

Europe and North America

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EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

1990 was a particularly eventful year in Europe. The successive upheavals in a number of central and eastern European countries had direct consequences for its work. In purely operational terms, the most immediate response was required for Romania.

Increasing openness in countries such as Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, the USSR and Yugoslavia allowed the ICRC to strengthen the relations that it had long maintained with both the National Societies and the governments of those countries.

The ICRC was thus able to organize a number of meetings and seminars to promote understanding of the principles of international humanitarian law and make its work better known. These contacts also enabled the institution to set up projects for cooperation with National Societies that were in many cases endeavouring to redefine their activities and set new priorities in the light of recent developments.

Advanced seminars made it possible to establish useful and promising contacts with government and academic circles and with senior officers in the armed forces of several countries.

An ICRC delegation remained in Bucharest throughout the year. Its 34-member team was gradually cut back to two delegates as the situation changed. Other activities in Europe were carried out from headquarters.

The ICRC's 1990 budget for Europe came to 35,305,400 Swiss francs and expenditure amounted to 37,394,500 francs.



ALBANIA

In December 1990, contacts were re-established for the first time in 43 years with the National Society and government officials in Albania. The ICRC then decided to launch a programme of material assistance for the Albanian Red Cross.

BULGARIA

Following the visit of an ICRC delegation in November, the ICRC launched a programme contributing to the development of the operational capacity of the Bulgarian Red Cross and set up several projects to promote international humanitarian law.

ROMANIA

On 22 December 1989, after the outbreak of events in Bucharest, ICRC delegates quickly arrived on the spot to provide protection for hundreds of civilians and medical care for the wounded. By 28 December, 34 ICRC delegates and 28 expatriates from National Societies were posted in Romania, working in close cooperation with volunteers from the Romanian Red Cross. On the same date, around 4,500 tonnes of relief goods had arrived or were on their way. During the emergency period, which lasted until the end of the year, the ICRC made repeated radio broadcasts in an attempt to ensure respect for the Red Cross emblem. In the midst of the fighting the emblem had been frequently disregarded. Once the initial emergency phase was over, there was an urgent need for various forms of ICRC humanitarian assistance, particularly in the areas of protection and medical assistance.

The alarming situation of abandoned children, handicapped people and the elderly became evident after ICRC delegates carried out thorough surveys in various parts of the country. The purpose of the surveys was to identify groups most in need of urgent assistance, and to determine what kind of assistance the Red Cross could provide.

At a working meeting convened by the ICRC in Bucharest on 20-21 January 1990, representatives of the ICRC, the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and various National Societies defined the outlines of a rehabilitation programme. The task of coordinating assistance activities was handed over to the League, while the ICRC concentrated on its traditional activities, as determined by its mandate, as well as on implementing a special programme for surgical units.

Visits to people detained in connection with the events

Between January and April 1990, ICRC delegates had access to persons detained in connection with the events of December 1989, including prisoners already sentenced. In all, 143 people were visited in 18 places of detention during the above-mentioned period. Visits came to a halt on April 17, however, as ICRC standard criteria for such visits were not respected.

Immediately after a renewed surge of violence in Bucharest from June 13 to 15, the ICRC made continuous attempts to gain access to persons subsequently detained. Its efforts were finally rewarded on 25 June, when visits started to 62 detainees in two places of detention.

Between January and September 1990, ICRC delegates visited detainees in 27 places, including 9 penitentiaries, 14 remand centres, 1 military garrison and 3 hospitals. In all, 376 detainees were seen.

Tracing Agency

As soon as the violence broke out in December 1989, communications in the country became extremely difficult. By opening a tracing office, the ICRC enabled separated families to exchange news. Communication links were re-established fairly soon, which meant that the number of tracing requests did not rise as the year progressed.

Programme of surgical activities

A Programme for Surgical Units was set up in February 1990 by the ICRC, with technical support from National Society specialists. The aim was to supply all hospitals carrying out surgical activities in Romania with standardized units of basic medical supplies, the composition of the units having been decided upon after ICRC evaluations in hospitals all over the country. The number of units to be made available to each province was directly proportional to the number of hospital beds, one unit being allocated for every 1,000 beds. In order to meet the needs of all 41 districts, including Bucharest, 302 units costing 50,000 Swiss francs each were necessary. Units were paid for by National Societies, the EEC¹ and the ICRC.

Dissemination

As part of the programme to increase awareness of the principles of international humanitarian law and the work of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, an ICRC dissemination delegate was posted to Romania in March 1990. In cooperation with the Romanian Red Cross Society (RRCS) and the League, the programme was elaborated to support development plans for the National Society. Information meetings for current and future members of the RRCS

¹ European Economic Community.

were held throughout the country and training courses for RRCS officials at national and district level were organized in the second half of the year.

Over the year contacts were established with the armed forces and a seminar was held in April at the central military hospital in Bucharest, in which 170 officers and doctors participated. A number of Red Cross publications were printed in Romanian and distributed on a large scale in 1990, mostly among military personnel.

The ICRC also established regular contacts with the media and academic circles, holding regular dissemination conferences throughout the year and producing several press articles and TV programmes. From March 1990 an ICRC dissemination delegate was posted in Tirgu Mures, following the ethnic clashes witnessed there the same month.

Personnel

At the beginning of 1990 there were 34 ICRC delegates and 28 National Society expatriates posted in Romania. During the course of the year, as ICRC involvement decreased, the team was gradually cut back, leaving two ICRC expatriates at the end of 1990.

UNITED KINGDOM

In June the ICRC carried out a follow-up visit to 1,634 prisoners in four detention centres: Magilligan, Maghaberry, Belfast and Maze.

USSR

The ICRC travelled to the Soviet Union on several occasions, in particular to Moscow, Vilnius, Minsk, Kiev, Tashkent and Boukhara. The aim of the visits was, on the one hand, to develop contacts with

Red Cross and Red Crescent representatives and government officials, and on the other hand, to participate in seminars on international humanitarian law and human rights.

Two ICRC delegates took part in a seminar on detention matters in the USSR organized in October by the Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Bukhara, Uzbekistan.

In December the ICRC was invited to participate in a course on the promotion of international humanitarian law within the Soviet Armed Forces, chaired by the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Soviet Army. Military Regional Commanders and army legal advisers attended this seminar.

YUGOSLAVIA

Following negotiations begun with the Yugoslav federal authorities the previous year, an agreement was reached enabling delegates to carry out an initial series of visits to 291 sentenced security detainees held in various places of detention in all the country's republics and provinces. These visits, which took place from April to June, were conducted in accordance with standard ICRC procedures, in particular interviews without witnesses between delegates and detainees selected by them. As is customary, it was agreed that the visits would be repeated at intervals yet to be determined.

RELIEF SUPPLIES DISTRIBUTED BY THE ICRC IN 1990 *EUROPE*

Country	Medical assistance	Relief		Total Sw. fr.
	Value in Sw. fr.	Value in Sw. fr.	(Tonnes)	
Romania	14,680,205	18,225,164	6,783.5	32,905,369

International Tracing Service

The International Tracing Service (ITS), which has been based in Arolsen, Germany, since 1946, has the task of centralizing information on victims of National Socialist persecution in order to enable them or their rightful claimants to obtain compensation. In 1955, the ITS was placed under the supervision of a ten-country International Commission and responsibility for its day-to-day management was entrusted to the ICRC. In 1990, the number of requests made to the ITS rose again, by 14.27%, and application was made for the fourth time to the Federal German Ministry of the Interior for additional staff. As at 31 December, 398 persons were working either full-time or part-time to fill 340 posts at the ITS.

The authorities of the United States and Italy, in order to serve more effectively the interests of former victims of persecution under the National Socialist regime who are now living in their respective countries, opened offices during the year in Baltimore, Rome and Arolsen for liaison with the ITS.

The work of the ITS in 1990 can be summarized as follows:

- 126,054 enquiries were received from 40 countries, concerning 112,551 people who lacked certification on which to base their claims and therefore contacted the ITS;
- 616,787 data checks were carried out in 29 different sets of ITS documents, pursuant to these enquiries;
- 147,587 replies were sent, on the basis of the information available, compared with 131,577 in 1989. This increase was made possible by the additional posts granted by the Federal German authorities;
- 142,170 requests nevertheless remained unprocessed at the end of the year and had to be carried over into 1991.

At its annual meeting in June, the International Commission for the ITS reaffirmed its desire to step up the acquisition of documents. Over the year, 95 ITS employees thus gathered over 300 linear metres of archive documents from 170 different organizations, travelling a total of 40,000 km in order to make copies of them.

