

In Europe's Shadow: Two Cold Wars and a Thirty-Year Journey Through Romania and Beyond

By Robert D. Kaplan

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From the *New York Times* bestselling author Robert D. Kaplan, named one of the world's Top 100 Global Thinkers by *Foreign Policy* magazine, comes a riveting journey through one of Europe's frontier countries—and a potent examination of the forces that will determine Europe's fate in the postmodern age.

Robert Kaplan first visited Romania in the 1970s, when he was a young journalist and the country was a bleak Communist backwater. It was one of the darkest corners of Europe, but few Westerners were paying attention. What ensued was a lifelong obsession with a critical, often overlooked country—a country that, today, is key to understanding the current threat that Russia poses to Europe. *In Europe's Shadow* is a vivid blend of memoir, travelogue, journalism, and history, a masterly work thirty years in the making—the story of a journalist coming of age, and a country struggling to do the same. Through the lens of one country, Kaplan examines larger questions of geography, imperialism, the role of fate in international relations, the Cold War, the Holocaust, and more.

Here Kaplan illuminates the fusion of the Latin West and the Greek East that created Romania, the country that gave rise to Ion Antonescu, Hitler's chief foreign accomplice during World War II, and the country that was home to the most brutal strain of Communism under Nicolae Ceau?escu. Romania past and present are rendered in cinematic prose: the ashen faces of citizens waiting in bread lines in Cold War–era Bucharest; the B?r?gan Steppe, laid bare by centuries of foreign invasion; the grim labor camps of the Black Sea Canal; the majestic Gothic church spires of Transylvania and Maramure?. Kaplan finds himself in dialogue with the great thinkers of the past, and with the Romanians of today, the philosophers, priests, and politicians—those who struggle to keep the flame of humanism alive in the era of a resurgent Russia.

Upon his return to Romania in 2013 and 2014, Kaplan found the country transformed yet again—now a traveler's destination shaped by Western tastes, yet still emerging from the long shadows of Hitler and Stalin. *In Europe's Shadow* is the story of an ideological and geographic frontier—and the book you must read in order to truly understand the crisis Europe faces, from Russia and

from within.

Praise for *In Europe's Shadow*

"[A] haunting yet ultimately optimistic examination of the human condition as found in Romania . . . Kaplan's account of the centuries leading up to the most turbulent of all—the twentieth—is both sweeping and replete with alluring detail."**—Alison Smale, *The New York Times Book Review***

"This book reveals the confident, poetical Kaplan . . . but also a reflective, political Kaplan, seeking at times to submerge his gift for romantic generalization in respectful attention to the ideas of others."**—Timothy Snyder, *The Washington Post***

"A serious yet impassioned survey of Romania . . . Kaplan is a regional geographer par excellence."***—The Christian Science Monitor***

"Kaplan is one of America's foremost writers on the region. . . . In a series of deep dives into the region's past—Byzantine, Ottoman, Habsburg and Soviet—he finds parallels and echoes that help us understand the present."***—The Wall Street Journal***

"Kaplan moves seamlessly from sights, sounds, and conversations to the resonance of history."***—Foreign Affairs***

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Editorial Review

Review
"[A] haunting yet ultimately optimistic examination of the human condition as found in Romania . . . The author delves into the ancient roots of Romania's culture and religion. . . . [Robert D.] Kaplan's account of the centuries leading up to the most turbulent of all—the twentieth—is both sweeping and replete with alluring detail. . . . The rich characters who wander through these pages . . . dispense wisdom from book-lined homes, cafes, or chapels old and new. . . . Kaplan's Romania offers lessons on the value of malleability, and what endures."**—Alison Smale,** ***The New York Times Book Review***

"This book reveals the confident, poetical Kaplan . . . but also a reflective, political Kaplan, seeking at times to submerge his gift for romantic generalization in respectful attention to the ideas of others. That tension—between an aesthetic sense of wholeness and the intellectual acceptance of complexity—is the real subject of the book, both as autobiography and as geopolitics."**—Timothy Snyder,** ***The Washington Post***

"A serious yet impassioned survey of Romania . . . [Kaplan's] method is that of a foreign correspondent, firing off dispatches from the South China Sea to North Yemen to the darkest corners of Eastern Europe when it was still Iron Curtain country, and his approach has a Thucydidean texture: a gimlet-eyed realism as gathered by evidence, and guided by an understanding that the knee-jerk of history is self-interest. . . . Kaplan is a regional geographer par excellence—undeniably, whatever you think of his conclusions—a big-picture man."***—The Christian Science Monitor***

"Kaplan is one of America's foremost writers on the region. . . . In a series of deep dives into the region's past—Byzantine, Ottoman, Habsburg and Soviet—he finds parallels and echoes that help us understand the present."***—The Wall Street Journal***

"Kaplan moves seamlessly from sights, sounds, and conversations to the resonance of history. . . . In Kaplan's hands, Romania emerges as no mere footnote, but as a historical and political pivot."***—Foreign Affairs***

"Kaplan's work exemplifies rare intellectual, moral and political engagement with the political order—and disorder—of our world. . . . Kaplan's writing is like the places he visits. It's a terrain, a concentrated expression of a particular part of the world as he sees it. . . . *In Europe's Shadow* amounts to a kind of historical anthropology plus geopolitics, a deep study of a particular country and people. . . . It shows how, at one and the same time, Romania is distinctive and a key to a broader and deeper understanding of contemporary Europe."***—The Huffington Post***

"Kaplan's is travel writing at its contemporary finest, weaving in the sights and sounds of a faraway land alongside interviews with its philosophers and politicians. . . . [*In Europe's Shadow*] provides an incisive, tactile introduction to the politics and potential prospects of Central and Southeastern Europe—a region that finds itself once again caught in the headwinds of history."***—RealClearWorld***

"A masterly work of important history, analysis, and prophecy about the ancient and modern rise of Romania as a roundabout between Russia and Europe . . . I learned something new on every page. Robert D. Kaplan is a master."**—Tom Brokaw**

"A tour de force of cultural and political travel writing in which Romania's complex past and uncertain present become vivid and newly urgent."**—Colin Thubron, author of *Shadow of the Silk Road* and co-editor of Patrick Leigh Fermor's *The Broken Road***

"Robert D. Kaplan has the remarkable ability to see over the geopolitical horizon, and he now turns his attention to Europe's marchlands—the former 'Greater Romania' lying between the Balkans and a resurgent Russia. In a triple journey through books, landscapes, and histories, he tackles the meaning of geography, the influence of intellectuals, and the daffiness—and power—of nationalism. . . . Timely, insightful, and deeply honest."**—Charles King, professor of international affairs, Georgetown University, and author of *Midnight at the Pera Palace: The Birth of Modern Istanbul***

"For an appreciation of contemporary Romanian attitudes, Robert Kaplan's book has no equal. As an outsider, yet within, the author offers an analysis of Romania that combines erudition and authority. His sparkling, suggestive reflections, drawing upon history and landscape, capture the DNA of the country and its inhabitants."**—Dennis Deletant, Ion Ra?iu Visiting Professor of Romanian Studies, Georgetown University, and emeritus professor, University College London**

"A moving book—an illuminating and compassionate guide through the labyrinth of Romania's immensely convoluted and often traumatic past . . . In spite of the many dark, distressing moments that no one should ignore, *In Europe's Shadow* conveys a sense of hope, promise, and continuous renewal."**—Vladimir Tism?neanu, professor of politics, University of Maryland, and author of *The Devil in History: Communism, Fascism, and Some Lessons of the Twentieth Century***

"Kaplan illuminates the extraordinary journey of the people of Romania, as well as millions of other East Europeans, from the tragic Soviet despotism of the decades after the Second World War to their more hopeful and democratic future as members of NATO and the European Union. Kaplan's ability to weave together complex histories, religion, memory, and political thought is nearly unmatched."**—Nicholas Burns, professor, Harvard Kennedy School, and former undersecretary of state for political affairs**

"A favorite of mine for years, Robert D. Kaplan is a thoughtful and insight-driven historian who writes clear and compelling prose, but what I like most about him is his political sophistication. *In Europe's Shadow* makes you look up and think about what's on the page—a true pleasure for the reader."**—Alan Furst**

About the Author
Coming soon...

Paul Boehmer is a seasoned actor who has appeared on Broadway, film, and television, including The Thomas Crown Affair and All My Children. Coinciding with another of his passions, sci-fi, Paul has been cast in various roles in many episodes of Star Trek.

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Chapter I

Bucharest 1981

The motion of travel relieves sadness. "The novel look of streets in novel countries . . . The peace they seem to offer for our sorrows," remarks the early-twentieth-century Portuguese poet and existentialist writer Fernando Pessoa. New surroundings prompt forgetfulness of old ones, and thus speed up the passage of time. The moment I left the plane at Bucharest's Otopeni airport, I exchanged a world of loud, intense colors in the

sun-blinded Middle East for one of a black-and-white engraving in the shivery, November-hued Balkans. Only hours removed, Israel was, nevertheless, already part of a distant, earlier existence.

Otopeni was a marble and dirty glass blockhouse with passport officers in slummy cubicles. A red star and photo of the dictator hung from the otherwise lonely walls. I waited half an hour in the cold for a plywood seat in a bus to take me downtown. Bare wiry branches—beeches, poplars, and large-leaved lindens—crackled in the steppe wind breaching the bus windows, signaling winter in the dead afternoon light under an iron vault of clouds. The forest of deciduous trees—hardly known in the Eastern Mediterranean I had just left and here dominant—only sharpened the sense of distance I had traveled. So did the steep-roofed houses that emerged as we entered a grand boulevard of the city, with their northern baroque influence and expectations of snow.

For six years I had not traveled beyond North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean. The times I had left Israel had only been for extended trips to Greece. The return to what—in comparison—was the north had a sudden and dramatic effect on me. “Nothing discourages thought so much as this perpetual blue sky,” writes André Gide in The Immoralist. It is said that when we think seriously, we think abstractly: Gide suggests that a cold northern clime of leaden clouds encourages abstraction, and by inference, analysis and introspection. For years I had held out the dream of living in a house on a Greek island in summer. My first hours in Bucharest began a psychological journey that would culminate decades later in the quest to live in Maine in darkest winter. With it would come a break in reading habits: exchanging the glittering Mediterranean sensuality of Lawrence Durrell for the cold, economical passion of Thomas Mann; leaving behind the occasional half-baked, Grecian ecstasies of Henry Miller and discovering anew the realist discipline of that most essential Greek, Thucydides, and by progression, his twentieth-century inheritors, Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz, and Samuel Huntington.

You don’t grow up gradually. You grow up in short bursts at pivotal moments, by suddenly realizing how ignorant and immature you are. Bucharest, as I rode in from the airport and saw the ashen, moldy faces of the bus driver and other Romanians aboard, crushed in their overcoats and winter hats with earmuffs and their worries, made me instinctually aware of all the history I had been missing the last half decade. Here was a whole category of suffering foreign to the Levant.

The gargantuan Scânteia building, grand in a Stalinist sort of way—named after the Communist Party daily, “The Spark”—heralded the entrance to the city. The 1950s Stalinist architecture with the courtyard statue of Lenin on a high plinth spiritually defeated everything around it. Here, the next day, I would visit a Mr. Tuiu in an empty concrete office to the right of the entrance: this official of the Communist wire agency AgerPres advised me “to be careful about anyone you talk to except” whom he approved.

Eroilor Aerului (“To the Heroes of the Air”) were the words emblazoned on the soaring monument on Pia?a Aviatorilor (Aviators’ Plaza), dedicated in 1935 to World War I fliers and other aviation pioneers, which I caught a glimpse of as the bus rumbled by. I grasped immediately the word, making the connection with Beethoven’s Eroica (“Heroic”) or Third Symphony. From the travel guides I knew that Romanian was a Latin language. But the words on the monument made me abruptly, palpably aware of it: just as the altogether bleak, wintry surroundings and virtually empty streets and boulevards made me palpably aware that I was in a part of the world not ordinarily associated with Latinity. (True, an exotic geography provided Romanian with elements of Slavic, Hungarian, Turkish, Greek, and Roma, in addition to a Thracian substratum—and yet the Latin basis was dominant.)

Soon the bread and fuel lines began: beyond Pia?a Roman? on Bulevardul General Gheorghe Magheru. The silence of the streets was devastating as I alighted from the bus with my backpack on Strada Academiei. The

city had been reduced to a vast echo. There were few cars, and everyone was dressed in the same shapeless coats and furry hats that evoked internal exile somewhere on the eastern steppe. People clutched cheap jute bags in expectation of stale bread. I looked at their faces: nervous, shy, clumsy, calculating, heartrending, as if they were struggling to master the next catastrophe. Those clammy complexions seemed as if they had never seen the sunlight.

This was the beginning of a decade that would be among the worst in Romanian history, even if the political repression was actually more suffocating in the 1950s, when the Communists under Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej had to establish total thought control over an ideologically hostile population. A distinguished British historian would later write that in the 1980s Romanians had been “reduced . . . to an animal state, concerned only with the problems of day-to-day survival.”

The situation would deteriorate by stages: with food, fuel, water, and electricity shortages worse than during World War I. In late 1982, there was a widely circulating rumor that bread was deliberately held in the bakeries for twenty-four hours before selling, so it would become stale and the population would buy less. A local joke of the era: “If only the Russians invaded, then we would get to eat like the Czechs and get passports like the Hungarians.” By the middle of the decade, the buses would no longer run on diesel, but on the much cheaper and more dangerous methane gas, with tanks attached to the roofs.

I had chosen the Hotel Muntenia on Strada Academiei from a budget guide: it was downtown and cheap enough, less than twenty-five dollars per night. All I can remember about the room was that it was brown with one bare lightbulb, with a common toilet and shower at the other end of a yawning and drafty hallway. I turned on the black-and-white television: speeches of the leader interspersed with folk dancing. The room had a phone with a corroded cord which required going through the hotel switchboard. In such mournful surroundings, I began to feel liberated from my previous life.

“Of course you can come in tomorrow for a briefing, and maybe we can get you in to see the ambassador,” a friendly and welcoming second secretary or other at the U.S. Embassy told me over the phone, as if lightening all the brown in my room. I had suddenly gone from being a nobody in a crowded journalistic field in Jerusalem to a person with more status, simply by showing up in this Cold War backwater. “You’re staying at the InterCon, aren’t you?” she asked. My reply was nervous and noncommittal. The coming years would be about perfecting the technique of so-to-speak interviewing the prime minister while staying at the youth hostel.

The next morning I walked past the dirty cream-and-white, run-of-the-mill modernist hulk of the InterContinental Hotel, towering upward in a half arc, completed in 1970 and the epitome of luxury in late-Communist Bucharest. Behind the hotel lay Tudor Arghezi, the street named for the inexhaustible twentieth-century poet and writer, whose literary aesthetic and prodigious modernity had managed to survive Communist rule. Here the white and steep-roofed baroque mansion that housed the U.S. Embassy was located. Inside, the gleam of tooled dark wood; the neat, state-of-the-art file cabinets and photocopy machines of the era; and the strict Washington dress code of the occupants made for what in my eyes then was a pampered atmosphere of safety, elegance, and efficiency, an extraterritorial refuge from the prison-yard surroundings in nearby streets. I remember the mansion fondly because I was instantly embraced by a team of diplomats who entrusted me with not only their analyses but their frustrations. They treated me as a professional journalist, a small but crucial revelation, since in Israel I always felt that my professionalism was suspect because I was a freelancer and a member of the local armed forces, and therefore prone to be sympathetic to the right-wing nationalist government of the day.

On repeated visits to Bucharest in the 1980s, I would be reduced to relying on Western diplomats. The sheer

terror that ordinary Romanians felt about confiding anything substantive to a foreign journalist, as well as the unwillingness of Communist officialdom to venture much beyond propaganda, left one with few alternatives. The Securitate, or secret police, were seemingly everywhere. The Romanian officials I did manage to interview would actually say such things as, “We never promised our people a rose garden,” or, quoting President Nicolae Ceau?escu, “we are making the passage from the bourgeois-landlord society to the multilaterally developed Socialist society.”

While after 1989 the U.S. Embassy in Bucharest was an afterthought for a correspondent, before 1989 it was the central dispatch point for information and analysis on what was happening in this pulverized, half-forgotten country. Here, along with the American embassies in Sofia, Belgrade, Budapest, and so on, I received briefings remarkable for their insight, lucidity, and unsentimentality that, nevertheless, did not undermine an overarching idealism.

For in that white baroque mansion, I met an American diplomat and Balkan area specialist, Ernest H. Latham Jr., who had made it his passion to collect the memoirs and other writings of visitors to Romania prior to the onslaught of the Communist ice age. His point was that by preserving the memoir of a pre-Communist past, one would be able to conceive of a future beyond Communism. In the early and mid-1980s, when Ceau?escu’s Romania bore the mood of Stalin’s Russia, and the paramount assumption of the age was that the Cold War had no end, this was the best sort of prophecy.

The Cold War in the Balkans and Central Europe was a golden age for Western embassy reporting. In such settings I began to live history as it happened, at a time when none of these capitals were journalistically fashionable: for this was the decade of Beirut, Managua, San Salvador, and Peshawar, with the media preoccupied with wars in Lebanon and Central America, and to a lesser extent in Afghanistan.

I then began acquiring the habit of separating myself from the journalistic horde, looking for news in obscure locations, that is. For example, on a later trip to Bucharest in 1984, Latham casually told me that Ceau?escu was blasting a vast area of the capital into oblivion, with security forces plundering and then blowing up whole neighborhoods of historic Orthodox churches, monasteries, Jewish synagogues, and nineteenth-century houses: ten thousand structures in all, many with their own sylvan courtyards. Residents were given hours to clear out with their life possessions before explosive charges were set. The blast site, where an austere Stalinist-style civic center and apartment blocks were to be built, was being called “Ceaushima” by Romanians brave enough to talk to foreign diplomats. Latham, who had seen the plans for the new Party complexes and ceremonial avenues, compared it to something “Albert Speer might have designed for Adolf Hitler, had the 1,000-year Reich become reality.” When I revealed what was happening in a magazine article a few months later, I was made persona non grata in Romania for five years, until Ceau?escu fell.

In neighboring Bulgaria in the mid-1980s, another American diplomat told me that, by the way, the Communist regime was forcing all 900,000 ethnic Turks, 10 percent of the Bulgarian population, to change their names—to Slavic equivalents, even as mosques were being closed and the Turkish language forbidden. In 1984, yet another American diplomat, Dan Fried, this time in Belgrade, strongly recommended that I henceforth concentrate my energies on Yugoslavia, where, as he put it, ethnic, political, and economic divisions were worsening and therefore “this country has a great future in the news.”

The 1980s, which professionally began for me that first morning at the U.S. Embassy on Tudor Arghezi, would constitute an onrush of current events, primarily in the Balkans, that I had more or less to myself—save, of course, for the relatively small number of dedicated foreign correspondents based in capitals like Vienna and Warsaw, themselves struggling to get their own stories prominently placed and appreciated, in the face of more cinematic events in the Middle East and Central America. In all of Eastern

Europe, only Poland—because of Solidarity, martial law, and a Polish pope—figured prominently in the headlines.

Passion was usually lacking in my freelance dispatches: sent by airmail with self-addressed return envelopes, using post offices and occasionally diplomatic pouches. The facts alone were sufficient to communicate the extent of the nightmare, to which an air of unreality frequently hung.

On one occasion I even saw the tyrant close up at a Communist Party congress. He had stridden up to the podium, and the four thousand Party members in attendance rose to their feet, chanting loudly “Cea-u-?es-cu, Cea-u-?es-cu . . .” The tyrant, his chin jutting forth, watched impassively for a full three minutes with his wife, Elena, beside him. Then he slightly raised his arm in a gesture vaguely reminiscent of a Hitler salute, the sight of which immediately silenced the great hall. Standing directly below a giant picture of himself, he began a speech interrupted five times: each time by several minutes of hand-clapping and chants of “Cea-u-?es-cu, Cea-u-?es-cu . . .” until he silenced them. He spoke for a full ninety minutes about socialist economics. After a break, he would speak for a further ninety minutes on socialist theory and ideology. The faces in the audience looked terrified throughout. Nobody dared stop clapping and chanting until he raised his arm.

I learned how to be a journalist in Bucharest. Not all at once, not always intentionally, and, again, not altogether consciously, for Bucharest in 1981 was not only powerful at first sight, but powerful in retrospect as the years went on. I would ponder Bucharest often as a reaction to the books I later read. Learning to be a journalist happened as much in reflection as it did in real time.

By learning to be a journalist, I do not mean learning the commonplace but crucial mechanics of accurate note-taking, newswriting, or developing sources, which I had been taught in elementary form earlier in college and at a small newspaper. Instead, I refer to understanding the true character of objectivity. For what is taught in journalism schools is an invaluable craft, whereas properly observing the world is a matter of deliberation and serious reading over decades in the fields of history, philosophy, and political science. Journalism actually is not necessarily, whatever the experts of the profession may claim, a traditional subject in its own right. Rather, it is a means to explore and better communicate subjects that are, in fact, traditional areas of study: history and philosophy as I’ve said, but also government, politics, literature, architecture, art, and so on. I’ve never altogether trusted what journalists say about themselves. As Robert Musil, the great early-twentieth-century Austrian novelist, observes: “high-mindedness is the mark of every professional ideology.” That’s why “the image of a profession in the minds of its practitioners is not too reliable.” (Thus journalism schools have the particular responsibility of looking at their profession from the vantage point of outsiders.)

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