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# THE REGRETS OF A DEFECTOR

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*Washington, D.C.*  
Nicolae Horodincea is a spy who came in from the cold. Now, more than a year after he defected to the United States, he thinks it may have been a mistake.

Discouraged, disillusioned, and humiliated by his treatment at the hands of the American intelligence community, abandoned by his wife and child, Horodincea says he is thinking of going back home to Romania even though he faces a possible twenty-year prison term for treason.

That he would even consider such a bleak option suggests that deep-seated problems may exist in the way spies who pass through the looking glass are treated in this country.

More important, Horodincea's unhappiness raises troubling questions about whether his complaints about the US intelligence community will scare off other would-be defectors.

It is difficult to check out Horodincea's complaints. Although another Romanian defector, Nicola Traian, insists they reflect quite similar experiences on his part, the Central Intelligence Agency has maintained a stony silence on the charges. The CIA man whom the two identified as being in charge of the "resettlement" of defectors declined to discuss Horodincea's assertions and referred all questions to the CIA's public information office, which has refused any comment.

In fairness to the CIA, it should be pointed out that part of the problem may be that East European intelligence officers lead privileged lives in their societies and doubtless have inflated expectations of how they will be treated if they come over to rich old Uncle Sam.

But even assuming some exaggeration on Horodincea's part, there appears to be an insensitivity in dealing with human beings who are experiencing trauma over their treason and attempted assimilation into a totally different culture.

This is Horodincea's story.

A bear of a man in his mid-30s, with a laughing round face and an ingratiating manner, Horodincea worked as third secretary in the Romanian Embassy. One of his responsibilities was to deal with American newsmen, answering questions about the actions or attitudes of his government and attempting to pick up low-grade political intelligence on the attitudes of the US government.

But his larger responsibility, by his own account, was to make friends among key congressional aides on Capitol Hill. Romania is one of the few Eastern bloc nations to get Most Favored Nation tariff treatment, renewable on an annual basis, and maintaining good relations on the Hill is of overriding importance.

Horodincea insists he never violated American law, he never sought to buy secret documents or compromise anyone in that role.

He is a bit shy about discussing all his reasons for defecting. But both he and Traian, a fellow intelligence officer, say a major reason was a shakeup in the security hierarchy back home that made life in the field intolerable. Both say they were not recruited as defectors by American intelligence; they came over on their own.

In Horodincea's case, he was driving with his wife and young son on the night of February 23, 1980, when he suddenly pulled his car into Fort Belvoir, Virginia, and befuddled army officers with his request for political asylum.

Several FBI and CIA men were called in, he says, and talked to him through the night, from 11 p.m. to 9 a.m. After they apparently decided that he was a bona fide defector, he and his family were taken to a posh hotel in downtown Washington.

"They held me in custody for three days in different hotels," he recalls. "They said, 'You did a good decision to defect. You'll have a marvelous life here. Especially your son. We will take care of you.'"

They were then moved to a so-called safe house in the suburbs of northern Virginia, a residence rented by a law firm as a cover for the CIA, the actual lessor.

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A different group of people met there. They asked for his passport and driver's license and said he would be paid \$50 a day during the entire period of interrogation, or debriefing. Three other people shared the house with the Horodincas. All three had rented cars to do such chores as ferry Horodincea to his debriefing sessions in a rented office or take his wife out to shop for food or clothes. All were armed.

Right away the Horodincas were upset, particularly by one man whom Horodincea described as "very, very dirty," a reference to his personal hygiene. "My wife said, 'This is like a horror movie. I can't stay here. I don't like these people at all,'" Horodincea says.

The next day, while he was undergoing his first formal debriefing, his wife slipped out of the house and took a cab to the Romanian Embassy. She took young Nicolae, nearly 3 years of age, with her.

Horodincea says he didn't know his wife planned to return to the embassy with their son.

Immediately, his handlers decided to move him, first to a motel in northern Virginia, then to another safe house, this time an apartment.

Several days later, however, his wife fell ill and went to a hospital with her son in tow. The FBI showed up at the hospital almost at once, and, although Horodincea is unclear about what happened, they persuaded her to return to her husband.

For the next three months, he was questioned on every aspect of his life: his training in intelligence, his foreign assignments, his activities in Washington, the role of other members of the Romanian Embassy, communications procedures, coding and decoding, how the members of the Warsaw Pact communicated with one another, relations with Soviet intelligence.

Horodincea says a lot of promises were made, including payment for him and his wife to study new professions, money for his son's nursery school, health care, a good house, and jobs.

At the end of the formal debriefing, he was given \$16,000 to buy a car, furniture, and clothes and was told he would be paid an unspecified living allowance monthly.

The first check he received, he says, was for \$996.40, or roughly \$12,000 a year.

But when he told the agents that he wanted to work, "they told me I should forget about my former training, that it was an opportunity to start my life from the beginning."

He was given an aptitude test, he says, and counseled that he would make a good preacher, military man, or funeral director. "This was something very stupid, but I said okay, this is the advice they gave me. I'll try to find something for myself. I told them I wanted to go into the study of computer science."

After another aptitude test, Horodincea claims, they promised to help him get a master's degree, but told him they weren't able to place him in George Mason University because "they had no arrange-

ments there." So he enrolled himself in courses at another nearby institution while his wife, who preferred to go into German language studies, entered a secretarial school.

At about this time, he says, he was told that the family should change their name, for their own protection. "I said both myself and my wife do not feel comfortable changing our name," he says. But he quoted the man in charge of the CIA's defector resettlement program as saying, "If you don't want to change your name, you'll sign a statement that you'll be responsible for your own security," which scared my wife very much."

Horodincea says since the stipend he was getting from the CIA was not enough for the family's needs, he went in search of a part-time job. But he didn't have any proper identification, so personnel managers asked him how he got into the country and

whether he had a resident alien card, a green card, which indicates a person is in the country legally.

When he asked his handlers for such a card, they sent a photographer to the apartment. "They photographed me from the front, left, right, back," he says. "My wife, when she saw this, started to cry. She said, 'I don't accept this, to be photographed like a wrongdoer.' She asked them to leave the house. She said, 'I don't need a green card, this is very degrading.'"

The photographer returned later, but again Horodincea's wife refused to have mug shots taken.

Horodincea says he did not receive his green card for a few months. "My first question on the first day, I asked: How can I get citizenship? 'We can't talk about citizenship, that'll take ten years.' But I was told I would have all the rights of citizenship, except to vote," he recalls.

One day last summer, still concerned about money, he told his contacts he wanted to look up some congressional staff friends because he thought they might help him find a job. Horodincea says the agents responded, "No, you have nothing in common and you are not supposed to speak with them. We will take care of this."

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But when he told them subsequently that he had disregarded their instructions and visited a Senate aide, two people came to his apartment at three that afternoon and questioned him about his contact until midnight. "My wife said, 'I'm exasperated. I don't know what to do. They didn't let me go to sleep.'"

He says he was offered a "salary" increase to \$26,000 a year if he would stop seeing his congressional friends, but he "said I don't see any relationship between my friends on the Hill and my salary. They were the only moral reinforcement for me, and for my wife, too."

In September, he got a part-time job at a discount department store, unloading trucks and stocking shelves. Paid the minimum wage, he worked three days a week, from 5 to 9 p.m. and all day Saturday and Sunday. "My wife was very distressed. 'If you go to school during the week, you should stay with us during the weekend.'" The life-style he'd expected seemed farther away than ever.

Horodincea says he asked for CIA help in buying a house, since he wanted to build something for the future. There were no funds for that, he was told, but the CIA would continue to pay rent on his apartment, one year at a time.

His wife told him that back in Romania they had their work, their apartment, a life they enjoyed. But in the United States they had uncertainty and harassment. Horodincea phoned his mother in Romania and asked what sentence had been imposed in absentia. The penalty was death,

she said. Horodincea doubted her because, he says, the death penalty is imposed for treason only in wartime.

Horodincea and his wife went to see the Romanian ambassador last fall. He says he had no fear of being seized and shipped back because the embassy is under firm instructions not to anger the United States unnecessarily.

He quotes the ambassador as saying he would provide a passport for his wife so that she could go back and represent his interests in an appeal of his sentence (which turned out to be twenty years, not death). They were assured no harm would come to her since from the beginning of his defection, she had wanted to go back home.

**T**wo things happened subsequently to change their lives.

The first occurred in late October. One of the CIA contact men brought a man to the Horodinceas' apartment and introduced him as a senior aide to a Republican senator.

Horodincea says he was shocked. First the man questioned him about his contacts on the Hill: "Tell me everything about you and about your relations in the Senate and in the Congress." Horodincea insists that while he had done nothing wrong on the Hill, by identifying all those people, mostly Democrats, as the contacts of a Romanian intelligence officer, he was tainting them with suspicion.

"After they left, my wife told me she was very dis-

turbed by the fact of their visit and by the way in which I was treated. It was a kind of moral rape. You know? The remains of my dignity," Horodincea says, unable to finish the sentence.

Then and there he promised his wife he would never allow anything like that to happen again: "I didn't want anymore to be a blind instrument in their hand."

Several days later, he says, an item appeared in Jack Anderson's syndicated column quoting an unnamed Romanian diplomat who had defected as having told CIA debriefers that the Russians mounted daily intelligence operations from the Romanian Embassy. Horodincea knew the columnist was referring to him and that the Senate aide had been the source. But he says the assertion was a lie: "I never told them this. I told them in intelligence work I never cooperated with the Russians in any way."

Horodincea says the day the article appeared in the *Washington Post*, he was called by the FBI and asked how it happened. For Horodincea, this was the last straw, the final indignity. He told his caller that henceforth he would speak to the FBI or CIA only in the presence of his attorney.

In retaliation, he says, the government stopped paying for his schooling, for his son's nursery school, for medical insurance. But the monthly stipend continued, albeit often two weeks late.

He went to his attorney and spilled out his story, explaining that "after more than a year I'm not able to have a normal life, and I'm very disoriented and they make me more disoriented." He told his lawyer he was thinking of going back to Romania and wanted to explore his options thoroughly.

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On a Saturday visit to the State Department, he confronted his CIA contacts and asked whether he could appeal his treatment to their boss. He says he was told that if he wrote a letter, it would only land back in their pockets.

The next day he returned, this time accompanied by his lawyer and a congressional aide who was a friend. The men from the CIA said they weren't authorized to talk directly with such outsiders, and a State Department man shuttled between two offices to enable an exchange of dialogue.

Horodincea recalls, "They said they will reconsider everything because all that happened with us was a misunderstanding. I felt, okay, this is how they always treated me. I cannot expect anything more from this. I realized my only alternative was to find out my status [in Romania]."

In November and December, his wife was ill much of the time, first with a bad case of flu, then with chicken pox, which their son also caught, and his wife complained about the medical care they were receiving. So they sought a private physician.

Last February the second major event occurred. Horodincea's wife developed large black, blue, and yellow blotches on her abdomen and arms. They feared it was cancer, though it turned out to be acute anemia. But she had had

enough and decided to go home with her son. Using the passport previously supplied by the embassy, they booked a flight on Romanian National Airlines and left on February 16. Horodincea informed the State Department.

He is still receiving a monthly check from the government, the last one being for \$1207.60, an annual rate of about \$14,500. But Horodincea has been informed the CIA will stop making housing arrangements for him, that he has to make his own.

Horodincea's compatriot Nicola Traian tells a similar story. He defected in Pakistan and came with his wife and two children to the United States to start a new life. He, too, says he is disillusioned and is mulling over the possibility of going back.

Perhaps both men are bluffing in the hope of getting a better deal. However bad things are for them in the United States, can several years in a Romanian political prison be better?

But they sought out a reporter to whom to tell their stories, risking whatever security they have in their current arrangements, and that speaks a fundamental problem.

What will Horodincea do now? He shrugs his shoulders, throws his hands out, palms up, and sighs. "I don't know," he says. "Right now I'm waiting to see how my situation will be clarified." ■

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