

# Moscow readies coup against Ceausescu

by Konstantin George

The Kremlin, egged on by the Soviet military high command, is moving to ensure that the days of Romania's rulers, Nicolae Ceausescu and his clan, are numbered. Whether caught asleep or mesmerized by the headlines of Geneva and the INF treaty, Western correspondents in Moscow missed, in the last two weeks of November, one of the biggest stories of the decade. Moscow is preparing a coup against Ceausescu, having decided that the Nov. 15 Brasov (formerly Kronstadt) riots, which exposed the instability of the Ceausescu regime, were the last straw.

The Brasov riots were no small affair. Hundreds were killed or wounded, butchered by Romanian interior ministry "special units," brought in along with Army units from the capital of Bucharest. Brasov was the biggest bloodletting inside the East bloc since the 1956 Hungarian uprising, and set off alarm bells in the Soviet defense ministry. Already in August when demonstrations against the Hitler-Stalin Pact erupted in the three Soviet Baltic "Republics" of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the military daily *Krasnaya Zvezda* was (unlike the civilian press) comparing the events to past "counterrevolutionary" troubles, listing Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968, and Poland 1980. In short, the Soviet military command was expecting big problems in the bloc.

This tip-off to Soviet General Staff pre-planning explains the speed with which the Soviet military responded to the Brasov riots. Only 48 hours later, Nov. 17, the Soviet defense ministry announced that a meeting of Warsaw Pact defense ministers would be held in Bucharest, Romania sometime "in the final 10 days of November." Warsaw Pact defense ministers' meetings in Bucharest are as rare as "hen's teeth."

More signals emerged in short order. Moscow scheduled the meeting for Nov. 24-26, and a day of bilateral talks between Soviet Defense Minister Dmitri Yazov and his Romanian counterpart, Col. Gen. Vasile Milea, on Nov. 23. The timing was exquisite. It coincided with Ceausescu's absence from Romania on a state visit to Egypt.

Before departing for Bucharest, Yazov huddled with the following figures in the Soviet military hierarchy: First Deputy Defense Minister Pyotr Lushev, Air Force Commander in Chief Yefimov, and two new deputy defense ministers appointed in June, Generals of the Army M.I. Sorokin and D.S. Sukhorukov. Sorokin and Sukhorukov have both played

key roles in the development of Soviet spetsnaz (special forces), air assault, and airborne forces in the past two decades. In short, the two figures in the defense ministry hierarchy who would be consulted on concrete contingency plans for an intervention. The same group met with Yazov when he returned from Bucharest.

The Bucharest meeting lasted three days. The time length betrayed the agenda: East bloc internal security, and "getting down to business" to make sure that the Romanian situation not get out of control, and thus not spill over into a very volatile and unstable East bloc situation as a whole. Warsaw Pact defense ministers' meetings never last more than a day, unless there is such an agenda. The three-day meeting signified the start of a "Romanian Crisis," as there had been a "Czech Crisis" in 1968, and a "Polish Crisis" in 1980.

The ludicrous communiqué published at the end of meeting declared that all the defense ministers "unanimously supported" the INF treaty, and "reaffirmed" the Warsaw Pact "defensive" doctrine put out at the May 1987 Warsaw Pact summit in East Berlin. As one British source said, with a rather raucous laugh, "So, they want us to believe that they needed three days to discuss the INF treaty and what they already stated in May? Who are they kidding?"

The defense ministers' meeting did not end the signals of the coup in the making. The day Yazov left Bucharest, Nov. 26, after a meeting with the newly returned Ceausescu, the head of the Soviet Armed Forces' Main Political Directorate, General of the Army A.D. Lizichev, arrived in Bucharest for talks with his Romanian counterpart, a member of the Ceausescu family.

## Polish hotspot

The prospects for disturbances in other East bloc countries, particularly in Poland, during the coming winter are very high. In Romania, the Brasov riots, which protested the lack of food and fuel, occurred even before winter set in. For Poland, the question now is, after voters rejected the government's "reform" package, including massive price increases, in the Nov. 29 referendum, will the government go ahead, and to what extent, with the planned price increases, scheduled to begin in December? Already in the first two days of December, demonstrations to protest the price increase program broke out in the Polish cities of Gdansk, Krakow, Lublin, and the steel center of Nowa Huta.

The austerity in Eastern Europe, slashing consumption to "accumulate" investment for industrial exports to Russia to fuel the Soviet *perestroika* industrial modernization and war economy growth program, is already severe. Moscow knows it runs the risk of major disturbances by continuing such a course, but, will, if necessary, repeat the military interventions of the past, to maintain the *perestroika*. The coming coup against Ceausescu not only has the goal of "solving" the "Romanian Crisis," but of serving as a lesson to other budding crises in the Captive Nations of the Russian Empire.