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Romanian Breakthrough

Romanians and Czechs dance to the holy names of Krsna.

Romanian Vignettes

by Suhotra Swami

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SPELLBOUND, I watch the satellite TV news with Kirtiraja Prabhu, ISKCON's Governing Body representative for Eastern Europe. We're sitting in the apartment of Vedavyasa Dasa, a Russian emigre who'd done time in a Soviet psychiatric prison because of his faith in Krsna, before the days of *glasnost* and *perestroika*.

Scenes from a new and frightening phase in the changes sweeping Communist Romania flicker on the screen: Running gun battles in the streets of Romania's cities as the dreaded Securitate (secret police) try to thwart army-supported, pro-democracy forces from taking over the government. A grisly display of exhumed victims of the Red terror in Timisoara, their wrists bound with barbed wire. A nightmarish look into the maze of tunnels under central Bucharest where armed thugs loyal to the toppled regime make a last stand. The sightlessly staring face of dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, his body riddled with the bullets of an exultant firing squad.

We learn that after more than two decades of repression many Romanians find it hard to believe that, in the words of one exiled writer, "Dracula is finally dead."

I'd visited Romania ten years before to see what opportunity there was for spreading Krsna consciousness. I succeeded only in selling some books to an Indian guest instructor at the University of Bucharest who'd written a letter asking for someone from ISKCON to visit him.

Some of his students came to his apartment while I was there, but he quietly advised me not to reveal too much about myself in their presence and not to let our discussions move beyond the subject of "Indian culture." I found these young people goodhearted and surprisingly interested in religious matters. But a palpable paranoia hung in the air over the Romania of that time.

In 1976 my German Godbrother Avinasa Candra Prabhu had been thrown out of the country for making the very first attempt to spread Krsna consciousness there.

Now, as we watch joyous throngs in the streets of Bucharest celebrating the first Christmas without Ceausescu that many Romanians have ever seen, Kirtiraja turns to me with a broad smile and says, "Looks like Krsna just gave you another shot at Romania!"

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