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The Purity of the Romanian Soul...

Obie Moore
USA

I'm here since 1992, prior to that I've made my first trip here in 1990, I was an official observer from USA at the elections, I was practising law at Washington D.C. and I was a member of something called The International Human Rights Law Group, I was a member pro bono, attorneys of private practice willing to spend time for a greater good if you will, if you can remember when the Berlin wall fell in November 1989 many people in Washington D.C. were caught by surprise, they were ill prepared for that event and necessary responses to it at the time George Bush senior was the president and there wasn't a lot of a media for public money to be devoted, so the public sector hires private persons. I was single and not married, I then came to Romania with three other lawyers that made an objective and balanced report about the elections here in Romania and it was much more critical than US government saw these things. At that time were very few people in Washington DC knowing more about Romania so for the next two years when someone from Romania would come to Washington I would get invited to the reception, to the round tables, so quite a few well known names in Romania that times visited US, so intentionally Romania became my interest. Living in Washington I was always interested in public policies, international affairs, there were a

little bit my hobby. I was appointed to come to Romania because a few people in Washington were interested in Romania, it was a greater interest in Hungary, Poland or Czech republic. I grew up in Texas where the ethnic diversity was really based on the Latin influence and so the Mexican Americans, as we called them *tachanos* in Texas, where my ethnic diversity and I had three years of Spanish and learned much things about Latin cultures, and so I just said Romania is supposed to be a Latin island in a Slavic sea. I have read, so they were quick to accept a willing volunteer for Romania. It was an extraordinary education about the country to come here and travel around the country for two weeks, to observe the elections prior to and after, you learn a lot. I come back again to Romania in September 1990. Then I had two objectives: one was business and the other was continuing my human rights work. It had been the June *mineriada* and there were 51 students who have disappeared, they were arrested, they put them in jail. There was a great concern how these 51 persons were arrested. The International Human Rights Law Group wanted to deploy someone to Romania to come in September 1990 to investigate this. Petre Mihai Băcanu had discovered a mass-grave at Straulesti cemetery. I was deployed along with a medical examiner from Chicago to come to

take photos of those persons burried there to determine whether or not this could be students. The photos were taken back to Chicago to be examined by experts trying to determine the kind of death of these persons, the cause of death. But there were inconclusive, the overall assessment was that it couldn't be a relation between those bodies and the students dissapeared when the miners came into town. So it was all this controversy about the comitment of the National Salvation Front for the values of democracy. That was my start here and I also attended that time a state oil company, they had in Bucharest in September 1990 the first oil and gas consesions conference with their offers to oil companies to consider. That was also an education-al experience for

me travelling all around the Carpetians looking at all those geological formations. Then I lost my enthusiasm, going at the Straulesti cimetry was a very difficult and unpleasent thing...Someone says that you always know, you can understand the level of civilization of a country by going and visiting their prisons and morgues, and this was not a pleasent place to be.... Then assistence money were started to be appropriate in Washington, money was made available to... I have three offers to come to Romania as a consultant because even it was a difficult experience during 1991. So I decided to come to Romania, I accept a consulting contract, basically was an institution building programme, rule of the law, focusing on building the NGO sector, civil society...and I travelled around the country organizing various



meeting among civic leaders of all sides. One of the problems was to elevate the NGO at the level of prefect, they never been in the same room together, so they can talk openly, identify the problems, identify means and resources. I remember Sighișoara, Iași, Sibiu, Baia-Mare, Salonta, Brașov, Galați, Arad, provoking people just to say... the message was that the Americans won't come and set things for you, you have to decide thing for you, this is democracy, you have the

responsibility of saying... your grandfathers were on different sides but now you have to find ways to associate based on your common interest and this was a kind of social exercise.

I saw all kind of people, generally speaking what I sensed was a very fundamental need to exersice their minds, their bod-

ies, their thoughts... they were never permitted previously, to... really even openly consider, to think about they certenly didn't think about and now all of a sudden here an american standing in front of this people saying: tell me what you really think about, tell me what are your concerns about, what are the problems, how we achieve solutions. I had much compassion for this people at that time it was as if they had been kept in a little box unable to move and all of a sudden they were released from the box. Well, may be you get out for a while but you are still set in that corpse position, even now the box has been removed, because, you now, somehow the box has become comfortable, or that position was the single comfortable, and now people are saying, you can move your arms, you can move

your legs, you're free to move about, and go where you want to go, and is uncomfortable for some people to have to do that, many of them had already just said "this box is my destiny, I don't really want to get out, don't make me get out". So many of them were afraid, and even angry that they have been forced to come out, because somehow their children or dependents that were responsible for... those who didn't ... those who were described as lost generation, they were mentally gave up, tunned out. All of this change was too much to absorb and assimilate. Particularly pensioners were mentally gave up. So it was very difficult, because changes are painful for all of us, even in United States... I saw people quiet for hours during those meetings and eventually their emotions were just boil up and finally they would say something in response to a question, they just poured out all of this toxic anger. So that's why if you ever try to organize a very tight seminar of active discussions, they never do it, because people would never ask questions, they would make commentaries and speeches and so on. But that was OK. They needed to do that, they need a sort of omens to get these things out and to feel their words themselves. I grew up in a country where you're always permitted to do all of these. People say: persons from developed democracies take their rights for granted... we do, we do, but we've learn. The other thing that I saw is related to market economy, decision making is that not growing up in a culture where you are constantly, as a child even making choice about values, your parents would give a quarter or a twenty-five cents and say... OK you can go to the store and you can buy whatever you want but you just have a quarter and you, you would have to make that decision, as a six years old child and you will be looking to see how much does it cost and so on. And sometimes you come home and you would say this candy is not very good, I've made the wrong choice, I should have got that other one, I knew that my brother got this one, in fact I want his and mummy, mummy I want his, no,

no, you've made your choice, that's your choice, you have to live with this. That was not part of the culture here.

That was an extraordinary opportunity to observe these things and I still have wonderful momentos from these events, people coming to you... because these were people that an ambassador wouldn't have time to get to have extensive discussions. During that time I met my wife, she is Romanian. It was the last thing I was thinking about, but for me it was, you know, at first sight, I just said... At that time I wasn't socialized with the Romanians. It was a policy of nonfraternization at that time when I met my wife, because the Securitate files have not been opened for the US government every Romanian was a potential for the Romanian securitate and so when I was first seen with my wife, in december 1992, at the American school, the next morning I was called into the embassy to say I saw you with that Romanian woman, don't you know that you are violating the non fraternisation policy?! And I said, scuse me, I'm not a diplomate, I don't have diplomatic imunity here in Romania, I'm a consultant, a contractor, contracting with the USID, but, I said, if I got the responsibilities to act within the duties of a diplomate give me the benefits of that, give the diplomatic imunity, give me access to the US commissary, where we can go and buy. Back on those days western products were not available, the embassy brought overall of these specialized products, you know Coca-Cola, potato cheaps, and all the necessities that Americans had to have, give me access to that, give me diplomatic imunity, give me access to the overseas mail... anyway, I was permitted to socialise with my wife. We ended that getting married, a year and a half later. We have been married ten years, have two kids.

I say I marry the first Romanian woman that would go out with me... She came because she was recommended by someone for me to hire, I was looking for an assistant... I just said I do not want... I have other plans, so I convinced her

would rather work to somebody else, rather working for me. She went to work for The American Bar Association which had a project here that I knew. So we got on these projects travelling around the country, she travelled with me because The American Bar Association had a program here trying to implement rule of law programs, we were working with the magistrats schools to train judges and so on...She was very much a part of all of these efforts. You know, I look back and I wonder why I had such a connection with the Romanian people... I guess coming here in 1990 after the falling of the dictatorship... when you were talking with the ladies you saw how bright and talented and gifted they were and very attractive people, and you just saw that great injustice that had held these people back so many years under this personality cult of the Ceausescu regime... When I was touring Casa Poporului I've got in mind that megalomania and you say "My goodness how could someone use the resources of the country for something like this". When an average person couldn't find a banana to buy on the street...

In Romania everything has been forced to accelerate, accelerate, accelerate and you can see why have been some problems. Let me give you a quick example from my lawyers. In early days that I was here, let's say 1990-1995 many laws were enacted here in Romania concerning privatization, to facilitate taxation based on western standards and norms. In all democracies laws are passing through a normal parliamentary process, through a debate and you establish what are the public policy of the country, and then you establish what is the legislative policy that you are going to take, and this is done by the Parliament. This takes time to evolve. Romania didn't have that opportunity to debate all the laws in order to be fully understood by all the parliamentarians. All these laws were drafted by foreigners, by experts who said: "This is a very good law based on the Treaty of Rome, based upon the US Taxation Law, Italian Commercial Law, Napoleon Code... and all these laws were al-

most forced to be implemented without any role of the democratic debate and understanding of the laws. So, then when you try to enforce these laws upon Romanian businessmen and people they would say: "What is this law, I don't know anything about it, this law doesn't apply to me, I didn't participate in the development of this law, this is a law written by the foreigners, let the foreigners comply with it. I operated my business here during the communist days and I'll continue to operate my business and these laws have nothing to do with me, and my company.

Romanians are fascinating people to me... You got this Caragiale cynicism and irony... and Mircea Eliade, and the poetry of Romania, the grand poets and so you see the both sides of the Romanian behaviour. People who are proud of the old Romanian virtues, then you get this sort of irreverence side with Romanians making ironical humour about everything... but, you know, I think, from my point of view, from an American point of view, because the Americans are so pragmatic, even so boring compared to the Europeans... but, you know, we don't have all the baggage of the history, you see. Whenever is a problem Americans come together and... I don't need to know what was your grandfather, or what my grandfather was and we're able to come together for short period of time and solve a common problem and do it in the most efficient way possible on the planet. We move quickly, we say these are the common denominators, this is the goal, how do you get from point A to point B... So we Americans with the transatlantic problems going on perhaps we need to be more sophisticated about this than we are and this is a real disappointment to me as a person, because there are so many Americans that are very European minded and they could have done a better job after 9/11 events, being more inclusive...OK it's a terrific tragedy that US is going through... and this changed US in a way that is irreversible...It's a very sad, sad realization that we need to have those restrictions of rights because of all these security threats and concerns.

I think there is a sense about the Romanian mind set from Mircea Eliade to Caragiale, that both of them, in some way, are very intellectually appealing to the mind. But, by just focusing on that in some people's mind in Romania, it became a diversion from accepting responsibility about your future, that becomes almost so cynically, or so idealistic and pure that both of them somehow allow people to escape from the responsibilities, allow them to avoid responsibility, because there is a sense... that you can't accomplish, you can't make a difference, so you're entertaining yourself with a sort of idyllic setting of village life which is wonderful, by the way, I admire the Romanian villages. But in terms of leadership that Romania need now and this is the point where I'm starting to see the people understand that they can't accept benefits without accepting responsibilities. I think that those two... writers and poets which are part of developing of the Romanian mind, and the Romanian people... we really need some other dimensions to come forward now to lead us into the next more mature European culture. Because you're changing dramatically as well with this expansion of UE. When you seat back and again you recognize how far Romania has come... and recognize just even further in Romania what the history of Romanian people, Romanian language, or state always has been gradualist. In fact Romania is a young country, I mean in terms of what is the modern day Romania state.

So, my point is that Romania has always been a gradual evolution country and this is why the reform period for Romania should actually been anyway different, because Romania has been a gradualist in terms of it's reforms during the nineties. They tried to please everybody.

I'm rather positive about the evolution of Romania, I think it's a wonderful country, the villages here, the people there, you know the hospitality of the Romanian people... I try to say to the foreigners when they try to understand Romania that the people is nice, is latin, with a latin language. Is the single latin country in the

world which is not catholic, it's orthodox. You can feel that, the culture, the history here is a kind of compromise to do away with this Cyrillic alphabet, to have a Latin alphabet, but we not gonna be catholic, we gonna be orthodox to again try to accommodate and compromise as many of the powers allow them to be... and this is very instructive... even today looking to the foreign policy or to public policy, legislative policy, how you get resources and built common interest among different groups, you can see and understand the meaning of this history.

Every society in order to be successful has to take care of widows and orphan and are many widows and orphans in this country. Specifically speaking, the idea is to be more inclusive, we have to have this sort of responsibility. On the other side I think it's that notion of governance, we the people, what Romania needs is a more of a sense of... that the political culture here where the voting population has the power needs to be taken more serious.

Someone said one time that at one minute you can be completely disgusted, a horrible taste that you see something very unappealing but next moment you can have such a joy because you see something that is completely to the other end of the human spectrum. I think I've seen a lot of these moments, small moments of human purity, purity of the Romanian soul, particularly in the arts and in music, people who play just for the passion of the music, people who paint... They do what they do without any consideration of their work in the free market. This is for me as American... that purity is something that amaze me... These are noble actions.

*Mr. Moore was so kind to answer to my questions which were eliminated in the process of transcription in order to let only his remarks to be read

Interview by Mihai Gheorghiu