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## EAST EUROPE

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#### Verdet Moves Up

Only a few days after the December session of the National Assembly, Radio Bucharest announced on January 3 the promotion of Deputy Premier Ilie Verdet, one of the closest associates of Ceausescu to First Deputy Premier. He thus joins Gheorghe Apostol, Emil Bodnaras and Alexandru Barladeanu in holding this rank. The "inner Cabinet" also includes (in addition to Prime Minister Maurer) six deputy prime ministers.

This latest development in Verdet's meteoric career (particularly since the death of Gheorghiu-Dej) places him in a most promising position in the line of succession to Prime Minister Maurer. It may be recalled that rumors circulated in Bucharest last summer of a forthcoming reshuffle in which Maurer would replace Stoica as Chairman of the State Council, a less strenuous job than the premiership. These rumors, which followed the Prime Minister's stay in a Swiss sanatorium, named Paul Niculescu-Mizil (another close associate of Ceausescu) as Maurer's probable successor (Die Welt of July 13 and reports by Rumanian visitors abroad -- see SR of August 25). However, it was clear already at that time that Verdet, who had risen as rapidly as Niculescu-Mizil after the death of Gheorghiu-Dej would have at least as good a chance to move up in the state apparatus, since he already held the position of deputy premier, while Niculescu Mizil was -- and still is -- working mainly in the Party apparatus (in the Secretariat). Already at the June 1966 Plenum, Verdet and Niculescu-Mizil were promoted to the Party's Standing Presidium. Verdet was selected to deliver the "Liberation Day" keynote speech on August 22.

A youngish apparatchik of the Ceausescu generation, Verdet (about 47) was elected alternate member of the Central Committee in December 1955 and full member in June 1960. He was listed in 1958 as First Secretary of the Regional Party Committee of Hunedoara -- a position in which he presumably acquired experience in industrial supervision and which he held until January 1959. It has been reliably reported that he had previously served as deputy-chief of the

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Party Organization Section of the Central Committee. He was catapulted into the Party Secretariat in March 1965. However, in a most intriguing change, he was already released from that function at the Ninth Party Congress the following July and elected to the less important position of alternate member of the newly established Party Executive Committee, but shortly afterwards, in August, he was appointed Deputy Premier. At the June 1966 Plenum he achieved a major breakthrough, climbing to full membership in the Executive Committee and also being elected to the Standing Presidium. Verdet has been a deputy of the Grand National Assembly since 1961 (first for the Jiu and then in 1965 for the Caracal district, Oltenia region). It is reported that he originates from either Oltenia or Southern Banat.

In speculating on the chances for succession to the premiership (and the massive criticism leveled by Ceausescu at the Grand National Assembly against the state agencies and the failure of Maurer -- and Barladeanu -- to take the floor at this session may be a further indication of a forthcoming change) it is worth noting that Gheorghe Apostol (who until August 1965 was the only First Deputy Premier) has seen the advantage of his seniority melt away with the increasing number of colleagues in the inner Cabinet.

Considering the succession problem as a whole, one still cannot completely exclude the possibility of a reunion of the positions of Party chief and Premier in the hands of Ceausescu. This would fit perfectly into the pattern of the self-assured and energetic young leader, but (aside from Zhivkov) the recent trend in Eastern Europe has been against the concentration of Party and state power in the hands of one person. Be that as it may, the promotion of Verdet certainly does not seem to be accidental, nor does it appear to have been conceived solely as compensation for a good record of achievement.

Verdet's promotion is the latest sign of the consolidation of Ceausescu's power, marked by the delegation of responsibilities to his close supporters, mainly apparatchiks.

#### Ceausescu Meets Basov

As reported by Radio Bucharest on December 29, Ceausescu received the same day Soviet Ambassador Alexander Basov, at the latter's request, for "comradely talks". No details were disclosed.

#### New Electoral Law

In his exposition on the Draft Law on the Election of Deputies to the National Assembly and the People's Councils, Minister of Justice Adrian Dimitriu underlined (Scanteia of 29 December 1966) the following new aspects of the proposed legislation: 1) Unification of the hitherto separate laws governing election to the National Assembly and to the People's Councils; 2) new criteria of representation of citizens in the organs of state power; and 3) a new system of electoral commissions set up territorially as well as for each constituency and voting section, which will provide the opportunity for a larger number of citizens to examine the conditions required for a candidacy, etc. Commentaries on the draft law (such as the speech by Pavel Daju at the National Assembly, Scanteia of 29 December 1966) indicate that it stresses the right of the electors to exercise permanent control over the activity of the deputies and of the state organs in which they are working.



On the first point, Dimitriu said that a unification of legislation was justified by the facts that both the National Assembly and the People's Councils were part of the same system of state organs, that it was advisable from a practical standpoint, and that it eliminated divergences in the procedural norms in one and the same field. Regarding the second point, he explained that as a result of new criteria of representation, the number of deputies to the Grand National Assembly (one deputy for each of the 465 constituencies would remain the same, but that the number of deputies to the people's councils would increase from 141,931 to 156,000 (Radio Bucharest of December 29). Out of this total increase of about 14,000 deputies, 13,000 would accrue to the communal people's councils.

Under the new law, the communes, districts, towns and villages are grouped according to the number of inhabitants, and for each territorial-administrative unit of a certain group, different norms of representation are established. This would avoid anomalies such as those registered in some communes in the Banat, where communal people's councils consisted only of nine members who were unable to discharge all their responsibilities.

Concerning point three, Dimitriu said that the electoral commissions, including people from all kinds of organizations, enterprises and institutions, will ensure a large participation in the organization and carrying out of all electoral operations.

Dimitriu said that the law provides for the nomination of one or more candidates for each constituency for election to the National Assembly and the people's councils. The old decree on elections to the people's councils (Scanteia of 25 September 1953) said exactly the same in its Art. 51. Law No. 9 of 1952 (published in the Official Bulletin No. 1 of 27 September 1952) on the Election of Deputies to the National Assembly, did not contain the same explicit formulation, but included equivalent provisions in the following articles: Art. 39 ("the candidates will present themselves to the commission of the electoral constituency"); Art. 48 ("The electoral commission will draw up reports showing the remaining definitive candidatures in their order of registration"); Art. 57 ("The ballot will contain all the remaining definitive candidatures for the respective constituency"); Art. 69 ("the elector will cross out on his ballot the names of all candidates whom he does not want to vote for and will leave untouched the name of his candidate."); and Art. 90 ("If there have been more candidates for a constituency, and if none of them has won the required half plus one of the votes, the electoral commissions will fix new elections....")

One can see that no essential change has been envisaged in the new electoral law in this respect. Official commentators who praised all the other innovations (the three new aspects mentioned above) did not elaborate at all on the question of the possibility of proposing one or more candidates for a constituency, but, speaking in general terms, some of them said that one of the merits of the new law was the fact that it formulated some provisions in a more concise and explicit fashion.

The not very clear formulation of articles of the old electoral law on the election of deputies to the National Assembly was probably intended to blur the fact that before every election to the National Assembly, the People's Democratic Front actually gave its blessings to one candidate, who was then promptly elected (without exception), as shown by the 99.99 per cent result of each election in favor of the candidates proposed by the Front. On one occasion, the complete list of PDF candidates was published in the press on the eve of the elections, only to be republished without any changes after the voting.

It is to be hoped that the insistence of the new electoral law on democracy and the real opportunity of every citizen, irrespective of nationality, to vote and be elected and to control the activity of the deputies will indeed provide more concrete opportunities for a free choice of candidates. In any case, the next elections to the Grand National Assembly will not take place before 1969.

It should be emphasized that a comparison with the new electoral law approved in Hungary, as made by some Western newspapers, is not indicated, since in Rumania individual constituencies and the possibility of proposing more than one candidate per constituency are by no means new. Moreover, in Hungary, the right to propose more than one candidate was, in contrast to Rumania, hailed as a big new achievement.

#### Press Digest

1) A Hungarian Publishing House Under Fire By Rumania. The December 2 issue of the Cluj Hungarian-language weekly Utunk included an article criticizing the "Europa" publishing house of Budapest for its translation of a selection of short stories by Dumitru Radu Popescu, the writer whose bold, unorthodox story The Blue Lion caused a stir in the Rumanian cultural world in the winter of 1965/66. Utunk charged the "Europa" publishing house, among other things, with having failed to select the most significant short stories of this writer, and with not having presented an accurate translation. The weekly was particularly irritated by the fact that the selection of Popescu's short stories appeared in a series entitled "The Modern Library", which has also included translations of such avantgarde writers and unconformist writers as Mrozek, Peter Weiss and Balkanov. The Utunk article does not, however, clearly indicate whether or not the Popescu publication also included The Blue Lion.

2) Rumania and the International Tourist Year. The December 28 issue of Scanteia carried on its front page an article by its Geneva correspondent on the International Tourist Year. This article reveals for the first time that Rumania is among the 17 European countries which have declared their willingness to abolish during the year 1967, on a mutual basis, the visa requirement for travel with all countries of the world. The article also discloses that Rumania is a member of the joint European commission charged with organizing the International Tourist Year.