

AP
May 4
XIII-1227

RUMANIA

<u>RELIGION</u>	/2800/
Visits Abroad	/1501/
<u>PROPAGANDA</u>	/2600/
<u>NEW DEVELOPMENTS</u>	/4500/
<u>REDEFECTION</u>	/2700/

RUMANIAN PROTESTANT BISHOP DUCKS QUESTIONS ON PRESENT
STATUS OF CHURCH AT SALZBURG MEETING.

SOURCE SALZBURG: RFE News Bureau.

DATE OF OBSERVATION: April 28 1956.

EVALUATION COMMENT: It is assumed that while formerly priests like the Orthodox priest Alexandru IONESCU and the Chief Rabbi Moses ROZEN had been sent abroad on various occasions /PARIS, STOCKHOLM/ mainly for "peace propaganda" purposes, the Lutheran Bishop Friedrich MUELLER was sent in 1956 to Austria to support by his appearance and cultural activities the redefinition campaign primarily among ethnic German refugees from Rumania.

See for background information on the Evangelical and Lutheran Churches in Rumania RFE Item No. 7585/54.

+ + +

Within the compass of lectures on the theme "Christendom and Current Period" sponsored by the SALZBURG People's

/over/

University /Volkshochschule,/ and directed by Pastor Gerhard FLOREY, the Rumanian Protestant Bishop of SIBIU, Dr. Friedrich MUELLER, consented to hold a speech on the theme "Development of the People's Church in South-Eastern Europe." The speech was delivered on April 28 1956.

If the 300 odd audience composed predominantly of ethnic Germans from Transylvania had assembled in the "Kleine Aula" of the SALZBURG University with hopes to hear some news from their lost homeland, they were bitterly disappointed. Bishop Dr. MUELLER, head of the Rumanian Protestant Church, flatly refused to answer any questions pertaining either to the present status of his Church or to the general situation in Rumania.

In a 35-minute lecture, Bishop Dr. MUELLER took upon himself the difficult task of outlining the history of the Protestant Church in Rumania, covering a wide period of five centuries. What's more, he devoted the largest part of his speech to events which had happened in the 16th through 19th century, whereas he just "breezed" through the 20th century, completely omitting to touch upon the after-World-War-II happenings.

Nevertheless, one statement of his could be of interest with regard to the current Soviet drive of Russification of the Orthodox Church. Bishop Dr. MUELLER stated that on March 18 1956, he had attended the installation ceremonies of the "5th successor to the Rumanian Orthodox Church, Bishop SAGUNA," to which event representatives of all Churches were invited. On that occasion, Bishop Dr. MUELLER admittedly talked to a Rumanian Orthodox Church dignitary /NU/. The latter allegedly mentioned that he had previously discussed with "a Bulgarian Orthodox Bishop" the problem of "how to bring the South-East European Orthodox Churches closer together." The Bulgarian Bishop on his part allegedly replied that he had negotiated the same problem with "a Yugoslav Orthodox Bishop."

Keeping in mind that the Rumanian Orthodox Church is headed by Patriarch Justinian MARINA who, by MOSCOW'S grace, rose in a spectacular career within a few months from an unknown village priest to the highest dignitary, it is easy to

/over/

guess the final goal of said endeavor of "how to bring the South-East European Orthodox Churches together." However, considering the alleged fact that "a Bulgarian Orthodox Bishop negotiated with a Yugoslav Orthodox Bishop," and that the Serbian Orthodox Church has managed until now to avoid a submission to MOSCOW, the field seems open for speculations. MOSCOW or BELGRADE - this had possibly Bishop Dr. MUELLER in mind when he said that "a period of 2,000 years proved that no nation has survived which rejected Christ."

Unfortunately, Bishop Dr. MUELLER was not in the least willing to elaborate on this subject. He was equally reluctant to answer any other questions even before they could be asked. Begged by a Rumanian refugee to answer at least some questions of general nature, the Bishop rather harshly replied: "I was to deliver a speech on a specific theme. Did you hear my review? Yes? That's all then. I've nothing more to say," and stormed out of the room, leaving bewilderment and uneasy silence behind him.

End