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Box 70, Folder 11, Romania, 1978-1979.

ROMANIA

Backgrounder

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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Foreign Affairs Dept.-AJC

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Welfare to Rumanian Jews

By Murray Kass

"Without our welfare aid 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," Rabbi Rosen said. "There is a synagogue in Jasi that is 500 years old and

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 emigrated, mostly to Israel.

"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 was 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 Rumanian Jewish Communities. There are 130 synagogues, of which more than 70 are in daily use. There are twelve 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 sadder statistic, Rabbi Rosen said, was that only seven percent of the Jewish population are under 20.

The Federation helps over 10,000 of the needy and the aged. "The other 30,000 contribute about 5,000,000 Lei (\$416,500) to the program to add to the funds provided by the JDC."

The educational cultural programs of the synagogues are completely supported by the congregations," Rabbi Rosen reported proudly. "For this we are not using JDC funds." This includes Hebrew classes for the young people, Talmud Torahs for the children, choral groups and a youth orchestra.

Rabbi Rosen seldom fails to visit the Talmud Torah on Sunday mornings. He especially enjoys listening to the children sing Yiddish and Hebrew songs and often sings along with them.

"Our welfare programs are based on human dignity," Rabbi Rosen said. "In our restaurants no one knows who paid full price, 12 Lei, (\$1.00), who paid half price and who paid nothing for his meal." More than 75 per cent pay nothing. There are eleven kosher restaurants, one in Bucharest and ten more in the provinces, which feed some 2,500 people daily. The meals include hot soup and meat dishes and for most of the diners it is their main meal of the day. In addition, the restaurants

fleet of vans carries the food to the shut-ins who usually eat some of it for lunch and save some for dinner.

About 4,000 receive welfare vouchers. They also receive six food packages during the year, winter relief, a clothing allotment and Passover supplies. Another 4,000 not quite as needy, do not receive welfare vouchers but do receive the food, clothing and other benefits.

The clothing is purchased from the Government industries at export prices, this providing Rumania with urgently needed hard currency and the Federation with greatly reduced prices. The clothes receive a numerical value, in points, and the beneficiaries receive 3,000 points a year with which they can "buy" several items or a

single high priced item. A coat, which would retail in the United States for about \$100, was on "sale" 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 villas that have been left to the community and turned into 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 down three very rundown and inadequate homes in the city.

A socio-medical center provides medical, dental and social care for about 3,000 annually.

Matzot, matzo meal and wine are shipped in by the JDC. "Anyone who wants to make Passover in Rumania can do so," Rabbi Rosen said. "For last Pessach the JDC sent over 400,000 pounds of matzot and 30,000 bottles of wine. Again, those who could pay for the matzoh and wine did so. The others did not. No one went without matzoh."

"The problem confronting Rumania Jewry is leadership," Rabbi Rosen said. "Ninety-nine per cent of the leadership has disappeared. Ours is an aged community but don't be 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, few of the publicists present doubted his prediction.

Congratulations to Fran Sarnoff 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. Chambers Players at 2 p.m. in Artemus Ham Hall. Audiences can meet La Barbara at a 1:00 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, games 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 6:30 p.m. volleyball. (whew! What an athletic bunch). Oct. 9 fun and relaxation at the Rumors - girls are only \$1.00 which covers all. Call 732 - 7156 for details.

Best Wishes

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