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Summary:

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ROMANIA
6 June, 1972

ROMANIA, ISRAEL AND THE ARABS

Her Majesty's Ambassador at Bucharest to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

SUMMARY

Mrs. Meir's visit to Romania is a classic illustration of Romania's independent foreign policy. (Paragraph 1.)

2. Since the Six-day War Romania has been the only Communist State in diplomatic relations with Israel, and played a significant and helpful role during the discussions preceding the Security Council Resolution of November 1967. (Paragraphs 2–5.)

3. After 1967 relations between Romania and the parties to the dispute were in a low key until diplomatic representation in Bucharest and Tel Aviv was raised from legation to embassy in August 1969, a move which annoyed the Arabs—to the apparent surprise of the Romanians. From that time relations with Israel developed steadily and Mrs. Meir's visit may be seen as a culmination of the process. Trade between the two countries has steadily increased, although the balance is heavily in Romania's favour. The Jewish community in Romania and the population in Israel of Romanian origin provide an emotional tie between the two countries. (Paragraphs 6–9.)

4. Mrs. Meir's visit also has a significance in the wider context of the Middle East situation. (Paragraph 10.)

5. The decision to invite Mrs. Meir was probably based on several motives. It was an attempt to right the balance following Romania's rapprochement towards Egypt; it was also intended to promote bilateral relations and it was a dramatic way of demonstrating Romania's independence. (Paragraph 11.)

6. Mrs. Meir's visit not surprisingly produced little concrete results as far as the Arab/Israeli dispute is concerned. But it cemented bilateral relations and drew attention to Romania in a dramatic way. At the same time it upset the Egyptians. Future developments are speculative at the moment. The Romanians will have a hard time treading a middle path between Arabs and Israelis. (Paragraphs 12–14.)

Bucharest,
6 June, 1972.

(Confidential)

Sir,

Now that the dust has settled after the visit of Mrs. Golda Meir to Romania it is perhaps a suitable moment to offer some reflections on the state of relations between Romania and Israel and on Romania's attitude towards the Arab/Israeli dispute. From our point of view in Bucharest, the chief interest in the

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Romanians' policy in this field is that it provides a classic illustration of Romania's much vaunted independent foreign policy in action. On other main international crises Romania's attitudes, although distinguished by nuances from those of other Communist countries, are not seriously out of line with them. For example on Viet-Nam Romania follows the policy pursued by the Soviet Union and her other Warsaw Pact allies, with nods in the direction of China. On the Indo/Pakistan dispute Romania was at odds with the Soviet Union but in practical terms at least was in line with China. But in the case of the Arab/Israeli dispute Romania's policy is at odds both with the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact and with China not to mention Yugoslavia. Romania is in fact at the present time the only Communist State to have diplomatic relations with Israel.

2. The origin of the curious position in which Romania now finds herself is the Six-day War of June 1967. Prior to that the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact States were in full diplomatic relations with Israel. The Soviet Union in particular was one of the first States in the world to recognise Israel in 1948, although relations had deteriorated in later years.

3. Immediately after the outbreak of the Six-day War Romania began to diverge from the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact countries. In the middle of the hostilities, on 11 June, the Romanian Party and Government issued a declaration expressing deep concern about events and saying that the use of armed force was no way to solve disputes between countries. But the declaration carefully avoided fixing blame upon one side or the other. The only villains, according to the statement, were the Imperialists. In that statement, and consistently thereafter, the Romanians called for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied territories, but they have always avoided distinguishing the Israelis as aggressors. The declaration was subsequently circulated as a Security Council document. As the Soviet Union and other Communist countries hastened to break off relations with Israel the Romanians carefully maintained their position of neutrality between the Arabs and the Israelis.

4. In the following months Romania was able to play a role on the international scene; a role which was generally denied to the other Communist countries because of their uncompromisingly pro-Arab policies. When a conference of Communist countries was called on the Middle East on 9 June, 1967, Romania had refused to sign the common declaration issued at the end of the conference and had strongly taken the line that only peaceful negotiations could possibly settle the Arab/Israeli dispute. On 24 July, 1967, President Ceaușescu explained Romania's position by saying that Romania had no special interest in the Middle East, that as friends of the Arab people Romania had always manifested her solidarity and supported their aspirations for unity and progress, but that the Romanians wished the Arabs to know that they did not understand and did not share the position of those circles speaking in favour of the liquidation of the State of Israel.

5. The Romanians were active in the UN in support of efforts to secure a compromise, and Lord Caradon, at that time our Permanent Representative to the UN, acknowledged the hard work done by the Romanians, particularly the Foreign Minister himself, to ensure the passage of Security Council Resolution No. 242 of 22 November, 1967.

6. In the ensuing years relations between Romania and the parties to the Arab/Israeli dispute continued in a fairly low key. But a new crisis point arose in August, 1969, when the Romanians and the Israelis took the decision to raise the level of diplomatic representation in Bucharest and Tel Aviv from Legation

to Embassy. The Arab countries represented here were not surprisingly indignant. Both Egypt and Iraq withdrew their Ambassadors, without however closing down their Embassies, while the Sudan and Syria broke relations altogether. The Arab reaction to the Romanian decision seems to have come as a shock to the Romanians. This is no great surprise since the Romanians seem to be more than usually insensitive to the feelings of others. The recent postponement of the President's visit to Japan at the last minute, which understandably has aroused my Japanese colleague to considerable anger (no doubt reflected in Tokyo) is a further example of Romanian failure to appreciate the effects of their actions on others. It also seems clear that the invitation to Mrs. Meir to visit Bucharest so soon after Ceauşescu's visit to Egypt aroused resentment in at least some Egyptian circles (*vide* Heikal's very strong anti-Romanian article). At all events the Romanians reacted indignantly to the actions of the Arab countries mentioned above and denounced them as interference in Romania's internal affairs.

7. The upgrading of diplomatic relations with Israel, however, was not the signal for a sudden increase in contacts between the two countries. But it did represent a sealing of relations between them, and contacts at all levels went on increasing at a steady rate. Mrs. Meir's visit may be seen as the culmination of this process. Leaving aside for the moment the wider political implications of the visit it is reasonable to say that, judging by the criteria which Romania applies to her relations with other countries, purely bilateral affairs now have enough solid content to justify a meeting between Heads of Government in order to lay down a framework for broadening and deepening still further the relationship between the two countries.

8. The most tangible aspect of Israeli/Romanian bilateral relations, because it can be expressed statistically, is of course trade. In this field it is noteworthy that the volume of trade in both directions between Romania and Israel has risen from 67 million Lei Valuta in 1967 to 198 million in 1970. Moreover, although it is still only a small proportion of Romania's foreign trade, this does represent an increase from 0·4 per cent to 0·9 per cent of Romania's total foreign trade. At the moment the balance is heavily in Romania's favour; of the 1970 figure no less than 138 million Lei Valuta represents Romanian exports to Israel. And these statistics do not include the quantities of oil which pass through the Eilat–Ashkelon pipeline.

9. A further important and emotive factor in the relations between the two countries is the sizeable Jewish community still in Romania on the one hand and on the other the large element in the Israeli population which is of Romanian origin. The latter element is in fact large enough to sustain a Romanian-language Press; Romanian is apparently one of the few languages other than Hebrew used in Israeli publishing. Estimates as to the size of the Jewish community in Romania now vary. At the same time of Mrs. Meir's visit the *Jerusalem Post* claimed that the community here numbered some 150,000 of whom 50,000 lived in Bucharest. Mr. Bodnaraş, the First Vice-President, in a recent talk with me put it at 100,000. The Israeli Embassy here also say that it is around 100,000, though we have seen estimates as low as 75,000. The community of course was much larger before the war, and although there were few deportations from the southern part of the country, the Jews in northern Maramureş and Bucovina suffered heavily during the war. Immediately after 1945 there was fairly large-scale emigration to Israel, but this has now slowed down considerably. It is difficult to estimate how many of the Jews now left in Romania would like to leave—and the Israeli Embassy is reticent on this subject—but there is little doubt that a significant proportion would go if they could, not least because

most of them have relations already in Israel. There is in addition a constant flow of visitors from Israel to Romania who appear to come and go without hindrance. We are also told by the Israeli Embassy that Israelis originating from other East European countries visit Romania for reunions with their families, who can get permission to travel to Romania but not to Israel.

10. So much for bilateral relations. But Mrs. Meir's visit cannot be seen only in that light and both countries are clearly fully aware of its significance in the wider context of the Middle East situation. The visit was almost certainly not the first occasion for discussion between the two countries on other than purely bilateral matters. Mr. Macovescu, the First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, has been to Israel several times and Mr. Rafael, Director-General of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has visited Bucharest. They have also met together elsewhere on at least two occasions. Each contact between Romania and Israel has been accompanied by rumours that Romania was in some way intervening in the Arab/Israeli dispute. While the suggestion that Romania might act as mediator has constantly been rejected by both sides, it would be very strange if the Arab/Israeli dispute had not been discussed on these earlier occasions and the Romanian point of view put forward, with the further thought behind all this that Romania might at some stage be well placed to play a more active part. Romania has a legitimate interest in Mediterranean affairs because of her geographical proximity to the Middle East, her growing imports of oil from the Persian Gulf and her developing relations with a number of Arab States. She is also unique among the Communist countries, not excluding Yugoslavia, because of her ability to speak to both sides.

11. The actual decision to invite Mrs. Meir to Romania was probably based on a number of motives. Partly it represented an attempt to right the balance following the various Romanian moves to improve relations with Egypt culminating in Ceauşescu's successful visit to Cairo. It has been suggested too that the Israelis were worried at the mounting evidence that the Romanians were moving closer to the Egyptians. The Israeli Embassy here, however, tends to pooh-pooh such suggestions and say they have no fears about Romania's position. In fact the Israeli Embassy have always been remarkably sanguine about Romanian policy—which suggests that in private they may have received some solid assurances of Romanian sympathy. It the opinions expressed by Mr. Bodnaraş as reported in my Savingram No. 2 of 26 May are typical of the higher Romanian leadership, it is more than probable that the Israelis have in fact received such assurances. The visit could be justified in part by the need to promote bilateral relations. But more important than either of these, at least from the Romanian angle, I feel was the consideration that the invitation was a dramatic way of demonstrating yet again that Romania has an independent policy, based on principles consistently applied, which enables her to play a responsible and valuable role in world affairs. The more she can establish this position, the more difficult, her leaders would argue, does it become for the Soviet Union to treat her as a satellite to whom the Brezhnev doctrine can be applied with impunity.

12. I have already reported the results of Mrs. Meir's visit as presented to me by the Israeli Ambassador in my telegram No. 161 of 11 May. If the Ambassador was honest with me, it is clear that there was no major Romanian attempt at mediation in the Arab/Israeli dispute this time. On the other hand President Ceauşescu seems to have gone out of his way to convey the impression to the world at large that Romania was playing some role as intermediary between the Egyptians and the Israelis, and this would be consistent with the

assessment of Romanian motives in the previous paragraph. Not surprisingly, however, he has come up against the same attitudes from both sides which have already frustrated more powerful world figures than himself. As far as the Arab/Israeli dispute is concerned, the visit of Mrs. Meir to Romania seems to have made little difference, and if the Romanians are at all realistic they cannot have expected dramatic results. But in terms of their other aims, they may feel more satisfied. The visit marked an important step forward in the cementing of relations between Romania and Israel. It also undoubtedly made others sit up and take notice, it drew attention to Romania again in a manner similar to that achieved by Ceaușescu's visit to China this time last year.

13. But it also had its reverse side. It cannot have been other than a blow to the Egyptians. Indeed members of the Egyptian Embassy here had indicated even immediately after Ceaușescu's visit to Cairo, with all its apparent goodwill, that the Egyptians were less than pleased with Romanian attitudes towards the Arab/Israeli dispute. They had noted with some concern, for instance, the statements about the dispute which Ceaușescu had made during his African peregrinations.

14. How matters will develop is largely a matter of speculation at the moment. Romania's relations with Iraq and Libya, which are tied up with the questions of oil exploitation and delivery, may influence matters as much as her direct contacts with Israel and Egypt. Her position in these respects is further complicated by the recent nationalisation of the Iraq Petroleum Company and of BP's assets in Libya at a time when Romania is simultaneously seeking to develop wide ranging co-operation with Shell and possibly BP as well. Moreover, in her anxiety to tread a middle path between the Arabs and the Israelis Romania may well have underestimated both the Egyptian capacity for taking offence at any evidence that Romania was not 100 per cent pro-Arab and the Israeli ability to exploit any mildly pro-Israeli sentiment to the maximum. For the moment at least Romania remains uneasily poised. She has bought off the Egyptians with a generous credit and given the Israelis considerable pleasure by inviting Mrs. Meir to Bucharest. But like everyone else with interests in the Middle East she is likely to find the going increasingly difficult and complicated. She is going to have to face some difficult choices and it would be surprising if she did not get some fingers burned in the process. The one thing which is clear is that Romania has demonstrated once again her capacity for individual action, and that for her leaders is probably sufficient justification.

15. I am sending a copy of this despach to Her Majesty's Representatives *in Tel Aviv, Cairo, Amman, Beirut, Moscow, Budapest, Prague, Warsaw, Sofia, Belgrade, Washington, Paris, Brussels, Rome, The Hague, Jerusalem and UKMIS New York.*

I have, etc.,

D. R. ASHE.

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