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This file photo shows clothes of late dictator Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena inside the dressing room at their former residence, Palatul Primaverii (the Palace of Spring) in Bucharest. — AFP photos



This file photo shows a bathroom of late dictator Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena at their former residence, Palatul Primaverii (the Palace of Spring) in Bucharest.

Ceausescu auction points to lingering nostalgia among Romanians

A trove of objects from the household of the former Romanian Communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu will go under the hammer on Wednesday in an auction drawing on the enduring fascination his memory holds amid the country's current political turmoil. Rugs adorned with the face of the "nation's beloved son", gifts from other world leaders, as well as clothes and photos are some of the artefacts on offer. "There is a clear interest in such objects," said Mihai Ipate from the auction house Artmark. "Some buyers are motivated by nostalgia, others want to enrich their collection." That nostalgia for the past and for the certainties of the past have been in evidence elsewhere in recent days.

The auction comes days after the 100th anniversary of Ceausescu's birth, a date which some Romanians felt moved to mark by gathering at his tomb. "I came to do my patriotic duty and light a candle for him, because he is worthy of this," said 79-year-old retired driver Valerian, one of dozens who came to the site with flowers and candles. "They shouldn't have killed him," he told AFP, glossing over the hardships of the Ceausescu era: "Everyone had work, an apartment, the freezers were full." Rising to the leadership of Romania's Communist Party in 1965, Ceausescu went on to create what historians judge to be one of eastern Europe's harshest dictatorships. He was overthrown after an uprising in December 1989 and executed three days later along with his wife Elena after a summary trial. An elderly woman laying flowers at the tomb in

Bucharest's Ghencea cemetery asks: "What dictator?! Are today's politicians able to do as much as him? Not at all, all they do is steal."

'Icon of a glorious past'

Large crowds have taken to the streets in recent weeks to protest against proposed judicial reforms that critics say would make prosecuting graft more difficult in Romania, considered one of the EU's most corrupt states. For many Romanians, "Ceausescu is the icon of a glorious past, of a Romania where the memory of cold and the hunger have been erased," sociologist Vasile Dancu told AFP. This nostalgia had only increased in the face of rising disen-



A picture showing late dictator Nicolae Ceausescu (right) and Cuban leader Fidel Castro (left) during his visit to Romania is displayed at an auction house in Bucharest.



A cover of communist 'FLACARA' magazine (The Flame) with late dictator Nicolae Ceausescu (right) and French President Charles de Gaulle (left) at an auction house in Bucharest.

chantment with the political class, he added. "Ceausescu still haunts the minds of those who grew up before 1989. The nationalist-communist discourse is still very present in political debate, while the former leader seems to have become acceptable, worthy of respect, a great patriot," says historian Armand Gosu. But in other ways his legacy still blights the lives of many. Mr Gosu points to towns "disfigured" by the old regime's economic policies and Ceausescu's "illogical decisions".

'Disgusting' spectacle

Those targeted by the regime's apparatus of repression are even more unforgiving.

"Ceausescu established a personal dictatorship and his regime was based on terror," 62-year-old Radu Filipescu said bitterly. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison in 1983 for distributing leaflets calling on Romanians to take to the streets against the regime. Filipescu remembers the cult of personality around Ceausescu, which transformed his birthday into what he calls a "disgusting" spectacle. Nevertheless curiosity continues to surround the Ceausescu era.

The enormous palace constructed on his orders in central Bucharest is home to the country's parliament and one of its most popular tourist attractions, with 210,000 tickets sold last year. His former residence, the Palatul Primaverii (Spring Palace), has been open to the public for almost two years and saw 36,000 visitors in 2017. — AFP



The Winter Garden of late dictator Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena at their former residence, Palatul Primaverii (the Palace of Spring) in Budapest.



Mannequins wear clothes of late dictator Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena at their former residence, Palatul Primaverii (the Palace of Spring) in Budapest.



Pictures showing late dictator Nicolae Ceausescu are displayed at an auction house in Bucharest.



A tapestry with late dictator Nicolae Ceausescu (left), his parents (center) and his wife Elena (Right), displayed at an auction house in Bucharest.



A car received as a gift from Iran's Shah is exhibited at the former residence of late dictator Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena, Palatul Primaverii (the Palace of Spring).



A picture of the three children Nicu (L), Zoe (center) and Valentin (R) is seen on the bedroom of late dictator Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena at their former residence, Palatul Primaverii (the Palace of Spring) in Budapest.



Physiotherapy room of late dictator Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena at their former residence, Palatul Primaverii (the Palace of Spring) in Budapest.



Indoor pool of late dictator Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena at their former residence, Palatul Primaverii (the Palace of Spring) in Budapest.



This file photo shows the bedroom of Elena, the wife of late dictator Nicolae Ceausescu at their former residence, Palatul Primaverii (the Palace of Spring) in Bucharest.