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ROMANIA:

New Government Seeks To Reassure Wary Public

The National Salvation Front (FSN) is consolidating its power and trying to convince a skeptical population that it will carry out the promised transition to multiparty democracy.

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FSN leaders used the relatively peaceful weekend to formalize several prodemocracy steps. President Iliescu announced legalization of all political parties, except those deemed fascist or extremist. He also announced the abolition of the feared security apparatus and promised an open, permanent dialogue with all segments of society. Meanwhile, a group of intellectuals—including members of the FSN—announced the formation of the Group for Social Dialogue to serve as a watchdog to monitor progress in democratic reform.

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Several steps also were taken to allay fears about a possible resurgence by the Communist Party. An official FSN spokesman said in a news conference Sunday that Communists are the minority in the provisional government and no longer consider themselves party members. About 20 leading Communists called Saturday for the 3.8 million members to hold an emergency congress as soon as possible to dismantle the discredited party and to transfer all funds and property to the new government.

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The Romanian news agency reported Sunday that former secret police chief Vlad and three other officials of the Interior Ministry, which controls the police, were arrested on unspecified charges.

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Comment: Rising popular expectations apparently have driven Iliescu—he earlier had expressed reservations about a multiparty system—to embrace political pluralism faster than he may have intended. Despite its liberalizing moves, the FSN's centralized power and media control virtually guarantee that it will be better positioned than other fledgling parties in the runup to the April election. The move against Vlad, following the dismissal of Deputy Defense Minister Gusa last week, probably increases the FSN's grip on power and reduces the chance of a countercoup.

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