

*From the desk of [Steven Hill](http://www.Steven-Hill.com), www.Steven-Hill.com
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Dateline: Bucharest, Romania

Dear friends and colleagues,

I hope all is well and that you are having a nice autumn. I'm in Bucharest, Romania speaking at a conference hosted by the European Ideas Network, which is a center-right think tank affiliated with the European People's Party (the largest party in the European Parliament). Naturally, much of the discussion here is about the current challenges over the euro. Hundreds of people are in attendance, including several prime ministers, numerous Members of the European Parliament, various ministry heads, government officials, think tank experts and more. There is much talk here about the need for a greater fiscal union, with the words "United States of Europe" sprinkled liberally within speeches from the main dais, as well as in private conversation. This is coming from the conservatives, mind you, and much of the center-left already has taken a position of "more Europe." So it seems like a consensus, fractious as it may be, is slowly forming in Europe among the political leadership. But when it comes to forging a United States of anything, the devil is in the details, and it is going to take many years to hammer out those details, just as it did for a young America in the 1780s.

The conference itself was held in Ceausescu's "house," the huge – no, gargantuan – palace to a dictator's vanity. It is supposedly the second largest building in the world, after the Pentagon (also built to stoke another type of vanity, increasingly one that Americans can't afford). No question, the palace – which is now the seat of the Romanian Parliament – is garishly impressive, mimicking the imperial grandeur of ancient Rome. Ornate columns and white marble are in abundance, sectioned off by royal red carpets and long hallways. But what is just as striking is that the rooms and hallways are so vast that the Romanian government can barely afford to furnish them. The rooms mostly are empty, it's like an enormous abandoned mansion of vast barrenness amidst a skeleton of grandeur. And of course it's a big waste of taxpayers money. The area around where I am staying in Bucharest at the Intercontinental Hotel was one of the major battlegrounds of the revolution against the thuggish Ceausescu dictatorship in December 1989; the plaza below my balcony on the 18th floor was the scene of one battle between the protestors and government security forces that resulted in many dead, with eye-witnesses taking photos of the battle right from these balconies. Kind of gives me goose bumps.

Read more of my dispatches from Romania, about the economic crisis, history and culture, posted [here](#) at the Washington Monthly website.

And below are other recent posts from my [Dispatches from Europe](#) blog at Washington Monthly, which gives you more stories, impressions and perspective from my recent travels in Europe. In these dispatches I reflect on the politics, economics, culture and history of the European landscape, and how those are relevant to the current challenges facing the world.

Also, you can follow me on Twitter now, [@StevenHill1776](#). Please feel free to forward my email to any people who you think might be interested in this kind of information.

Yours,

Steven