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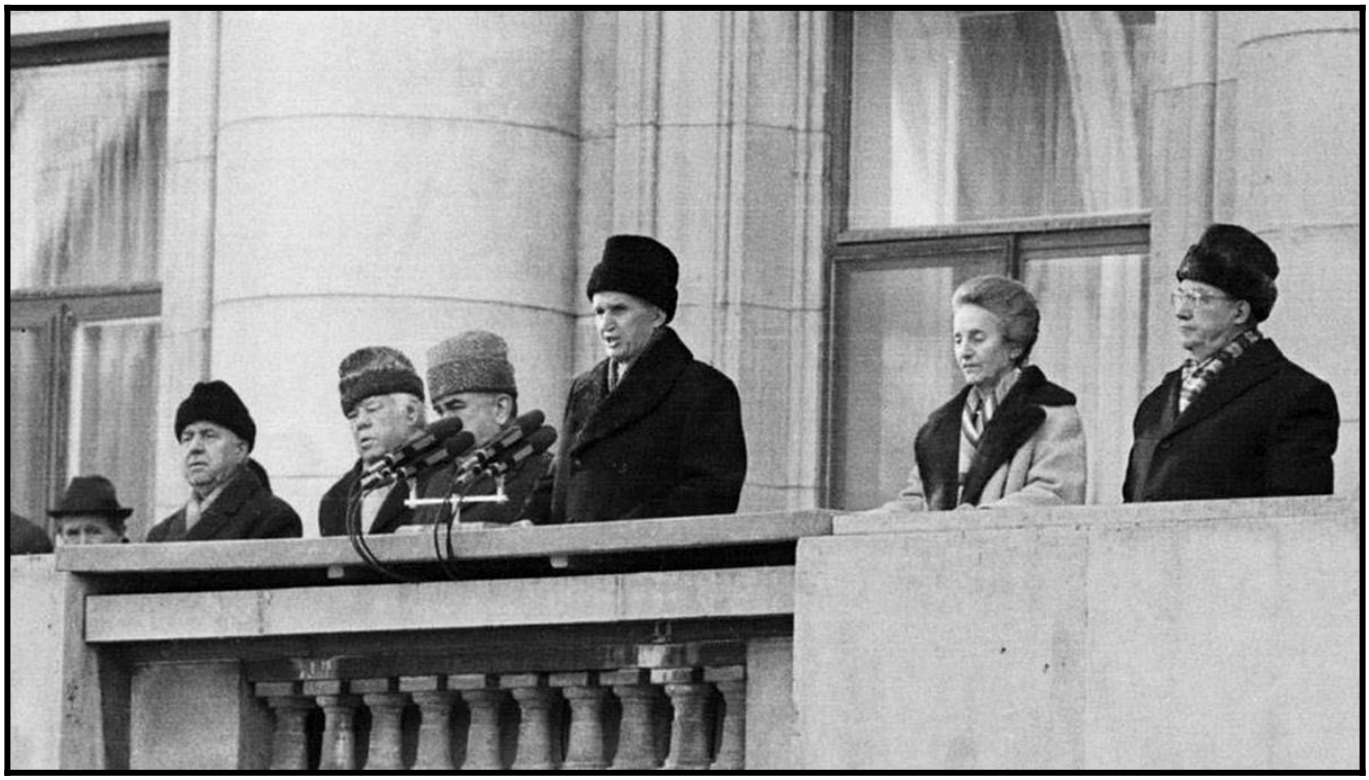
"How Our Embassy Staff in Bucharest Experienced the Massive Protests and the Execution of Ceausescu"

– Interview with the Albanian Journalist and Diplomat to Romania Rezar Xhaxhiu by Dashnor Kaloçi of "Memorie.al" –



The following interview conducted by Dashnor Kaloçi of *Memorie.al* with the then-diplomat of Albania to Romania Rezar Xhaxhiu reveals not only what it was like for foreign dignitaries (especially from a country such as Albania) to live through the chaos and anarchy of the Romanian events of December 1989, nor only the incredible film-like scenes of picking up rusted weapons to defend the embassy, but also the viewpoint of the Albanian Party and state on the unfolding events.

The purpose of said events in the eyes of the Albanians was clear — regardless of Ceausescu's merits or lack thereof — the attempt to overthrow him was part of the

sweeping imperialist offensive at that time against anyone who refused to submit to the dictate of the two superpowers. Although, it is almost paradoxical to write "two superpowers" — because the Soviet Union in its collaboration with the United States until its ultimate collapse two years later, was heeding the way for the latter to consolidate its position as the sole superpower. This is what Gorbachev's leadership accomplished. It is especially striking in this vein to read the words of the Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to their embassy in Bucharest: *"Comrades, tighten your ranks. After Ceausescu's fall, Albania remains the last fortress of [European] resistance against the imperialist offensive toward sovereign nations!"* Indeed, it was not long until this fortress would also meet its end, despite 45 years of ceaseless work of consolidating it, which was not enough to prevent the tide of international developments.

As for Nicolae Ceausescu himself, he and his wife Elena were hurriedly executed after a show trial in which they had no means to defend themselves against the accusations. Regardless of whether these accusations had merit or not, this was not the true purpose of the trial and execution, which was to rid Romania of any independence. For this, they had Ceausescu's former comrade Ion Iliescu groomed for a role overseeing the "democratic transition," which not only sold off the national economy to foreigners, but increasingly today, 35 years later, even the limits of the bourgeois-democratic system established are being eliminated. For evidence of this, one only needs to look at the absurd and anti-democratic annulment of the first round of the November 2024 presidential election results based on phoney pretexts of the terrifying "Russian interference" apparition through the social media application "TikTok." This all to keep Romania under the thumb of U.S.-NATO rule, which began with the execution of Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu.

As may be assumed, the interview was conducted with the hindsight of today's world and the widespread, unilateral condemnation of the epoch of socialism in Albania for any public figure, so we translated and are republishing this interview with historical purposes in mind, acknowledging that it still has immense value by providing a glimpse into the reality of history.

NEPH

Memorie.al publishes the untold story of the massive protests of the Romanian people in

late December 1989, which led to the overthrow of the communist leader Nicolae Ceausescu, who had governed the country since 1965 following the death of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. This account includes the rare testimony of the well-known journalist and moderator Rezar Xhaxhiu, who served as the Press and Culture Attaché at the Albanian Embassy in Bucharest from 1987 to March 1991. Speaking exclusively to *Memorie.al,* Xhaxhiu publicly recounts for the first time how the embassy staff, led by Ambassador Pirro Vito, experienced the dramatic events of the Romanian protests. For several days, the personnel of this diplomatic mission were forced to arm themselves and take defensive positions in various parts of the embassy building.

Mr. Xhaxhiu, what are the beginnings of your education?

I graduated high school in 1979 at the "Sami Frashëri" Gymnasium in Tirana. Later, I pursued higher studies in the Albanian Language and Literature program at the Faculty of History and Philology, from October 1980 to July 1984.

Who were some of your professors at the Faculty of Language and Literature?

Where should I start? Whom should I talk about? The great Shaban Demiraj, the polyglot Fatmir Agalliu, or Ali Xhiku? The wonderful professor Floresha Dado, Vehbi Bala, Llambro Ruci, Rahmi Memushi, or my father, Muzafer Xhaxhiu, among others.

What memories do you have of these professors?

They were an exceptional group of professors from the Language and Literature department, to whom I am still grateful to this day. If I am who I am today (and not just me), I can confidently say I am a product of that extraordinary generation of respected and honourable people and professors.

Do you recall any of your friends who studied at this faculty?

There were truly many. Look, from that generation of students, many later became prominent poets and distinguished writers. I would mention here: Teodor Keko, Besa Myftiu, Rita Petro, Behar Gjoka, Eqerem Bramo, Shaban Sinani, Vahid Hyzoti and others. They later excelled with their works — some in poetry, others in prose, and some in literary

criticism, among other fields.

After completing your studies and graduation, how did you become involved in the field of diplomacy?

At that time, there was a need to rejuvenate the diplomatic system by bringing in “new blood,” following a selection process that had taken place five or ten years earlier, mostly from the ranks of the working class. As a result, the first course for future diplomats was created, and I became involved around 1985.

What were the criteria at the time that allowed you to be included in diplomacy?

There weren’t many criteria. First and foremost, you had to have a clean background. Then, you needed to be a student with relatively good or excellent academic results. Additionally, you were required to have a clean moral and social record. And of course, being married was also mandatory.

From which faculties were students selected to continue in diplomacy?

The selection was primarily made from the faculties of Social Sciences, such as Philology, Political Science and Economics, as well as from the departments of History, Foreign Languages and others.

Can you recall the names of some of the students who went on to become future diplomats?

Why not? There are many, but I’ll mention a few, such as Kastriot Robo, Llesh Kola, Marko Bello, Arben Rama, Artur Kuko, Petraq Proko, Sokol Neçaj, among others.

You mentioned earlier that you underwent a course on the basic rules of diplomacy. Where was this course held?

The course was conducted both at the premises of the Faculty of Philology and at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the time.

And how many people were part of this course?

In our first course, there were about 10 to 12 students, selected from the faculties mentioned earlier.

Can you recall some of the programs included in the diplomacy course?

The programs covered a wide range of subjects, such as Foreign Policy, Balkan History, European History, Political Science, as well as the History of the Party of Labour of Albania, although viewed from a different perspective. There were also more specific topics, such as Communication and Diplomatic Protocol.

What did these specific subjects cover?

For example, these subjects focussed on how to conduct yourself at an official reception, dinner or lunch. They included the arrangement of seating at the table, the placement of plates, forks and everything else related to diplomatic protocol.

Who were some of the senior officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who taught you these lessons?

We received lessons from both university professors and officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I remember having lecturers such as deputy ministers like Sokrat Plaka, as well as directors of departments like Piro Bita, Ksenofon Krisafi and Jovan Andoni, who taught us “Etiquette and Protocol” — a subject that was particularly beloved by us because it was practical and very necessary. Other lecturers included many other officials of various ranks from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during that period.

After completing this course, in which sector of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were you assigned?

I was assigned to the Directorate of the Balkans as a referent, where I worked for several months before receiving my posting. This was absolutely a wonderful experience. I had colleagues like Mirosh Sako, Hasan Haxhia and Leonidha Mërtiri, who were career diplomats and highly knowledgeable about the region and relations with neighbouring countries, especially Yugoslavia and Greece.

Who informed you about your appointment to Romania?

It was the Head of Personnel at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jani Polena. He was a classic apparatchik, a typical administrative worker who could have served in the bureaucracies of any regime.

And how do you remember that moment?

I recall it must have been the end of 1986 when Polena called me into his office and informed me of the appointment, saying: *"The Party has decided that you will serve as a diplomat in our embassy in Romania, in the position of Secretary (Attaché) for Press and Culture."*

Why were you assigned to this specific country?

I can't say for certain why I was assigned there. However, it might have been because I had worked for several months in the Directorate of the Balkans at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which had jurisdiction over Romania. Another possible reason could be my strong command of the French language. At that time, French had significant linguistic and cultural influence in official Romania, and not only there.

Mr. Xhaxhiu, you mentioned earlier that in order to serve as a diplomat representing Albania in embassies accredited in Europe and other parts of the world, one had to be married. Could you explain why this rule existed?

This was one of the oddities and absurdities I encountered not only in that ministry but also throughout the entire mechanism of Albanian diplomacy abroad during the 1980s. From the very first days of our appointment, Minister Reiz Malile informed us that we had to be married if we wished to continue our careers as diplomats in various embassies. For us, who had been students just a few months earlier, this seemed like a joke — something surreal. But later, we realized that this was a *sine qua non* condition if one wanted to be appointed as a career diplomat in Albania's embassies worldwide. Even today, I still don't fully understand why such a requirement existed. Every attempt to make sense of it has proven futile.

How did you react after learning about this "rule"?

I reacted as anyone in that situation would. I began looking for a bride and my future wife (laughs). I'm joking, of course. I simply asked the woman I was dating at the time if she would like to go from being my girlfriend to becoming my wife. I brought it up rather quickly because, to be honest, there wasn't much time to waste. And there you have it — problem solved. Without much stress, experimentation or searching around (laughs). I was somewhat lucky in this regard.

Did your wife's background and her family's biography also have to pass official scrutiny?

At that time, it was mandatory for the name of the woman who would become my future wife to be submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. If I'm not mistaken, her name and surname were sent to the personnel office, which then forwarded them into the elaborate filtering and verification mechanisms of the State Security. These checks were designed to ensure that, even in the second or third generation — or among third or fourth cousins — there was no "blemish" in her family history that would disqualify her from becoming the wife of a diplomat.

How long did this process take?

After a waiting period of 15 days, the much-anticipated official response finally arrived. It stated, verbatim: *"Your future wife is deemed worthy to accompany you to the embassy."* That was essentially the message. With this reply, the waiting period — along with the anxiety, impatience and uncertainty — came to an end. Looking back on it today, I wonder… how was it possible for such a thing to happen? But even now, I've never received a sincere explanation for it.

Before leaving for Romania, did you receive specific instructions from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on how to behave and what to do or avoid in that country?

Of course, we did. There were a series of such meetings, but the final meeting, which sealed everything, was held with Mr. Polena. As meticulous and professional as he was, he didn't forget to give us detailed advice on our behaviour as diplomats and the care we should take as official representatives in a "revisionist" country, as Ceausescu's Romania was labelled at

the time. The advice ranged from the strange to the outright absurd, but nonetheless, it had to be taken with the utmost seriousness and a strong sense of responsibility.

How do you remember your departure to Romania, and in what year did you go there?

It was in October 1987. We left Tirana on a flight with *TAROM* (the Romanian airline) from an eerily quiet Rinas Airport. At that time, only two airlines operated out of our airport: Romania's *TAROM* and Hungary's *MALEV.*

How did you feel about this departure?

It was a journey into the unknown and the beginning of a new life. A life in which a part of your existence was no longer your own but belonged to others who would constantly monitor, scrutinize and advise you. I was embarking on a journey into a new world that was nothing like what I had imagined before. The embassy was a piece of Albania on foreign soil, with all its advantages and disadvantages.

Which sector of our embassy were you assigned to as a diplomat?

I arrived in Romania as Secretary for Press and Culture, or as it is known in diplomatic terminology, Attaché. This was the lowest rank in the hierarchy of staff at the Albanian embassy at that time.

In which district of Bucharest was the Albanian embassy located?

Our embassy was located in an area with other embassies, somewhere on Aviatorilor Boulevard, if I'm not mistaken. It was next to the Argentine embassy, in what is now the famous street of diplomatic missions, known as Modrogan.

Is it true that this villa was once one of the residences of a Romanian queen?

Yes, that is absolutely true. The building was an 18th-century three-storey villa with spacious rooms and grounds, including a large, beautifully green courtyard beside it. This villa was once the residence of one of Romania's queens, although I can't recall her name at the moment.

Who welcomed you at the airport, and who accompanied you to the embassy?

At Bucharest Airport, we were welcomed by embassy staff. If I remember correctly, it was the First Secretary, the Economic Counsellor and the driver. Later, we had a friendly meeting at the embassy with Ambassador Zoi Toska and the other staff members.

How many people made up the staff of the Albanian embassy in Romania?

At that time, there were about 13 or 14 families assigned to the embassy.

What was your first impression of Bucharest, considering it's one of the most developed metropolises in the region, often referred to as the "Paris of the Balkans"?

It was undoubtedly a striking impact. Right from the start, we encountered extremely wide boulevards, 18th- and 19th-century buildings, luxurious hotels and massive structures adorned with elegant lighting. There were countless traffic lights, endless relaxing parks, lakes and marvellous gardens everywhere, well-dressed and well-groomed people, and not to mention the streams of cars that often caused chaos and traffic jams in the city. It was a total shock, especially when compared to the desolation of Rinas Airport that we had left just two hours earlier, and the bleakness of a destitute Tirana in the late 1980s.

Can you recall the names of the Albanian staff at the embassy in Bucharest, and what specific roles they held there?

Zoi Toska was our ambassador in Romania during the period when I arrived. He spoke Romanian fluently, perhaps because he had studied there. Viktor Dhroso was the First Secretary of the embassy, meaning he was second in the hierarchy after Ambassador Toska. Following him was the Second Secretary, Qemal Gjokutaj. From the Ministry of Foreign Trade, we had Viron Andrea, while Ilir Shijaku served as the Economic Secretary. The late Marko Bello, like me, was the Secretary for Press and Culture. The cipher clerk was Andon Koçi, and there were other personnel such as Third Secretaries, Defence Attachés, radio operators, drivers, etc. I can mention names from these roles like Vangjel Kovaçi, Ymer Xhaferri, Ali Kuka, Lulzim Fuga, Luan Visha, Xhevair Ago and others.

What were your relations like with them?

We were, in a way, like a family within the embassy. And like any family, there were moments of harmony and moments of tension. At times, there was jealousy, envy, competition, gossip and even harmless reports, as we say.

Could you elaborate on this dynamic?

There were women who envied one another, even over their clothing. There were men who were influenced by their wives. There were drivers who behaved as if they were genuine diplomats. Our embassy in Bucharest reflected all facets of life. It was like a miniature version of Albania. However, it's not my place to air the dirty laundry, so to speak (laughs).

Regarding housing, where were you and your family accommodated?

A portion of the staff — including four families (my family included) — lived outside the embassy building, in a residential block alongside ordinary Romanian citizens.

Where was this residential block located?

This residential block was located in a quiet area near the Romanian National Circus, on Circului Street 15 in the second district of Bucharest.

Compared to Tirana, what were the living conditions like in Bucharest?

Compared to Tirana, the living conditions in the Romanian capital were relatively normal. The apartment we lived in was furnished in the most basic way possible, with furniture resembling the kind you'd find in Pogradec — or perhaps it had been imported from a "Pogradec" of Romania! (laughs).

So, were the living conditions in Bucharest similar to those in Tirana?

Actually, they were far better. For example, in my apartment, we had a central heating system powered by gas, something unheard of in Tirana during the communist era. Similarly, all cooking was done with gas. In addition, Bucharest had metros and trams, which greatly facilitated daily transportation. There were also massive department stores,

although during Ceausescu's time, these were often empty of goods and products!

You mentioned earlier that you would be covering the Press and Culture sector at the embassy. What were the cultural relations like between Albania and Romania in the 1980s?

Cultural relations between Albania and communist Romania were not very intensive, as there were few cultural exchanges between official Tirana and Bucharest. The severe economic problems faced by both countries dominated the agenda, and cultural relations were secondary to political and economic issues.

Did you have any contact with Albanian students studying at Romanian universities?

During the period I served at the embassy, there were no Albanian students studying in Romania. If I'm not mistaken, the last group of such students belonged to the 1970s, either the mid or late part of that decade.

Can you briefly describe the political, economic and social landscape of Ceausescu's Romania?

Romania was an enormous country, nearly half the size of the Balkan Peninsula, with a population of 25 million and vast plains, along with extensive above-ground and underground natural resources. Yet, it was entirely immersed in abject poverty reminiscent of Migjeni's depictions of misery, and marked by an extraordinary deprivation.

What were the most striking features and characteristics of Romanian society in the late 1980s?

It was an open yet oppressed society. Romanians were a people who freely practised their religious rites but were forbidden from meeting with foreigners, even tourists. An ordinary Romanian could own a private car, but they were under constant surveillance and were prohibited from expressing any free or independent opinions.

Did you and your embassy colleagues discuss the poor state of affairs in Romania?

As diplomats, we did not experience the deprivation endured by ordinary Romanians, but that didn't prevent us from observing it up close. Our neighbours were from various social strata — doctors, military personnel, teachers, workers, etc. As a result, we were aware of and could witness their way of life firsthand. But that was the extent of it. This harsh economic and social situation did not have any direct impact on our daily work or living conditions.

What was the daily routine and work life like for a diplomat like you in one of the leading communist countries in the Balkans and Europe?

It was a typical office routine, much like working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the same hours and, of course, the same discipline. Our work consisted of drafting documents, verbal notes, responses to notes, organizing events and official celebrations. We also arranged meetings with fellow diplomats and held banquets, cocktail parties and various receptions. This was the typical day of a diplomat, which would often end with the preparation of a report for Tirana regarding developments in the country. Alternatively, it could involve sending a telegram to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about a meeting, a message or a conversation of interest with a Western or Eastern colleague or a Romanian official. These telegrams were drafted in what was known as the "Black Room."

Could you explain in more detail what the "Black Room" was?

The Black Room was a small space, about two metres wide and three metres long. The room was entirely lined with thick, black fabric. This material was used to prevent possible surveillance and to block any hidden listening devices ("bugs") that were suspected to have been installed by the Romanian Secret Service (Securitate) in the walls of the embassy. The room was like a cell, but without windows — something akin to a black tomb.

And how were you able to work in such conditions?

Of course, under these conditions, we had no choice but to work as required. Telegrams and memos were written on a small desk surrounded by the black lining. This confined space, illuminated by a small spotlight, was isolated even from the rest of the room in which we worked.

As is well-known, communist Romania had one of the most notorious secret services in Europe, the Securitate. While you were there, did you feel that you were being surveilled by its agents?

We were under surveillance, yes, but not in an obvious manner. Everything was done from a distance. It wasn't as if we saw cars tailing us or specific individuals following us. At least some embassy staff members, like myself or Marko Bello, were not considered "high risk." We came from the ranks of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and not from the Directorate of Political Intelligence (which was one of the three directorates of Albania's Sigurimi).

Were there strict protocol rules that you, as embassy staff, were required to follow?

Yes, there were countless such rules. Most of them were good rules, but at times, they seemed like endless absurdities!

Can you mention some of these rules?

For example, we were required to inform the embassy of every movement we made within Bucharest or outside of it. Additionally, we had to notify the embassy about any invitations we received from our colleagues for various banquets, lunches or dinners, whether these were hosted at their homes or in the reception halls of their respective embassies. It was mandatory for our wives to be accompanied by their Albanian colleagues during any outings they made. We were also expected to maintain a dignified appearance, even outside of working hours. For instance, it was forbidden for us to wear jeans, as they were considered a symbol of Western fashion! (laughs).

During your time there, did you have meetings with high-ranking Romanian officials?

Of course. Our work required all of us to have contact with high-level officials in the Romanian government. These included ministers, deputy ministers, department directors and others who were connected to Albania or its matters.

What was their perception of Albania? Did they ever discuss with you the tense situation Romania was going through at the time?

Romanian officials and diplomats, as well as others, found Albania to be a very interesting country because of its official positions, not just toward the Soviet Union but also toward the United States. They admired our country as one that had a longstanding tradition of friendship with Romania, thanks in part to a community of Albanians who had lived and worked there for many years. Albania was seen as a state with which they shared common stances and as a nation known for its brave and loyal people. However, regarding the dire situation their own country was experiencing, they rarely spoke about it.

What stood out to them the most about Albania?

What stood out the most to them was their belief that Albania produced the best cognac in the world. The "Skanderbeg" cognac was something they saw as capable of solving all personal problems and opening all doors at every level of the Romanian administration. Cognac was essentially the tool with which we broke through the "blockade" in Bucharest! (laughs).

Can you share some memorable or humorous episodes from your meetings with Romanian and foreign officials and diplomats?

One of the strictest rules we had to follow during our mission there was avoiding communication with, and even refraining from shaking hands with, diplomats from the United States, the Soviet Union and Israel. During the various receptions and cocktail events, which were numerous at the time, this put us in very awkward — and often quite laughable — situations as diplomats.

Did you ever encounter such awkward situations?

Absolutely, several times even. I remember one time during a reception when I was standing among a group of diplomats from both Eastern and Western countries. Suddenly, a colleague from the Soviet embassy approached me. After shaking hands with everyone in the small circle, he extended his hand to me. This left me no choice but to step away discreetly, as if with style, but it left a bitter and strange impression on the diplomats present in that group.

What did the other diplomats say when they saw you do this?

Among the group was also a diplomat from the north Korean embassy, who later approached me and asked about the meaning behind this strange act, as he saw it. I tried to explain the strict rule imposed by our centre (the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tirana) regarding officials from these three countries. He laughed with that typical Asian smile and said to me, verbatim: *"We have a similar rule toward our south Korean colleagues, but we're a bit more moderate than you in our behaviour."* Curious, I asked him what this "Asian moderation" entailed, and he replied: *"Well, when we're face-to-face with them, we don't shake hands, but at least we exchange some general remarks about the weather, the rain, the frost or even the increase in sparrows in Bucharest, etc."* I laughed heartily and told him: *"That's your typical Asian diplomatic style, which is completely different from the Balkan style!"* What else could I say to the north Korean diplomat, other than turning it into a joke? But, fortunately, after 1990, I had the chance to explain this absurd Albanian diplomatic rule to the diplomats of these three countries in a more appropriate manner.

What happened during the reception you mentioned with the diplomats from the USA, Russia and Israel?

Oh, certainly. If I'm not mistaken, this was in the early months of 1991. At that time, the communist regime in Albania had just fallen, and our country had re-established diplomatic relations with Washington, Moscow and Jerusalem. During a regular reception organized by our embassy on the occasion of re-establishing these diplomatic ties, I was approached unexpectedly by a diplomat from the American embassy in Bucharest. He addressed me in this way: *"Hey, Mr. Xhaxhiu, my Albanian friend, can I finally shake your hand firmly now that our two countries have re-established diplomatic relations? And you Albanians will no longer call us Americans the 'gendarmes of international imperialism,' right?"* We both burst out laughing because I was caught off guard by his phrasing, which sounded like something straight out of the satirical *Hosteni* magazine. We shook hands warmly and then had a friendly discussion about various topics. Similarly, I was fortunate to have the chance, after meeting the American diplomat, to also apologize to the Russian and Israeli diplomats for the "crazy rule" of not shaking hands. It was a relief to clear the air and move forward in a new era of diplomacy.

Did you ever feel surveilled by your embassy colleagues at any moment?

Honestly, during all receptions, cocktails and various events, you always had to be extremely careful because there was always a watchful eye. Someone was always ready to report any deviation from the absurd rules imposed by Tirana. It was a dangerous game because you never knew where the unexpected would come from.

Did you or your family have any specific episodes where you felt at risk due to these strict rules?

One of the most absurd rules — at least that's how I saw it back then — was the strict prohibition of diplomats' wives or family members going out alone. To this day, I can't fully understand the real reason behind this absurdity! The first incident happened shortly after I arrived in Bucharest. At the time, my wife was a young woman, around 19 or 20 years old, and somewhat rebellious by nature. This meant she didn't easily comply with what she called "these idiocies." A few months after we had settled in the Romanian capital, she began walking freely around the boulevards and department stores of Bucharest. This went on for several months until one day, she was spotted on the streets by some of the embassy women, who were out shopping together by car. That was all it took for a telegram to be sent to Reiz Malile, who was then the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The telegram demanded action be taken against the diplomat whose wife had committed the "heresy" of walking alone on the streets of Bucharest.

How was that issue resolved?

Later, I found out that my father happened to be a friend of Reiz Malile at that time. He intervened and managed to have the issue resolved with just a formal warning for the "rookie couple," a solution that the minister accepted with understanding. However, this warning didn't really change my wife's behaviour. She found new ways to assert her freedom and continue exploring Bucharest on her own (laughs).

During the time you worked there, did you have any contact with ordinary Romanians? And if so, what did you talk about regarding the poor conditions Romania was going through?

Since we lived in shared apartment buildings and staircases with Romanians, we often had

contact with them, but we approached these interactions cautiously. For instance, my wife had a friend who lived in the neighbouring stairwell, and she would often visit her secretly, away from the view of other Albanian embassy neighbours. She developed a strong friendship with this kind Romanian woman, and they still maintain occasional contact to this day.

From the contacts you had, what were ordinary Romanians like?

Ordinary Romanians were incredibly kind, dignified and cultured people, despite the suffering they endured. They often complained about their living conditions, but they did so with great caution. They expressed frustration about the communist regime, the dire economic situation and the repression of the secret police, the Securitate. However, even in their complaints, they displayed a level of restraint and dignity that was truly admirable.

Mr. Xhaxhiu, during your time as a diplomat, did you have the chance to meet the Romanian communist leader, Nicolae Ceausescu?

I had the opportunity to meet Nicolae Ceausescu only once during the official ceremony for the presentation of credentials by Ambassador Pirro Vito. As part of the Albanian embassy staff, we had a conversation with him that lasted about an hour.

Can you describe this meeting and what was discussed?

From what I recall, he was a short man, pale, frail and extremely cautious in his official conversation. The discussion was very general, as is typical in such ceremonies. Topics included the relationship between the two peoples, the role of the Albanian community in Romania, economic ties between Tirana and Bucharest, and other general matters.

Did you have any other occasions to meet Ceausescu?

Apart from that occasion, when the newly-appointed ambassador Pirro Vito presented his credentials, I didn’t have any further opportunities to meet with Romania’s communist dictator.

Let’s move to 1989, the decisive year for the fall of the communist regime in Romania. How do you remember the early dissatisfaction and protests in the

country?

For Romanians, 1989 was the year that brought the great change for both them and their country. Early that year, Ceausescu announced that Romania had completely paid off the billion-dollar debt it had borrowed from the West in the early 1970s. This repayment was finalized, and at a Party Congress, Ceausescu proudly declared: *"Now, for the Romanian people, the great turnaround will begin."* This statement was interpreted by the public as a promise of *"great prosperity."*

Was there any noticeable economic or social improvement in Romania after Ceausescu paid off the debt?

As the months went by, the economic and social conditions not only failed to improve but continued to deteriorate further. By the end of 1989, the shops in Bucharest and throughout Romania were stocked only with jars of pickled vegetables and marmalade. There were only basic items available to barely sustain life. Everything was rationed, and there was absolutely no abundance of food, contrary to what had been propagated.

From a diplomat's perspective, did you sense that these silent protests would escalate into violent demonstrations?

Absolutely. The dire situation caused a silent dissatisfaction to grow and accumulate, spreading like ripples from the centre toward the periphery of Romania. Everywhere, there was a charged atmosphere, an internal tension and a sense that things could explode at any moment. Meanwhile, the state-controlled Romanian TV, which at the time broadcast only four hours of programming daily (three of which were devoted to the Ceausescu couple), continued airing endless documentaries about the "achievements" of Romanian industry.

As the chronology of events shows, the starting point of unrest in communist Romania was the so-called "Timisoara Massacre." How do you remember that tragic event?

Then came the infamous Timisoara Massacre, which followed the arrest of a reformed pastor of Hungarian origin, Laszlo Tokes, if I remember correctly, on December 15. It was a day marked by a frightening snowfall. People gathered in the centre of Timisoara in the

form of a protest. This was the first time such a thing had happened in Romania since the Second World War. The protesters chanted slogans against the regime, and that alone was enough to send things spiralling out of control, culminating in a massacre against the demonstrators.

After the 1990s, many Romanian and foreign analysts argued that the massacre was incited by USLA forces of the Securitate, who, disguised as civilians, fired sniper shots into the crowd from the rooftops. Based on the information you had, does this hold true, and what is your opinion on this event?

Indeed, even during that period, this rumour was widely circulated, not only among the Romanian public but also within the more liberal segments of the Romanian Political Bureau. It's important to note that during the demonstrations and bloody clashes in Romania, the Armed Forces under the Ministry of Defence sided with the people. In contrast, the Armed Forces under the Ministry of Internal Affairs — namely the Securitate — remained loyal to Ceausescu's regime, almost to the very end. The allegations about the USLA snipers disguised as civilians, shooting from rooftops to incite chaos and suppress the protests, were widely believed and supported by many accounts at the time. It seems plausible, given the Securitate's brutal tactics and their loyalty to Ceausescu. This divide between the military and the secret police further deepened the cracks in the regime and contributed to its rapid collapse.

After the massacre, what was the situation like in Bucharest and across Romania?

Following the events in Timisoara, Ceausescu urgently returned from an official visit to Iran. On December 20, he delivered a speech in which he labelled the citizens of Timisoara as *"enemies of the socialist order."* He also emphasized the so-called achievements of Romania's socialist system. However, what truly fuelled the hatred and revolt of the people was a statement made by his wife, Elena Ceausescu, on state television. She said: *"The corpses of the protesters killed in Timisoara should be impaled on fence stakes so everyone learns their lesson!"* This shocking remark only intensified the public's anger.

How were you informed about these events, and where did you follow them?

For instance, we at the embassy followed the events in Timisoara primarily through foreign radio stations like *VOA* (Voice of America), *BBC Radio* and French radio stations. Additionally, we received frequent updates and reports from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tirana.

Did Ambassador Pirro Vito give you any official directives regarding these events, and if so, what did he say?

During this period, we received instructions both from Tirana (the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and directly from Ambassador Pirro Vito. He advised us to *"remain vigilant in our movements."* This vigilance extended to our interactions with Romanians, as it was impossible to predict what might escalate in the coming days or weeks.

Did you attend the large rally held by Ceausescu in Bucharest, and if so, how do you remember it?

Now, moving to the famous rally of December 20, I remember it vividly. It was a massive demonstration, and I was standing toward the back of the crowd. It was a beautiful sunny day, though bitterly cold — the kind of cold typical of Bucharest. A huge crowd had filled the square in front of the Central Committee building of the Romanian Communist Party. Everything seemed orchestrated and under control until Ceausescu himself appeared on the balcony of the building. He began delivering one of his usual monotonous and uninspiring speeches, referring to the participants in the Timisoara revolt as *"enemies of socialism and Romania."* He promised that *"Romania will be better after this revolt, with increased wages and pensions,"* and so on. But suddenly, from the back of the crowd, someone shouted *"Alo, alo!"* followed by a loud noise — a sort of explosion or disruption, though it was never clear what it was. At that moment, thousands of people in the crowd lowered their red flags, banners and even the portraits of Ceausescu in protest. They began chanting *"Timisoara, Timisoara!"* It was a turning point, as the rally, meant to demonstrate Ceausescu's control, transformed into an outright display of defiance. The regime's grip was visibly slipping.

Did Ceausescu react after this?

Seeing what was unfolding, Ceausescu froze for a moment, seemingly unable to believe

what he was hearing and seeing right before his eyes.

What happened to Ceausescu after this anti-rally began?

Afterward, he tried to calm the crowd by calling out: *"Comrades, comrades… calm down, don't disperse, stay in your places, comrades…"* However, the response he got from the crowd was something he could never have anticipated. The enraged crowd shouted slogans such as *"Down with Ceausescu," "Who is Ceausescu? A criminal from Scornicesti"* and *"Don't be afraid, Ceausescu will fall,"* among others. Shortly after, his bodyguards forcibly pulled him away from the balcony, took him inside and later evacuated him by helicopter to an unknown location. This marked the beginning of the end and set off the chain of events that would unfold in the days to come in communist Romania.

As an eyewitness to the armed revolts that erupted in Bucharest, what can you tell us about them? How do you remember these events?

In the hours and days that followed, all of Bucharest descended into chaos and unprecedented tension. Thousands of people stormed into the interior of the building known as the "Palace of the People," which at the time was Nicolae Ceausescu's presidential residence. They began looting and burning his works, which were torn apart and tossed, burning, from the massive balconies.

It is said that this gigantic and luxurious building drained the Romanian state budget. Is that true?

Yes, that's true. This luxurious building cost the communist state's budget an enormous amount, significantly impoverishing ordinary Romanians. It was like a "Versailles of the Balkans," as it's the largest building in Europe and the second-largest in the world after the Pentagon in the United States. There were battles everywhere — on the boulevards, in apartment blocks, and in key institutions like post offices, hospitals, administrative offices and police stations. The central Securitate headquarters was nearly burned to the ground due to the armed clashes between demonstrators and its guards.

What was the general atmosphere like during those days of revolt?

It was a mix of anger, chaos and a long-suppressed desire for freedom. Ordinary people, despite their fears, were determined to dismantle the structures of Ceausescu's regime, both physically and symbolically. It was a moment when decades of oppression erupted into action, marking the end of one of the most oppressive regimes in Eastern Europe.

What happened with the intense fighting in the following hours?

On the evening of that day, the repression began, led by the Minister of Defence, General Vasile Milea. The crackdown lasted two to three days, with the mobilization of the Army, tanks, police, the Guard, border forces and the Securitate, including its specialized units such as the USLA, among other state agencies. The greatest atrocity was committed by Securitate officers and USLA forces, who dressed as civilians and fired on the people from every possible direction. General Milea, in the days that followed, had a heated argument with Ceausescu and other high-ranking communist officials. He refused to align the army with the regime's side, and subsequently, he committed suicide. This act further escalated tensions, both among the population and within the government.

How did the armed clashes continue in the following days, and what was the climax of these events?

On the morning of December 22, thousands of workers from Bucharest's peripheral factories marched toward the city centre, to University Square, where a large part of the Army had stationed itself on tanks. What followed was a moment of brotherhood — soldiers and workers embraced each other and exchanged flowers in a powerful symbol of unity. However, chaos soon followed, with widespread destruction, barricades, tank movements, killings and tension, which was especially intense in Bucharest and less so in other cities. Both sides engaged in fierce fighting and killings using every means available. Demonstrating revolutionaries, after identifying Securitate agents or members of other Ministry of Internal Affairs units, would publicly lynch them and, in many cases, execute them. Similarly, members of the Securitate arrested or kidnapped civilians or demonstrators, tortured them in police stations and then killed them.

Based on the information you had at the time, how many people were killed on both sides?

It was said that around 2,000 people were killed in these clashes, and over 5,000 others were wounded. However, the exact figures were never officially made public.

What stance did the Albanian embassy take during the unfolding of these events?

As an embassy, we closely monitored the rapidly escalating events, following them step by step. Based on the various pieces of information we received, we formed our own assessments. First and foremost, we needed to clarify who this new group was that was replacing Ceausescu's regime, led by his former ally, Ion Iliescu. We also tried to understand the role being played by the Securitate and the Army, and what position we should take in relation to the fast-moving developments.

Were you in communication with official Tirana about these events, and what directives were you given?

Communications were frequent, and Tirana was closely and anxiously following everything happening in Bucharest during those days. This was evident in the many telegrams we received from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which provided guidance on our stances, both diplomatically and personally. By personally, I mean the advice we were given to *"remain careful, prudent, but above all, ensure the safety of ourselves and our families."*

Did you, as a diplomatic body, have any specific encounters related to the bloody clashes?

I clearly remember one particular day — it was in the morning. While I was driving through the boulevards of Bucharest with the embassy driver, we were stopped in the middle of the road by a group of armed teenagers, likely around 15 to 16 years old. They had set up a makeshift roadblock with various objects. They signalled us to stop and demanded that we step out of the car.

Mr. Xhaxhiu, how did you respond in that situation?

I told them: *"We are part of the diplomatic corps, and you have no right to stop us, let alone search us!"*

And how did they respond?

It was difficult to reason with them because they didn't understand what the diplomatic corps was, the immunity we enjoyed, or the rights and protections diplomats have. They kept insisting that we get out of the car so they could search it, likely based on some vague suspicions they had.

Did you agree to let them search your vehicle?

Fortunately, at that moment, an older man arrived — someone who seemed to have some influence over the teenagers. He intervened, and the group backed off, asking: *"Which embassy are you from?"* After learning that we were from Albania, one of them remarked: *"Get ready, soon it will be your turn."* When I think about it now… it felt like a prophecy, spoken by a young Romanian on the streets of Bucharest. I remembered that boy two years later, when the protests and unrest began in Tirana.

Did the Albanian embassy in Bucharest face any issues during the protests of that time?

Yes, it did. If I'm not mistaken, it was on December 22, in the afternoon, when we noticed two or three tanks stationed around the embassy. We were both surprised and concerned, wondering what the Army's tanks were doing in front of our embassy building! Later, we also noticed soldiers positioned at some distance and other movements that puzzled us, but at the same time, alarmed us. It was a mix of worry, fear and anxiety as we tried to figure out what might happen next.

What had happened? Why were those tanks there?

The tanks were stationed there as part of a silent military encirclement of the Albanian embassy in central Bucharest. Through communications that our ambassador, Pirro Vito, had with representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tirana, we learned that the encirclement was based on a rumour: the Romanians believed that Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife, Elena, were hiding in the basement of the Albanian embassy!

Who started the false rumour that the presidential couple was hiding in the embassy's basement or tunnels?

It remains a mystery how such an absurd assumption came to life. However, we must take into account the chaotic environment of those days — full of tension, clashes, fighting, fake news, rumours disguised as facts and facts disguised as rumours. In such an atmosphere, anything that was said could quickly take root and be accepted as truth. Perhaps the rumour that Ceausescu was hiding in our embassy spread in this context. I do not believe it was part of a deliberate provocation by the Romanians, as during that period, no one was in the mindset to provoke a state or an embassy. Everyone was focussed on surviving and figuring out what would happen the next day.

Were the lives of the Albanian embassy staff in Bucharest ever in serious danger from these protests?

During those tense days and hours, the entire embassy staff stayed within the building. Ambassador Pirro Vito convened an emergency meeting, where he told us: *"Now it is our duty to defend this piece of our Homeland that is here in Romania."* It was a highly charged moment — filled with fear, panic, insecurity and tension that was visible in everyone's faces. No one knew what might happen an hour later or through the night. At one point, they distributed weapons to us.

Weapons? What kind of weapons?

It's important to understand that all of Albania's diplomatic missions worldwide, or at least a portion of them, maintained a small arsenal of weapons. These were stored in metal boxes, and ours in Bucharest hadn't been opened for decades — they were so old that they had rusted. I was given a "Karabina" rifle and assigned a defensive position at a loophole — a small window between the first and second floors of the embassy building.

How did you feel in that moment?

It was a surreal and nerve-wracking moment. We were diplomats, not soldiers, yet there we were, standing in defensive positions, clutching old weapons with rusted barrels. None of us knew if we'd actually have to use them. The idea of defending an embassy, a piece of Albania on foreign soil, became both a duty and an existential challenge for us during those critical hours.

Did the other embassy staff members also receive weapons?

Of course. Our late colleague, Marko Bello, was assigned to guard the first floor with a weapon. The rifle I was given looked like it hadn't seen the light of day for years — it had rust and even cobwebs on it. Seeing this, I said to the ambassador, *"What am I supposed to do with this rusty weapon?"* especially given the knowledge I had about firearms from the endless military drills we'd been subjected to during school (laughs).

How did the ambassador respond?

He told me: *"Hold on to it tightly — it gives you security and confidence."* I couldn't quite grasp what kind of security he was talking about, but I followed his order nonetheless, all the while silently praying that none of what was happening would escalate further. This state of alert lasted for hours until the ambassador had a conversation over the phone.

Who did Ambassador Pirro Vito communicate with, and did the situation de-escalate afterward?

I can't recall now if it was a phone call or a meeting at the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but he firmly demanded that the Romanian authorities immediately withdraw the military presence surrounding the embassy. He described the situation as an idiotic and senseless provocation. The ambassador gave full assurances that the rumour about Ceausescu being sheltered in the Albanian embassy was either baseless gossip or a banal provocation. Perhaps after this conversation, or maybe after the Romanians received new information — or perhaps because Ceausescu was arrested the following day — the military forces eventually withdrew from the perimeter of our embassy.

How did you feel when the situation calmed down?

There was an overwhelming sense of relief. We had all spent those hours on edge, uncertain about what might happen next. The withdrawal of the tanks and soldiers felt like a break in the tension, though the atmosphere in Bucharest and within the embassy remained highly charged until the end of those turbulent days.

After this incident, were there any other moments when the lives of embassy staff

were at risk?

No one really knew how much danger the embassy staff was in during those moments. What we did know was how to respond to this "attack" of tanks and soldiers surrounding a diplomatic mission. For this reason, measures were taken, and we maintained constant communication with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tirana, which instructed us on each subsequent step. I remember one of the many orders we received was to destroy the embassy's archives spanning decades, to ensure that the documents wouldn't fall into the hands of Romanian demonstrators if they managed to breach the building. However, as long as fighting — even sporadic — continued on the streets of Bucharest, our lives remained under constant threat.

How was the destruction of the Albanian embassy's archives in Romania carried out?

I vividly remember the scene of feeding files and boxes of documents into the embassy's furnace to burn them — essentially erasing the memory of an entire embassy that had been active since shortly after the Second World War. It was a painful and emotional process, reminiscent of scenes from Hollywood movies — almost surreal, I might say.

What happened with your family and the families of other embassy staff during this time?

I remember that all the families of our staff had gathered together and stayed in the basement of the embassy, gripped by a sense of uncertainty and real panic about what might happen in the coming hours. Meanwhile, those family members who were sheltered outside the embassy building experienced the battle on the streets of Bucharest with twice the fear and anxiety.

How did your family cope with this intense and dangerous situation?

I remember my wife, whom I found terrified and paralysed with fear and uncertainty every time I returned to the embassy. At that time, we had a six-month-old daughter, and I would often find both of them under the window sill to protect themselves from bullets flying in every direction. Gunfire was coming from all sides, and the most treacherous shooters were

the USLA snipers of the Securitate, stationed on the rooftops of apartment buildings and official structures. In many cases, it was impossible to tell who was shooting!

How do you recall the moment of Ceausescu and his wife Elena's arrest and capture by the Army?

It was the day after Christmas, December 25, 1989, when we learned about Ceausescu's arrest. He and his wife, Elena, were stopped by an army roadblock near Targoviste. At that moment, the presidential couple was heading toward an airport in an attempt to flee Romania and seek political asylum in a friendly country.

Where did you learn about this news?

We learned the news and saw it on Romanian state television during the evening news broadcast. It was a dramatic moment to witness a former communist leader of a country with 25 million people emerge from the back of an armoured vehicle, followed by the most hated figure for Romanians — his wife, Elena Ceausescu.

How do you recall the trial and execution of the Ceausescu couple? How did you and your colleagues at the embassy react to what happened?

The trial of the dictator was a spectacle in itself, almost a farce, and it was widely criticized and questioned at the time. If I'm not mistaken, it took place either in a school or inside the facilities of a military unit, possibly in a classroom-like setting. A hastily assembled military tribunal presided over the proceedings. The charges included *"genocide"* and *"treason against the homeland,"* along with other typical accusations for a quick military trial or what was often referred to as a *"field court martial"* during that time.

Was there public debate and opposition in Romania about the swift trial of the Ceausescu couple?

Yes, there was significant debate about this rushed trial, both during those days and in the years that followed. Many questioned why the trial had to be so swift, why the execution was carried out so abruptly and why the process lacked proper deliberation. Romanian officials explained at the time that they felt compelled to conduct a quick trial and execution

to diffuse the chaos, tension and armed clashes that were escalating day by day. And, in fact, that's exactly what happened. After their execution, the resistance of regime supporters — mainly the few remaining hardline loyalists and the special units of the Securitate — diminished significantly and eventually disappeared altogether in the days that followed.

How did you feel personally about the trial and execution?

As diplomats, we observed the events unfolding with a mixture of amazement and reflection. The fall of a dictator and the end of a brutal regime left us considering the impact such events might have on Albania and other communist regimes in the region. The entire process felt surreal, not just for Romanians but for everyone who followed the dramatic and historic events of that December.

Did you receive any official reaction from Tirana after the execution of the Ceausescu couple? If so, what was it?

During this entire period of unfolding events, I recall that our Ministry of Foreign Affairs was very active, constantly sending instructions. Telegrams and letters arrived almost hourly, reminding us to *"be cautious and dignified in our stances, to maintain integrity and to hold our heads high before foreign diplomats,"* and similar directives. I specifically remember one telegram, which, if I'm not mistaken, bore the signature of either Reiz Malile or Sokrat Plaka. It read: *"Comrades, tighten your ranks. After Ceausescu's fall, Albania remains the last fortress of resistance against the imperialist offensive toward sovereign nations!"* There was a lot of drama in this telegram, which was read to us collectively as a way to *"give us strength and courage."*

How did you experience the moment when embassies in Albania opened six months after Ceausescu's fall?

The opening of embassies in July 1990 was an absolute shock for us. News of the embassies being opened in Tirana reached us sporadically at first. Initially, there was total silence from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but eventually, a few terse telegrams arrived, written in the typical terminology of the time.

What was communicated in those official telegrams?

The telegrams described the situation as: *"A group of discontents, citizens who do not represent Albanian society..."* It was phrased in a way that clearly conveyed uncertainty, disorientation and a certain level of fear. More detailed information, however, reached us through foreign news agencies or radio stations, especially those from neighbouring countries. It was through these sources that we gained a clearer picture of the scale and implications of the events in Albania. The tone of the telegrams reflected the regime's struggle to control the narrative and its fear of losing grip over the unfolding changes. For us in Bucharest, watching events in Albania from afar, it felt like the tide of history was finally beginning to shift.

What was happening at our embassy in Bucharest during those moments?

At our embassy, there was an atmosphere of uncertainty, which was amplified by the lack of reliable information about what was happening in Albania. Communication with our families back home wasn't easy during that time, and even when we did manage to talk to them, we received vague and general updates that often left us more confused than informed. The Albanian press, which arrived at the embassy with a two-day delay — mainly newspapers like *"Zëri i popullit," "Bashkimi," "Zëri i rinisë"* and a few magazines — provided no real clarity. Meanwhile, we were under constant pressure from questions posed by our fellow diplomats during receptions and cocktails. Our responses, however, were always evasive, ambiguous and often contradictory, reflecting the lack of concrete information we ourselves had.

How did you and your embassy colleagues react to the December 1990 demonstrations demanding political pluralism?

The events of December 1990 came as yet another shock to us at the embassy in Romania. For the embassy staff, being far from home made such events feel like a magnified mystery, wrapped in the absence of reliable information or surrounded by conflicting narratives — sometimes official, sometimes rumours and at other times outright fake news. The atmosphere was filled with tension and anxiety, as the developments in Albania seemed to reflect the broader collapse of one-party regimes across Eastern Europe.

What directives did the Ministry of Foreign Affairs send to you regarding these events?

The Ministry's telegrams regarding the December events were generally terse, reminding us to *"be cautious in our conversations with fellow diplomats, to act with restraint and not to share more information than what was officially provided by the centre."* The common theme in the messages we received was largely consistent. One of the telegrams stated: *"Attempts to violently overthrow the dictatorship of the proletariat. Remain at the appropriate professional level of your duties and representation of our state. Be cautious against potential provocations and exercise restraint in your conversations with the diplomatic corps."* We felt as though we were paralysed, operating in a fog of information blackout. We tried to break through this informational barrier using whatever tools and methods we could, but it was difficult to navigate the ambiguity and lack of clarity that characterized the situation. The whole embassy staff felt a mix of professional duty and personal concern for what was happening back home, as the news of unrest and protests painted a picture of profound change that we couldn't yet fully comprehend.

Having witnessed what happened in Romania, were you afraid of a similar scenario unfolding in communist Albania at the time?

I wouldn't say we were necessarily afraid of a repeat of the Romanian scenario, but there was certainly an overwhelming sense of uncertainty about how events would unfold in Albania. Everything seemed possible. Due to the lack of reliable information, it was difficult to conduct a detailed analysis of how things might develop in our country. It was equally challenging to make accurate predictions or draw parallels with what we had experienced in Romania just a year earlier.

How do you recall your departure from Romania and your return to Albania, considering that by 1991, the communist regime in Albania had effectively fallen?

I served as Secretary (Attaché) for Press and Culture at the embassy until early March 1991, when I returned to Rinas Airport — the same Rinas from where I had departed for Bucharest four years earlier. But this time, everything was entirely different.

What was your first impression upon returning to Albania?

My first impression upon returning home was striking. At Rinas Airport, I noticed a stark contrast to the past: where only two or three flights departed each week during the 1980s, I now saw the same planes being boarded by the first wave of Albanian traders carrying sports bags filled with scrap metal, clothing and other items bought in the markets of Romania, Hungary or Bulgaria. I also saw the first groups of Albanian refugees climbing the steps of the planes, dazed and frightened, accompanied by police officers — some in uniform, others not. It was a completely different Albania than the one I had left behind. What I experienced upon returning in March 1991 was a country in transition, a place deeply shaken, yet on the verge of profound change. It was both surreal and emotional to witness this new reality.

And today, after so many years since the revolts and bloody clashes in Romania, how do you analyse those events as a journalist and analyst?

The events in Romania were part of the domino effect sweeping through Eastern and Central Europe at the time. They were a specific manifestation of a broader phenomenon, but with unique characteristics compared to other Eastern Bloc countries. Even today, there are numerous mysteries surrounding the events of those days. For instance:

— What was the role of the Soviet embassy in Bucharest?

— Why did the overthrow in Romania have to happen with such violence?

— How is it that the leadership of post-communist Romania was filled with former members of Ceausescu’s Communist Party, led by Ion Iliescu?

— How can we explain that during Romania’s transitional period, many high government positions were taken by former communists, some of whom were educated in Soviet universities?

Then, there’s the role of the Romanian Army, which sided with the people, versus the Securitate — the secret police — which remained loyal to the Ceausescu regime until the very end. There’s also the mystery surrounding the suicide of Vasile Milea, the Minister of

Defence, who refused to order the Army to fire on the people. Like in any revolution or upheaval of this magnitude, many details remain undiscovered or shrouded in mystery. The events in Romania were no exception. Questions still linger about the dynamics of power, the motives behind certain decisions and the lasting influence of former communist elites. These mysteries remain an open chapter in Romania's history, wrapped in a puzzle that may never be fully unraveled. What is certain is that the Romanian revolution was one of the bloodiest and most dramatic in the wave of uprisings that swept Eastern Europe in 1989. It highlighted both the brutal desperation of a collapsing regime and the resilience of a people determined to break free. But the legacy of those days continues to provoke debate and reflection, both in Romania and beyond.

*(Translated from the Albanian original, a five-part series of articles beginning **here**)*