

Exchange With Reporters in Bucharest July 11, 1997

President's Visit

Q. What did you buy at the Peasant's Museum?

The President. I bought just a representative sample of the things that were there.

Q. What did you think of the reception?

The President. It was amazing. It was truly amazing. I can't imagine how many people were there, because there were people, when I drove up, in blocks that had been blocked off by the police, who were way back, weren't even visible from the stage. There were a lot of people there.

Q. Were you surprised by the warmth?

The President. Well, I was surprised by the size and intensity of the crowd. I knew that the Romanian people—my friend Mr. Moses here keeps me updated, and I knew that they were very friendly toward America. And keep in mind, they really did suffer more in the recent past than any other people under any of the other Communist governments—I mean, what they went through here to gain their liberty. You saw behind the stage today—the President and I were before the cross there, and that cross marks the place where people were actually killed when they threw off the previous government. So I think that the price they paid is very fresh in their minds.

Romania and NATO

Q. Mr. President—[inaudible].

The President. They're a very impressive people. And I do believe if they keep going, they'll make it, just like I said. They've just begun in the last year or so, and they have an enormous undertaking with their economy. But if you look at the rich resources and the fact that the people here are very well educated, I'd say they have an excellent chance, a really good chance.

Q. Did they express disappointment? Were they frustrated?

The President. Oh, I think of course they were disappointed. But I think they also—the leaders have managed this very well, and they talked very frankly to the people and said—well, you heard what the President said today. NATO is a part of their larger strategy. And as long as

they see that we're all still on the same page with the larger strategy, that we want them integrated into the West, we want their democracy to flourish, we want their economy to do well, and that if they keep going the way they're going, they will certainly be qualified for NATO membership. And everybody—100 percent of us in Madrid agreed that one of the things that we wanted was to have some more membership from the southern flank, because of the problems that are likely to develop in this region in the years ahead.

Q. By NATO's test, where is their area needing greatest improvement, the economy?

The President. Well, I think for one thing, when a country assumes the responsibilities of membership, you want to be—[inaudible]—hopefully, would even be helpful because of the extra psychological boost it gives.

So Poland and the Czech Republic and Hungary, they've all been through that roller coaster that the economists call the J-curve, where you undertake the reforms, there's a drop in economic output, people suffer, they go through it, they bottom out, and then they start coming back. And they've been through that. So you don't want to impose on a country big, new external burdens while they're going through that. But on the other hand, you don't want to take away the hope that these people have waited decades for.

Martin Luther King, Jr., Assassination Investigation

Q. Mr. President, what do you think about the King bullets not matching the James Earl Ray rifle?

The President. I'm sorry, I don't know—you're the first person who's asked me that. I haven't been briefed about it.

Q. The test results show that the markings do not match.

The President. I'll review it.

NOTE: The exchange began at 7:06 p.m. at the Village Museum. In his remarks, the President referred to Alfred H. Moses, U.S. Ambassador to Romania. A reporter referred to convicted assassin James Earl Ray. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.