



# The Romanian Revolution of December 1989

By Peter Siani-Davies

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The Romanian Revolution of 1989 was the most spectacularly violent and remains today the most controversial of all the East European upheavals of that year. Despite (or perhaps because of) the media attention the revolution received, it remains shrouded in mystery. How did the seemingly impregnable Ceausescu regime come to be toppled so swiftly and how did Ion Iliescu and the National Salvation Front come to power? Was it by coup d'état? Who were the mysterious "terrorists" who wreaked such havoc on the streets of Bucharest and the other major cities of Romania? Were they members of the notorious securitate? What was the role of the Soviet Union? Blending narrative with analysis, Peter Siani-Davies seeks to answer these and other questions while placing the events and their immediate aftermath within a wider context. Based on fieldwork conducted in Romania and drawing heavily on Romanian sources, including television and radio transcripts, official documents, newspaper reports, and interviews, this book is the most thorough study of the Romanian Revolution that has appeared in English or any other major European language. Recognizing that a definitive history of these events may be impossible, Siani-Davies focuses on the ways in which participants interpreted the events according to particular scripts and myths of revolution rooted in the Romanian historical experience. In the process the author sheds light on the ways in which history and the conflicting retellings of the 1989 events are put to political use in the transitional societies of Eastern Europe.

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### **Review**

"Siani-Davies has reconstructed the rush of events during these three revolutionary weeks literally hour by hour. The effect is to draw the reader in as if he or she were there, while at the same time soaring above and viewing the overall flow and structure of a revolution. In short, Siani-Davies has done more than provide an exceedingly fine-grained account of the overthrow of the Ceausescu regime; he has given students of revolution an example with all the inner mechanics exposed."?Foreign Affairs, September/October 2005

"Among the Communist governments in eastern Europe that collapsed, nowhere was the overthrow as violent and blood as in the Romanian revolution of 1989, which cost more than 1,000 lives. Peter Siani-Davies, utilizing a wide variety of Romanian sources, has written a detailed history of the revolution that brought the overthrow of the Communist government in Romania and the execution of Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena on Christmas Day, 1989."?Keith Eubank, The Virginia Quarterly Review

"Here is a remarkable portal to a crossroad in contemporary politics for Romanian aficionados and Cold War history buffs. Peter Siani-Davies touches western and southern urban locales in focusing on the immediate background and aftermath of Nicolae Ceausescu's overthrow. He critically assesses evidence gleaned from Romanian newspapers and offers probabilities and possibilities for matters still awaiting the disclosure of primary records."?Frederick Kellogg, Slavic Review, Summer 2006

"Splendidly researched and compellingly argued, this book is an original and persuasive contribution to our understanding of the collapse of Ceausescu's dictatorship, the December 1989 revolutionary upheaval, and the difficult birth of democracy in Romania. It is mandatory reading for all those interested in a luminously sophisticated approach to the myths and realities of the Romanian Revolution."?Vladimir Tismaneanu, University of Maryland, author of Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism

"Finally, a near-definitive account of how Ceausescu fell! This fascinating book shows that this was indeed a classic revolution. It was violent, mass based, and it deeply transformed Romania. Peter Siani-Davies has made a valuable addition to the analytic literature on mass political movements. Impeccably documented and reasoned, his book will provide comparative students of revolution enormous amounts of material. We rarely get such detailed accounts of how various leaders, factions, and ordinary people are swept up in chaotic circumstances they often do not quite understand. In Romania, the outcome was deliverance from a stultifying tyranny, but this study makes it clear that chance and human errors play a role in determining outcomes, though underlying structural and historical factors ultimately count even more."?Daniel Chirot, Senior Fellow, United States Institute of Peace

### **From the Back Cover**

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#### About the Author

Peter Siani-Davies is Director of the Centre for South-East European Studies and Senior Lecturer in Modern South-East European Studies, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London. He is the coauthor of Romania (revised edition) and editor of International Intervention in the Balkans since 1995.

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