

COMMENTARY

Questioned Documents in Romania

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There are two distinct offices of the Romanian government that support questioned document examinations. After World War II and the Communist takeover of the country, the General Inspectorate of Police (within the Ministry of the Interior), opened forensic laboratories that included questioned documents (QD). In 1958, apparently following instruction from Moscow, additional laboratories were started in the Ministry of Justice. That basic laboratory model from that era has gone unchanged today. Although there are field offices throughout the country, the headquarters for both the Police and Justice laboratories are in Bucharest.

The division of labor gives the Police laboratories responsibility for immediate law enforcement problems that include cases in which a decision must be made about arrest or continuation of detention. Justice laboratories tend not to work under time pressure. They prepare detailed reports for court presentation, then conduct further examinations that might be requested by the court.

Since the violent Romanian Revolution in 1989 (which resulted in the overthrow of Romania's autocratic Ceausescu regime by the democratic National Salvation Front), the country has taken significant strides towards democracy. There are, however, still vestiges of the Communist system. One remnant is the fact that opinions of government experts are not challenged in court. One forensic document examiner (FDE) explained that he has never been called to court for cross-examination.

In Bucharest, the Police and the Justice laboratories are well equipped with much of the latest instruments produced in the West (Figure 1). The Police laboratory, however, is missing an ESDA, although there are plans to purchase one in the

near future. The Justice laboratory is arranged in an interesting fashion—one floor of the building is devoted to forensic equipment and another floor for office space. The philosophy behind this arrangement is to maximize use of equipment, allowing experts from the various forensic disciplines to use a wider variety of equipment than one might otherwise expect.

Neither the Police nor the Justice laboratories in Bucharest contain even a basic QD library. Rudimentary texts, both classical and modern, are missing. Few papers are presented at professional meetings of FDEs. There is, however, one book of particular note. It is a QD book in the Romanian language originally written in 1978 and reprinted in 1994. The author is Dumitru Sandu, a Romanian who was a Justice laboratory FDE. Although Sandu was trained in the USSR, his book does include Western sources of information.

During a January 2005 visit to the laboratories, no ongoing research was being conducted by FDEs. However, a computer applications expert was involved in QD-related research. He was looking into computerized methods for color differentiation in an effort to determine possible common origin of two obviously spurious Romanian identity cards. He has also used this method to look at handwriting from ballpoint and porous-tip pens.

A visit to each of the Police and Justice laboratories in Cluj-Napoca, Transylvania yielded a very different picture. There, advanced scientific equipment is far from the level of the Bucharest laboratories. Most of their QD cases involve handwriting. Cases needing technical examination with scientific instrumentation are forwarded to Bucharest. In the Police laboratory in Cluj-Napoca, there is one very interesting book in the



Figure 1. Equipment available in the Police laboratrty in Bucharest.

laboratory—*Suspect Documents* by Wilson R. Harrison (1958). This book is a bound Romanian translation with carbon copies of typewritten pages.

Private FDEs have been allowed in Romania since 2001. Today, several are active in Bucharest. The private examiner in Cluj-Napoca passed away in 2003, and as of this writing no one has opened a QD practice in that city. Unlike the United States and elsewhere, not just anyone can place a shingle outside his or her front door and advertise as an FDE. All potential private examiners must apply for a government license—a procedure taking several months. The applicant must show either prior QD work experience or pass a series of rigorous professional tests. The private examiners are former government examiners/employees. A policy was being developed regarding the possibility of government examiners handling private cases that would not present a conflict of interest.

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