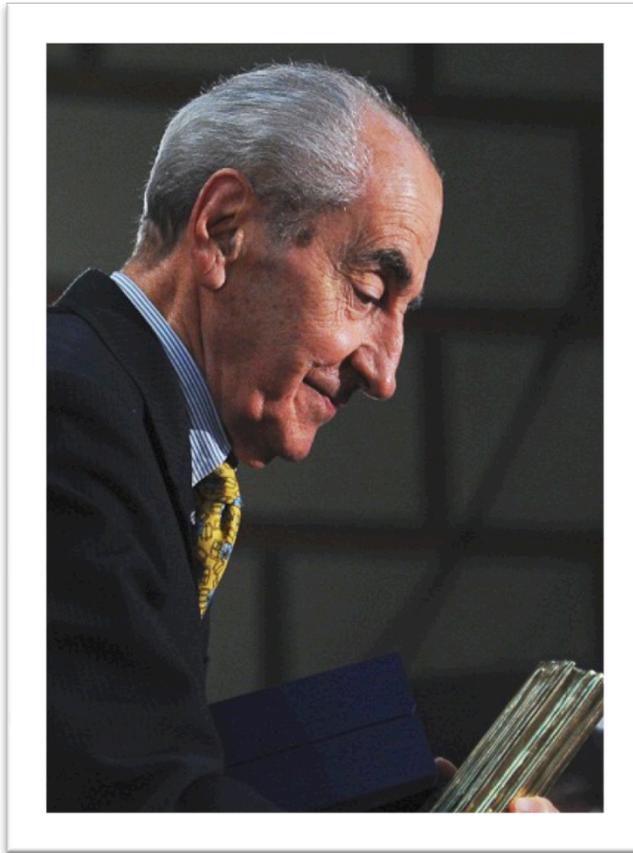


MIRCEA IONESCU-QUINTUS

A Brief Biography



Introduction

Mircea Ionescu-Quintus is the honorary president of the Romanian National Liberal Party, former head of the Senate, and minister of justice. A distinguished war veteran and former political prisoner under the communist regime, he has led exceptional careers in the military, as a politician, as a professional lawyer and constitutional scholar. He is the author of eleven books, written over the span of more than sixty years, which include works of fiction and short stories, books of aphorisms and poetry, one play, a biography, and a political memoir. Over his many years of public service he has been honored with many of his country's most prestigious awards, and, at the age of 95—adored for his sharp wit, humor, youthful spirit, and profound humanity—he continues to be actively engaged in the daily business of Romanian government.

Biography

Mircea Ionescu-Quintus was born on March 18, 1917 in Kherson, Ukraine, where the family had fled to escape the war and occupation of Romania. His father, Ion Ionescu-Quintus was a lawyer and influential politician; his mother Marioara Voiculescu, was an actress. Once peace was restored, the family returned to their hometown, the city of Ploiesti in Prahova county, Romania. Mircea's father was a liberal leader who would become mayor of the city and went on to hold nine seats in Romania's parliament, culminating in the vice-presidency of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies. Like his son, Ion was a beloved writer whose legacy was honored as recently as 2005, when Prahova County Council named their Art Museum the "Ion Ionescu-Quintus" Museum of Art of Prahova (Ion had been one of the Museum's most important founders in 1931). Ion would prove to be the greatest influence on young Mircea, who grew up amidst his father's political activities, the family home frequently visited by politicians from all sides of the political spectrum.

As a teenager Mircea witnessed his country in turmoil, as Romania, still a monarchy at the time, went through a period of social unrest and political upheaval. While attending the St. Peter and Paul High School in Ploiesti (1927-1934), Mircea developed a special regard for one of his father's frequent visitors: Ion Gheorghe Duca, who became prime minister of Romania for less than two months at the end of 1933 before being killed in an assassination for his efforts to suppress the fascist Iron Guard movement. Mircea often refers to Duca as his mentor and political father figure, and when he was assassinated—only three months after Mircea's father's natural death—it left a deep mark on him. When a statue of Duca was unveiled the following spring, Mircea was asked to give a speech at the occasion. Barely seventeen years old, Mircea recalls being reluctant and feeling out of place, but a friend of the family and prominent politician reminded him that "your father would have spoken here today. You must do your duty and fill his shoes. This is your time." Mircea felt the call of duty, and thus, by giving the speech, he became a member of the National Liberal Youth. He spoke out in protest against the hugely popular Legionnaires movement (the Iron Guard), for their barbaric assassination of Duca. The speech would propel him into the public eye and marked the beginning of his long political life.

In 1938 Mircea graduated from the faculty of Law at the University of Bucharest with a Bachelor's degree, specializing in Constitutional law. Later that year he joined the military, waiving what would have been his legal right to abstain from service based on being the sole remaining male provider in his family. He excelled in the army, soon rising to the rank of lieutenant and then captain. For his valor in battle at Odessa during the summer and fall of 1941, King Michael I awarded him the rare distinction of the "Romanian Crown" for military virtue. Mircea went on to fight at the Russian front from the summer of 1942 to the spring of 1943, and then at Bessarabia from the fall of 1943 until the winter of 1944. After the war Mircea quit the army in October of 1945.

In 1944 Romania's prime minister, Antonescu, was toppled and arrested by King Michael, and the country changed allegiance, joining the allies. Despite this late association with the winning side, Romania was largely dismantled after the war and its role in the defeat of Nazi Germany was not recognized. During the subsequent Soviet occupation, the Communist-dominated government called new elections, which were won with 80% of the vote. They thus rapidly established themselves as the dominant political force. In 1947, the Communists forced King Michael to abdicate and leave the country, and they proclaimed Romania a people's republic. During this period the Communist government established a reign of terror, carried out mainly through the "Securitate," the government's secret police. Many campaigns were launched to eliminate "enemies of the state," in which numerous individuals were killed or imprisoned for political or economic reasons. Punishment included deportation, internal exile, and internment in forced labor camps and prisons; dissent was vigorously suppressed. Communist rule in Romania would last for over 40 years.

During this time Mircea was a practicing attorney at law in Prahova and, ever since 1936, an official member of the National Liberal Party. (However, starting with the Communist take-over in 1947 all other parties, including the NLP, were rendered effectively defunct.) He published his first book of Epigrams, "Smiling in the Face of Adversity" (1943), and he met his wife, Viorica Ileana Mazalu, who was an Art History major. They fell in love and married in June of 1947. Following his father's advice, given at his deathbed, to "never enter politics," Mircea withstood the temptation to become actively involved in the resistance movement, but when King Michael abdicated in 1947 he knew it was only a matter of time before he would be targeted for his refusal to fall in step with the regime's propaganda.

During the night of August 15, 1952, without warning or explanation, Mircea was seized from his home by the Securitate on suspicion of counter-government activities, leaving behind his shivering wife, who was pregnant with their son at the time. After being held at the Ploiesti penitentiary for over two months, he was shipped off to one of the largest forced labor camps at the Danube-Black Sea Canal.

For the next eighteen months Mircea endured unspeakable horrors alongside other tens of thousands of political prisoners, forced to work twelve hours a day, seven days a week, on the excavation of the canal. Mircea's son, Razvan, was born during this time, a fact of which Mircea was notified only through a package sent to him by his wife with the return address: "Razvan Ionescu-Quintus" (since all written communication was closely monitored, Viorica could not risk explicitly announcing the birth of their child in a letter). He watched as countless of his comrades—fellow "dissidents" who were generals, politicians, academics, scientists, writers, intellectuals and businessmen—were beaten, tortured, denied medical attention, forced to live in unsanitary conditions, exhausted by physical labor and, not rarely, driven to suicide. Some accounts estimate as many as half a million slave laborers

died during the construction of the canal. As Mircea recalls in *The Devil's Grinder*, few of the men with whom he arrived ever returned home.

Mircea was eventually released from camp Borzesti on April 30, 1954. Over the coming years, after returning home to rejoin his wife and son, Mircea continued to be persecuted by the Securitate for his non-conformist views and refusal to cooperate with the communist regime. He was repeatedly interrogated, threatened, forced to tell what he or someone else had said or done or were conspiring to do against the System. He never betrayed a soul, but the protocols of these interrogations were kept on file for many years. In early 2000, these documents were published and used by political opponents as proof that he had “co-operated” with the Securitate during Communism. Mircea fought and won the case against these allegations, and while he wanted to step down as president of the Senate during the procedures, his colleagues refused his request, faithfully defending his honor. Despite the legal victory, the profound injustice of these charges took a heavy toll on Mircea.

After being released from prison, Mircea continued his career in law and academia and published the bulk of his literary work. He would not re-enter politics until the Romanian Revolution and the momentous fall of Communism, which was marked by the live internationally televised execution of dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu in December of 1989. During the revolutionary transition following the overthrow of Ceaușescu, Mircea was instrumental in re-establishing one of the most important pre-Communist Romanian parties: the National Liberal Party. He was elected its vice president (1990–1992), and then president (1993–2001), and he simultaneously served as vice president of the assembly of deputies (1990–1991), and as minister of justice in the cabinet (1991–1992). His political leadership led to the unification of all liberal parties in Romania between 1994 and 1997. He was a senator of Prahova from 1996 until 2008, and he served as vice president (1996–1999) and then as president (1999–2000) of the Senate. Throughout this time Mircea contributed substantially to the formulation of the new Romanian Constitution, and several of its most important texts to date are his work.

Mircea has been knighted twice, once by the Queen of Denmark, and once by the President of Portugal (both in the year 2000). On October 19, 2002, he was named honorary president of the National Liberal Party, and in 2004 he received the highest Romanian distinction, “The Romanian Star” for outstanding political service. In 2008 he was featured as one of the 101 Most Successful People in Romania, publicized in a special report in the Romanian newspaper *Cotidianul* and honored by a nationally televised celebration in December of that year. In April of 2009 he received the honorary degree of Retired Brigadier General from President Traian Basescu for his military service during the Second World War, and just recently, in March 2012, TNL (The National Liberal Youth) presented him with the Award for Longest Political Activity at their Annual Parliamentary Gala. Mircea accepted the award on stage, together with his wife Viorica, to a standing ovation.