Dominating the entire project from the western end of Bulevardul Unirii is the colossal **Palatul Parlamentului** (Palace of Parliament), claimed to be the second-largest administrative building in the world – after the Pentagon – measuring 270m by 240m, and 86m high. It epitomizes the megalomania that overtook Ceauşescu in the 1980s; here he intended to house ministries, Communist Party offices and the apartments of high functionaries. Built on the site of the former Spirei Hill, which was razed for this project, the sheer size of the building can only be grasped by comparison with the toy-like cars scuttling past below. It has twelve storeys, four underground levels (including a nuclear bunker), a 100m-long lobby and 1100 rooms, around half of which are used as offices while the remainder are redundant. The interiors are lavishly decorated with marble and gold leaf, and there are 4500 chandeliers (11,000 were planned), the largest of which weighs 1.5 tonnes, but the decoration was never finished due to the Ceauşescus’ ever-changing whims. They were demanding patrons, allowing little more than a technical role to the architects, of which there were around seven hundred – one staircase was rebuilt three times before they were satisfied.

This huge white elephant was officially known as the Casa Republicii, then as the Casa Poporului, but more popularly as the Casa Nebunului (Madman’s House), before taking on its present name. The new government spent a long time agonizing about an acceptable use for it, and in 1994 it was finally decided to house the Senate and Parliament here; it is now also used for international conferences.

There are several different **tours** available. The standard one is a 45-minute trek through ten of the most dazzling, most representative or simply the largest of the halls, such as the extraordinary, glass-ceilinged **Sala Unirii** (Unification Hall), where legendary Romanian gymnast Nadia Comaneci was married in 1996. One of the last chambers you’re led to is the Alexandru Ioan Cuza room, whose **balcony** offers defining views of the city. Other tours take in the basement, terrace or both. The palace is so popular (particularly with tour groups) that you’d do well to time your visit for the start or the end of the day.

**Muzeul Naţional de Artă Contemporană**

Located in the building’s west wing (to the rear of the palace) is the **Muzeul Naţional de Artă Contemporană** (National Museum of Contemporary Art). Accessed via a specially constructed glass annexe and external elevators (which, as they take you up, give you some idea of the breathtaking scale of this building), it’s a superbly designed space covering four floors. All the works on display are temporary (typically two- or three-month rotating programmes), featuring both Romanian and international artists, and mostly take the form of multimedia installations (including large-screen projections), sculptures, collages, montages and photographic displays.