



## Romania - Recent History

After the Second World War, Romania fell under Communist control. In 1965, Ceausescu came to power, committed to expanding the largely agricultural economy by developing heavy industry. His industrialisation programme absorbed 30% of the country's wealth and led to massive international debt. In an effort to pay off these debts, the bulk of the nation's agricultural output was exported, and most of the population was reduced to near starvation.

In an effort to expand the economy, Ceausescu sought to build a larger workforce. He banned all forms of birth control for women with less than 5 children, and those without children were penalised by high taxes. Many people were unable to support their large families, so children were abandoned to the orphanages that so shocked the world when the images hit our TV screens in the early 1990's.

Other abuses included ill treatment of the gypsy people and other minorities, and constant repression of the whole population by the Securitate or secret police, which produced an atmosphere of fear and distrust even between members of the same family. The communist regime sought to control every aspect of people's lives, including freedom of worship. Many churches were closed, and those that remained were often infiltrated by informers so that believers lived in fear of arrest and persecution.

Living conditions became more and more desperate - but a wave of change was sweeping across the whole of Eastern Europe. Riots broke out in Timisoara, as protestors demanded Ceausescu's resignation. Despite orders to quell the riots with gunfire, the army chose to withdraw rather than shoot their own people. This heralded the end of Ceausescu's regime. He and his wife tried to make their escape, but were quickly arrested and executed on Christmas Day 1989.

In 1992 Romania became a presidential democracy - and there are positive signs of change as Romania seeks to recover from the devastation of its recent past. Great efforts are being made to overcome corruption, poor infrastructure and outdated legislation in a bid to enter the European Union. While this is to be welcomed, it puts an additional burden on the poorest in the community, as they struggle to comply with the new regulations.