaired.

Of the Jews who remained more than 60 percent are over 60 years of age. A sudden statistic, Rabbi Rosen said, was the re-emergence of new Jewish age groups, described by the Joint Distribution Committee and the Federation in the last 10 years.

The educational programs in the synagogues are completely supported by the Federation, Rabbi Rosen reported proudly. "And there is no support from JDC." The Federation helps the elderly with about $100,000 in annual funds. It also helps through the community’s burnt out of old age homes. The Federation has turned in the United States into an old age home.

The other 30,000 Jews are not really old age homes. They are now home of the Federation. They are the aged. "The other 30,000 Jews in Rumania are the aged. They are not really old age homes. They are the aged. They are the aged. They are the aged."}

The problem confronting Rumania Jewry is leadership, Rabbi Rosen said. "We have 99 percent of the leadership has disappeared. Ours is an aged community but not ready to bury us yet. I can assure you that there will be a Jewish community here in Rumania for a long time to come."

Sensing the conviction and determination of his voice, even the publicists present doubted his prediction.

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FRIDAY, OCT. 6, 1978

WELFARE TO RUMANIAN JEWS
By Murray Kaas

"Without our welfare and health programs our people would be sentenced to death," Rabbi Moses Rosen, Chief Rabbi of Rumania, Member of Parliament and President of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Rumania, told a group of American Jewish public relations directors on a United Jewish Appeal mission this summer.

"And this would not be possible without the help of the Joint Distribution Committee," he added.

The Joint Distribution Committee had budgeted close to $3.5 million for programs aiding over 10,000 of the 40,000 Jews in Rumania. These funds are provided mainly by the United Jewish Appeal through the campaigns of the Jewish Federation and Welfare Funds.

Rabbi Rosen showed no trace of fatigue from meetings in London which ended only the day before. Seated behind a massive desk in his wood-paneled, book-lined study, the Rumanian Jewish leader traced the history of his people.

There has been a Jewish presence in Rumania for 600 years. There is a synagogue in Jasi that is 500 years old and

LAS VEGAS ISRAELITE

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single-priced item. A coat, which would retail in the United States for about $100, was sold at the Federation for 3,500 points, the equivalent of $35.00.

There are five old age homes in Bucharest and two more in the provinces. "They are not really old age homes," Rabbi Rosen said. "They are old age homes, but they are not really old age homes."

To provide for the growing number of enfeebled aged the JDC is building a 200-bed home in a park-like residential section of Bucharest. The home, which will be ready in 1979, will enable the community to shut up the 100 rundown and inadequate homes in the city.

A socio-medical center provides medical, dental, and social care for about 6,000 annually. The center is operated by the Jewish Agency for Israel.

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Congratulations to Fran Sacks who was recently honored with an appointment to the National Board of ORT. Fran was also installed as V.P. of District II which is comprised of the States of Nevada, Arizona, and California. Her dedication and willingness to work have been responsible for much of the growth of ORT in the past few years.

Joan La Barbara, the reigning vocal wizard of music’s avant garde, will make her first Las Vegas appearance on Sun. Oct 8 with the L.V. Valley High School playing at 2 p.m. in the Art Humanities Hall. Audiences can meet La Barbara at a 4:00 p.m. "Meet the Artist" program.

"By the way, show me a man with head held high, and I’ll show you a man who can’t get used to bifocals.

The Las Vegas Jewish Singles forge ahead courageously with a bring your own food and kids picnic at Sunset Park on October 7, 10:00 a.m. October 8 at 10:00 a.m. they’ll be at Valley High School playing tennis and volleyball. (Who? What an athletic group.) Oct. 9 at the Roaring Twenties. Girls are only $1.00 which covers all. Call 732 - 7156 for details.