

## George Soros' Romanian Ghosts: Explaining the Democratic Society

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How the Open Society Foundations' NGO network tries to influence politics in Eastern Europe



*Image credit, [goo.gl/gmK7HM](https://goo.gl/gmK7HM)*

Read [Part One](#) of “George Soros’ Romanian Ghosts.” [Part Two](#) explains how Soros-funded NGOs and their Western allies in government push for revolution in Eastern Europe. [Part Three](#) shows how Romanian activist “ghosts” became a threat to civil liberties and undermined their nation’s sovereignty.

*Liberal billionaire George Soros has a plan to spread his brand of “democracy” to the countries of Eastern Europe. But is it really democratic?*

“The president of the country calls, and you don’t even answer?” an acquaintance [asked](#) Monica Macovei over the phone, on Christmas Day 2004. An unknown number had obnoxiously harassed her cell while she was trying to spend quality time with her parents and son. But she had no idea it could be the president-elect of Romania, Traian Băsescu—or why he was calling her, for that matter. She knew the acquaintance from legal advocacy that she had done in Parliament. The newly-elected president must have got her number from him.

When Băsescu called her again, he asked if she would be his Minister of Justice. Stunned, she needed time to think about it, and asked if she could call him back at any time. “The Minister of Justice can call the President at any time,” he assured her.

Macovei's mother urged her to politely decline the offer. She spent a lot of time away from her family already. In fact, at that moment, most of her things were in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, where she was working on justice reform with the Council of Europe. Macovei also served as president of a nonprofit in Romania—something else that she would have to give up if she entered government. She needed to discuss it with someone else before deciding.

Macovei had graduated fourth in the country in 1982 from the University of Bucharest Law School. She then worked as a prosecutor both during and after the fall of Romania's communist regime, headed by Nicolae *Ceaușescu*. After the Iron Curtain fell, she became one of many young Eastern European professionals who benefitted from American philanthropy—funded in large part by the Hungarian-born billionaire George Soros, aimed at “democracy development” in the region.

In [Foundations and Public Policy: The Mask of Pluralism](#), political scientist Joan Roelofs identifies “leadership training” as one of the main ways in which Western NGOs (along with hundreds of millions of dollars) provided “technical assistance” to post-communist Eastern Europe. She lists the National Forum Foundation, the Pew Economic Freedom Fellows Program, and the Eisenhower Exchange Fellowships as three examples of institutions that educated “future elites” in the 1990s and brought them into international networks.



*CEU Board of Trustees, Monca Macovei pictured behind George Soros, Image via [ceu.edu](http://ceu.edu)*

In 1992, Macovei received a [full scholarship](#) to Soros' Central European University (CEU) in Budapest, Hungary, which he had created one year before to [provide](#) a platform to spread his ideology. She graduated two years later, with a Master of Law. She would later join CEU's Board of Trustees.

After graduating from CEU, Macovei [consulted](#) for several NGOs, including Soros' Open Society Institute (OSI), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the

[Soros-funded](#) Defense of Human Rights in Romania – The Helsinki Committee (APADOR-CH), and the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC). ERRC blogger Adam Weiss [sums up](#) Soros' connection to the latter in his retelling of a time when the philanthropist paid the organization a visit:

*Impressing Mr Soros is important; his Open Society Foundations helped set us up and continue to support us. I imagine everyone was told months in advance he was coming. My messiest colleagues probably cleaned their desks. Some people surely spent a few extra minutes picking out their clothes that morning.*

In a 1995 interview, Soros [gave](#) two simple reasons for his massive funding of foundations in Eastern Europe: “I care about the principles of open society, and I can afford it.”

“I recognize that I am not an organization man,” he said. “But I retain the right to formulate strategy.”

Soros' strategy has remained the same since 1984, when he established first Eastern European foundation in his native Hungary: locate people who share his vision of an “open society,” and provide them with the means to spread it. Asked what exactly his foundations do, he responded, “It's impossible to say.”

*In each country, I identified a group of people—some leading personalities, others less well known—who shared my belief in an open society and I entrusted them with the task of establishing the priorities.*

When asked how he defines “open society,” Soros said that the philosopher Karl Popper taught him that “concepts shouldn't be defined; they should be explained.” In his philosophy, open society is grounded in “imperfect understanding. Nobody is in possession of the ultimate truth.”

Macovei's NGO involvement and reform-minded work attracted attention in the West, which led to speaking opportunities on the Romanian legal system.

In 1996, she [criticized](#) her country's laws to the Brussels Subcommittee on Human Rights for providing broad immunity to office holders and government officials. She argued that “the lack of criminal investigation of Members of Government and Parliament leads to the population's mistrust in the political and judicial system.”

In 1997, she received an Eisenhower Exchange Fellowship, meant for mid-career “men and women of outstanding achievement who are expected to assume positions of national influence” after Eisenhower Fellow Manuela Ștefănescu, who worked for APADOR-CH, nominated her.

After completing the Fellowship, Macovei [resigned](#) from her position as prosecutor. In her resignation letter, she cited differences in understanding of the role of the Prosecutor's Office in a democratic society.

She soon went to work full-time for APADOR-CH, co-directed by Open Society Institute president Renate Weber. Weber would later become the longest-serving president of the Romania Soros Council. Macovei, meanwhile, took over APADOR-CH as president in 2001.

Now, faced with her greatest career challenge, yet also the greatest opportunity of her life, she decided to call Ștefănescu for advice.

“Don’t go!” her friend urged. The job of civil society was to hold government accountable, not to join it. Crossing over would be akin to treason.

Unconvinced, Macovei called another [Soros-funded](#) NGO president and close friend, Alina Mungiu-Pippidi.

Mungiu-Pippidi, who sits on the Open Society Foundations (OSF)’s European Advisory Board would make a solid candidate for Ideologue-in-Chief of Romania’s Soros society. A political scientist, she has been widely published in English, French, and Romanian, and has lectured frequently at Ivy League universities on Eastern Europe’s transition to a market economy. She contributed early on to the magazine *22*, the publication of the Group for Social Dialogue (GDS), with whom Soros [met](#) less than two weeks after *Ceaușescu’s* execution. In 1996, she founded Romania’s premier think tank, the Romanian Academic Society, which has received hundreds of thousands in [grant dollars](#) in the past decade alone from the Soros-founded and funded Trust for Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).

Mungiu-Pippidi has also tried her hand at playwriting. Her greatest hit, “The Evangelists,” presented a pornographic, balkanized retelling of the story of Jesus. A highly misogynist Apostle Paul dictates the Gospels to a philosopher and his students, four of whom are named Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. At the Last Supper, Paul poisons the students, and when Jesus objects, Paul kills him too. After rising from the dead, Jesus then looks at one of his girlfriends and says, “today, you will be with me in Paradise.”

After most of Romanian society and press criticized the play strongly, but civilly, Mungiu-Pippidi revealed her real intentions behind it. She [told](#) the French newspaper *Le Monde*,

*I was expecting a violent reaction, but I would have preferred that my play not reveal the primitivism of our society. We live in a hypocritical society just like in the days of dictator Ceaușescu. At that time, we were all communists, today we are all Orthodox. Our showboat Christianity hides an incredible backwardness.*

When Macovei asked her for her advice on the Ministry of Justice, unlike Ștefănescu, Mungiu-Pippidi cut her off mid-sentence, and flatly told her to accept the offer. If she didn’t accept, it would make the civil society network look cowardly. “You’re going,” Mungiu-Pippidi [insisted](#).

*Bănescu's* Truth and Justice coalition reminded many of the Ukrainian Orange Revolution happening at the time. Most Western observers and NGOs viewed his victory as the triumph of Western reform over post-communist corruption.

In the *National Review*, former Romanian defector to the U.S. Ion Mihai Pacepa [praised](#) Ukraine's Orange Revolution, and claimed that because of it, Ukrainians were finally free. With *Bănescu's election*, Pacepa said that Romania "for the first time in 60 years—has a government without any Communists in it."

No one can blame the elation over Bănescu's election both in Romania and internationally. He had run on a populist, anti-corruption, pro-NATO, pro-U.S. platform. His opposition, the Social Democrats, had helped usher Romania into NATO, but they still had the stench of Iliescu's National Salvation Front (FSN) all over them.

Bănescu was an outsider, and he was looking for outsiders to surround him with. The NGO network that Soros and other American philanthropists had funded provided a great pool from which to choose candidates. Most of them were Western-trained, Western-connected, and best of all, hadn't been corrupted by outside politics—yet.