



The E.S. Case – A Romanian Spy Operating in Israel under the Cover of a New Immigrant (1958-1965)

Introduction

The Soviet Union and its satellite countries in Eastern Europe have strived to collect intelligence in Israel since its establishment, when Eastern European intelligence services have often been assigned as sub-contractors supporting the Soviet super-power's intelligence necessities.

The Romanian Intelligence Service, for example, was during communist times one of the dominant services acting against Israel. It conducted its activity through intelligence officers, who served under the cover of official roles in the various Romanian delegations in Israel.

One of the major methods of the Eastern block to infiltrate agents into Israel was under the cover of newcomers. Generally, an immigrant movement offers a convenient opportunity for secret services to infiltrate agents into a country, and Israel, being a country absorbing immigrants is ideal for that purpose. However, since immigration from the Soviet Union was most restricted and scanty, the Soviets used the waves of immigrants from other Eastern European countries as an instrument to introduce intelligence agents into Israel. Romania is among the countries from which there was an extensive immigration to Israel during the 50's and 60's.

According to Eastern European modus operandi, most of the deployed operatives were of previous active Communist-Party background. Some were recruited after having engaged in the absorption process; others were infiltrated under the cover of newcomers, instructed by intelligence elements. For some, Israel was merely a waypoint on their way to be infiltrated into another western country.



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ISA has regarded the possibility that among the East European immigrants are also agents infiltrated by foreign secret services, including the Romanian service, with the utmost seriousness and has strived to uncover them.

One of these agents was E.S., whose story will be brought henceforth.

Life resume and recruitment to the Romanian Intelligence

E.S. was born in 1923 to a Jewish family in the town of Dej in Transylvania. He joined the Romanian Communist Party during the Second World War.

- In 1944 he joined the Party apparatus, and was promoted to a District Secretary.
- In 1948 he was appointed the Romanian Minister of Agriculture's Secretary. The minister and his deputy – Nicolae Ceausescu, who later became Romania's president – have both helped him in later years.
- As a result of the 1952 dismissal of the Minister of Agriculture due to internal power struggles in the Romanian Communist Party, E.S. was dismissed from office as well.
- E.S. was arrested and transferred to a mental hospital, where he was brutally interrogated. After several months he was released from detention, but eventually lost his Party position. He subsequently returned to his work as an electro-mechanic. E.S. later claimed these experiences during the interrogation and detention have haunted him for years and have influenced his resolve.
- In 1956 he was summoned to the Communist Party's offices and was accused of "right-wing perversions", and was offered to purge his name by undertaking a "difficult mission" on the Party's behalf. E.S. turned to Ceausescu, whom he had previously known, but the latter refused to intervene, and E.S. had no choice but to accept the offer.
- E.S. was trained for the mission in a six-month intelligence course, where he was instructed both theoretically and practically in clandestine activity and in various methods of clandestine communications, as well as in recruiting



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sources. The target – Israel – only became known to him upon completing the course. He signed an "agent-contract" for a period of five years. He was to immigrate and be absorbed in Israel, consequently settling down in Haifa. His intelligence assignments were to get familiar with the Israeli political scene, and to report to his superiors about the country's leading political forces. He was to keep track of the economic situation and report about commercial contracts signed between Israel and western countries, as well as to spot candidates to be recruited to the Romanian intelligence.

- E.S., his wife and two children immigrated to Israel on April 27, 1958. He was first sent to a kibbutz, worked in his vocation and was successfully absorbed. He later moved to Haifa due to pressure from his wife, and worked as an electrician.
- In 1963 he began working as maintenance manager in a laundry company in northern Israel.

E.S. suspected for espionage

Several months after E.S. immigrated to Israel, certain indications emerged from various sources which suggested E.S. may be a Romanian intelligence agent.

In September 1958 he was summoned to an interview by the relevant ISA department, yet he produced reasonable answers and did not raise suspicion. However, additional suspicious information emerged, some of which led to designating E.S. as suspected of espionage, and to monitoring him through operational means. During the surveillance it appeared E.S. had been aware of the possibility of being monitored, often exposing surveillance. The ISA was also convinced his letters abroad contained a hidden content.

The operational monitoring of E.S. lasted for nearly six years. Meanwhile, suspicious material continued to add up in his file mostly from debriefings of new



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immigrants from Romania, alongside suspicious features in his behaviour. Yet, this was not sufficient to form a body of evidence for prosecution.

The uncovering

In July 1964 E.S. moved with this family to Neve Shaanan neighbourhood in Haifa. The apartment adjacent to his has been rented by the ISA for the tightening of the operational surveillance on him.

In March 1965 a breakthrough was noted when a Romanian intelligence transmission to E.S. apartment had been intercepted by ISA elements monitoring his activities. But that was not sufficient either in order to arrest and bring him to trial. The evidence needed was one which can withstand legal purposes, such as catching him red-handed while receiving a transmission from his Romanian handlers, containing incriminating material such as reception logs, and a one-time-pad which enables the deciphering of the transmission, etc.

ISA had prepared for acquiring legal evidence and the next day, upon the initiation of another Romanian intelligence transmission to E.S., ISA personnel stormed his apartment accompanied by a police officer, holding a warrant for his arrest.

While breaking into the apartment, the couple's bedroom door was locked, and was broken after the couple refused the police officer's demand to open it. In the bedroom were found the radio receiver used for receiving the transmissions. His wife held a piece of burnt paper, which included listings E.S. made during receiving his handlers' messages, and which she apparently tried to burn down in the room's heater.

The couple was separated. Once E.S. understood he had been uncovered, he turned in the earphones he used for receiving the transmissions and the cipher.



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The interrogation

E.S. was interrogated for a month. He admitted to some of the counts, namely those he had been "incriminated" with. Yet, in other topics he kept his cards close to his chest, and only disclosed partial information, while trying to mislead the interrogators.

Only in later stages of the interrogation, in light of his wife's arrest, his concern for the wellbeing of his children and his own detention conditions, he made a clean breast of details regarding his handling, assignments and communication with the Romanian intelligence.

Inter alia, E.S. unfolded the story of two clandestine meetings with a Romanian intelligence officer conducted in Israel, and confirmed the ISA's basic assumption that his letters to Romania contained concealed contents.

E.S.'s wife was also interrogated and at first employed the total denial tactic, including the attempt to burn down the papers, albeit this act was witnessed. Although it has been assessed the wife was an active partner to her husband's activity, considering the couple's children, it has been eventually decided she will not stand trial and was released.

The trial

E.S. trial began in September 1965 in the Haifa District Court. The hearing took place in the president-of-court's chamber in order to keep the arrest secret. The bill of indictment contained four clauses: conspiring to collect information, collecting information, transferring information, all with the purpose of compromising the State's security, as well as contact with a foreign agent (Romanian secret agents).



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E.S. denied all charges and claimed to having done what he did out of compulsion, under threat and no alternative – not out of free will. He mentioned the torture he endured in Romania in 1952 and the influence it had on him. He also stated he had no intention of compromising the State security; he claimed he only passed marginal information, and avoided taking on heavier assignments. In that manner he refrained from taking a job in the Acre Steel Works and from joining Mapai, the Israeli Workers' Party – with the pre-intention of avoiding accessibility to information his handlers would have been interested in. He also stated he evaded the task of recruiting new agents for the Romanian intelligence.

Conclusion

E.S. was legally convicted and was sentenced to six years in jail. The Romanians asked in 1966 through unofficial channels for his release. They clarified the "highest instance in their country", that is President Ceausescu, is inquiring about E.S.'s fate. ISA deemed further imprisonment of E.S. pointless and agreed to release him, stipulated that he would leave Israel and return to Romania.

On May 23, 1967 E.S.'s sentence was reduced, and his son was released ahead of time from military service. On May 30, 1967, six days before the Six Day War – E.S. and his family left Israel and returned to Romania.
