

# **FINAL REPORT**

of the

## **International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania**

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## **ROMANIAN-GERMAN RELATIONS BEFORE AND DURING THE HOLOCAUST**

### **Introduction**

It was a paradox of the Second World War that Ion Antonescu, well known to be pro-Occidental, sided with Germany and led Romania in the war against the Allies. Yet, Romania's alliance with Germany occurred against the background of the gradually eroding international order established at the end of World War I. Other contextual factors included the re-emergence of Germany as a great power after the rise of the National Socialist government and the growing involvement of the Soviet Union in European international relations. In East Central Europe, the years following the First World War were marked by a rise in nationalism characterized by strained relations between the new nation-states and their ethnic minorities.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, France and England were increasingly reluctant to commit force to uphold the terms of the Versailles Treaty, and the Comintern began to view ethnic minorities as potential tools in the "anti-imperialist struggle."<sup>2</sup> In 1920, Romania had no disputes with Germany, while its eastern border was not recognized by the Soviet Union.

### **Romanian-German Relations during the Interwar Period**

In the early twenties, relations between Romania and Germany were dominated by two issues: the reestablishment of bilateral trade and German reparations for war damages incurred during the World War I German occupation. The German side was mainly interested in trade, whereas the Romanian side wanted first to resolve the conflict over reparations. A settlement was reached only in 1928. The Berlin government acted very cautiously at that time. In regard to internal political affairs in Romania, German policy was one of strict neutrality.<sup>3</sup>

From 1928 onward Germany began to pursue its political and economic interests more actively. This shift affected all aspects of Romanian-German relations. It was not until this

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<sup>1</sup> See Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars*, A History of East Central Europe, vol. 9 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974).

<sup>2</sup> Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> For context see: Hans-Paul Höpfner, *Deutsche Südosteuropapolitik der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1983).

period that the fate of the German minority became an issue in bilateral relations. The German side now granted not only modest financial support to their cultural and religious organizations, but also a measure of political support. As another way to further the interests of its minorities abroad, Weimar Germany tried to establish itself as a protector of the international ethnic minority movement. In this respect, it also began to take an interest in the situation of the Hungarian and Jewish minorities in various eastern European countries.<sup>4</sup>

German-Romanian relations, both political and economic, suffered after the Nazis seized power in Germany and demanded a radical revision of the World War I peace treaties. This policy was diametrically opposed to Romanian interests. But soon enough, economic relations between the two countries were to improve again: the beginnings of the German-Romanian rapprochement date back to 1936. Romanian officials were motivated by economic interests and by security considerations; they wanted Germany to keep Hungarian revisionism in check and to protect Romania against potential Soviet threats.<sup>5</sup> Nazi foreign policy placed particular emphasis on economic penetration of the southeastern European states.<sup>6</sup> This, in turn, helped Romania to alleviate some of the effects of the Great Depression. Germany was, in effect, the only open market for southeastern European grains, the region's most important export.<sup>7</sup> As a result, by 1938 Germany had become Romania's most important commercial partner, accounting for almost 50 percent of Romania's foreign trade.<sup>8</sup>

But Romania managed to deepen trade relations with Germany without being forced to forsake the protection of its Western allies.<sup>9</sup> It is worth mentioning that in the pre-Antonescu period, the new eastern European states, notably Romania and Czechoslovakia, believed they

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<sup>4</sup> Sabine Bamberger-Stemmann, *Der europäische Nationalitätenkongress 1925 bis 1938. Nationale Minderheiten zwischen Lobbytätigkeit und Großmachtinteressen* (Marburg: Verlag Herder Institut, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Rebecca Haynes, *Politica României față de Germania între 1936–1940* (Iași: Polirom, 2003, p. 18).

<sup>6</sup> Jean Ancel, ed., *Romanian-German Relations, 1936-1944*, vol. 9 of *Documents Concerning the Fate of Romanian Jewry During the Holocaust* (New York: Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1986), henceforth: Ancel, *Documents*; *The War Years, June 23, 1941- December 11, 1941*, vol. 8, ser. D (1937-1945) of *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918–1945* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1964), henceforth: *DGFP*.

<sup>7</sup> Harry M. Howard, *The Policy of National Socialist Germany in Southeastern Europe*, Harry S. Truman Library, pp. 10-529.

<sup>8</sup> Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitler, König Carol und Marschall Antonescu. Die deutsch-rumänischen Beziehungen 1938-1944* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1954), p. 45.

<sup>9</sup> I. Benditer and Ion Ciupercă, "Relații româno-germane în perioada 1928-1932," in *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie, "A. D. Xenopol"* (henceforth: A.I.I.A.I.), 8 (1971): 317-330.

could trust French and British guarantees, in part due to their opposition to Mussolini's proposal to revise the Versailles Treaty.<sup>10</sup>

Political relations, therefore, remained precarious. The increasingly aggressive German revisionist policy was interested not only in a reorientation of Romanian foreign policy, but also in a change in its internal affairs. Ideologically and financially, Germany supported the Romanian radical right and antisemitic groups, which helped to undermine Romania's democratic order from within. According to German historian Armin Heinen, Octavian Goga was the first Romanian politician to be financed by Nazi Germany.<sup>11</sup>

Germany also played an active role in the internal conflicts of the German minority in Romania, and supported and financed the creation of a Nazi movement from within. During the 1930s Berlin succeeded in bringing the ethnic Germans in Romania under its control.<sup>12</sup> The fact that antisemitism in Germany had become official state doctrine, encouraged antisemitism elsewhere, especially in Romania. The rise of this German-influenced antisemitism, which intensified Romanian antisemitism, occurred even before German efforts to draw Romania away from its former allies had begun to take effect.<sup>13</sup>

As the 1930s advanced, German diplomacy also encouraged direct measures against Romanian Jews, such as forcing them out of German-Romanian commercial relations. It pressured German companies in Romania not to employ Jews or let them sell German goods. In 1939 the German Foreign Office required each of its Romanian consulates to supply comprehensive information on the number of Jews in its area and their role in the community's business life. At the signing of the economic agreement in March 1939, the leader of the German delegation reported to Berlin that, aside from the real economic cooperation intended by the agreement, it also aimed to eliminate Jews from the Romanian forest industry.

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<sup>10</sup> Ion Ciupercă, "N. Titulescu și rolul statelor mici în viața internațională contemporană," in *Titulescu și strategia păci*, (Iași: Junimea, 1982); Ion Ciupercă, "Locarno oriental, semnificația unui eșec (1925–1937)," *A.I.I.A.I.* 34, no. 2; E. Bold and I. Ciupercă, *Europa în derivă (1918–1940). Din istoria relațiilor internaționale* (Iași: Casa Editorială Demiurg, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> Armin Heinen, "Die Legion 'Erzengel Michael,'" in *Rumänien. Soziale Bewegung und politische Organisation. Ein Beitrag zum Problem des internationalen Faschismus* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1986), pp. 322-335.

<sup>12</sup> Wolfgang Miede, *Das Dritte Reich und die deutsche Volksgruppe in Rumänien 1933-1938* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1972); Johann Böhm, *Deutsche in Rumänien und das Dritte Reich* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1999); Vasile Ciobanu, *Contribuții la cunoașterea istoriei sașilor transilvăneni 1918-1944* (Sibiu: Hora, 2001), pp. 179-219.

<sup>13</sup> Hildrun Glass, *Zerbrochene Nachbarschaft. Das deutsch-jüdische Verhältnis in Rumänien 1918-1938* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1996), pp. 357-457, 527-560.

However, German anti-Jewish actions were still somewhat restrained during this period for fear of a negative impact on the German minority in Romania. Thus, in 1937 the German ambassador in Bucharest protested against the Romanian government's plans to introduce the "Law for the Protection of National Labor." If enacted, this measure would have required Romanian firms to employ, at minimum, 75 percent so-called blood Romanians. The Romanians repeatedly reassured the Germans that this measure was not an attempt to damage German interests and was intended to affect only the Jews. The Romanians did indeed request German help in achieving the intended "elimination of the Jews," a request to which the German diplomats had no principal objection.<sup>14</sup>

The German-Soviet rapprochement exemplified by the Ribbentrop-Molotov Agreement (August 23, 1939), the fall of France in June 1940, and Romania's humiliating territorial losses that same summer were all incentives for a closer relationship with Germany. Arguably, the range of options available to the Romanian government in 1940 was narrowing. After the loss of Bessarabia to the Soviet Union in June 1940, the Romanian government envisaged Germany as a defender against Hungarian and Bulgarian revisionism. Yet, Romanian hopes for German protection were not to be realized, as Hitler supported Hungarian and Bulgarian territorial claims against Romania.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, the use of population transfers as a policy tool was gaining credibility; Romanian Foreign Minister Mihail Manoilescu saw population transfers as a way to ease Bulgarian and Hungarian demands for territory. Such moves were part of a broader debate about ethnic homogeneity within the borders of nation-states, and its legitimation in diplomatic statements further encouraged harsh anti-minority rhetoric and policies. It was only a small step from here to "cleansing the land," the implementation of ethnic purification—a small step, which triggered the tragedy of the Jews and Roma under Romanian authority during World War II.

In fact, however, the shift from Franco-British to German protection actually occurred before the end of March 1940—three months before the defeat of France—apparently because the Romanian government had lost faith in an Allied victory. As a symbol of this fundamental change, the Romanian government signed an oil agreement with Germany after months of negotiating. Throughout the war Romania remained a sovereign state, but committed itself more and more to dependence on its new ally, which initially had seemed so overwhelmingly

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 544-547.

<sup>15</sup> Constantin Iordan, "La neutralité dans le sud-est européen (1939-1941). Le cas de la Bulgarie et de la Grèce. Quelques repères," *Revue des Etudes Sud-est Européennes* 3 (1991), p. 171.

powerful. Romania delivered its raw materials and put its army at Germany's disposal, thereby helping to keep the German war machine going.

Moreover, Nazi Germany insisted that Romania sign an agreement granting extensive autonomy to the German minority in Romania. Thus, the ethnic Germans, in effect, erected a small state within the state. This de facto territorial entity was built directly by the Reich and followed the Nazi model; and in 1943 Romania was forced to allow ethnic Germans to join the Waffen-SS instead of being drafted into the Romanian army.<sup>16</sup> In a parallel to German maneuvers removing the German minority from Romanian sovereignty, Nazi Germany also attempted to gain control over Jewish life in Romania, with the intention of destroying Romanian Jewry. Beginning in spring 1941 Gustav Richter, diplomat and member of the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (RSHA; Reich Main Security Office), was active in Bucharest. His job was to ensure that all regulations regarding Romania's Jews were to be formulated in accordance with the German example. In strict conformity with German directives, the Romanian Jews were to be exterminated.

### **Antonescu and Germany**

When Antonescu came to power in September 1940, it was not obvious that he would be Berlin's favorite. The Nazis identified him as a potential leader through their embassy in Bucharest; yet the German ambassador's endorsement of Antonescu was accompanied by a cautionary note: Antonescu had criticized the Munich Conference and Anglo-French appeasement.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, when Antonescu's Romania joined the Axis on November 23, 1940, Antonescu showed an unabashed commitment to "the German option." The vision of the Antonescu regime was that of a Romania able to retrieve its lost territories and to participate in the new international order planned by the Tripartite Pact.<sup>18</sup> In his plea against German support for a Ukrainian state or for Bulgarian territorial claims, Mihai Antonescu, vice president of the Council of Ministers, added to this vision a racial element during his meeting with Hitler on November 27, 1941: "For me, the greatest challenge of European reconstruction is the solving of the Slav problem;" to ensure an enduring peace, it was necessary to "link the German action

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<sup>16</sup> Vasile Ciobanu, *Contribuții la cunoașterea istoriei sașilor transilvăneni 1918-1944* (Sibiu: Hora, 2001), pp. 236-264.

<sup>17</sup> E. Barbul, *Le III<sup>e</sup> Homme de l'Axe* (Paris: Editions de la Couronne, 1950), p. 189.

<sup>18</sup> Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 9: pp. 134-135.

against the Slavs with the one of the Latin race; our position vis-à-vis the Slavs must not be toned down by hesitation and any policy viewed at the isolation, neutralization, or occupation of Slavic territories may be considered legitimate.”<sup>19</sup>

Mihai Antonescu further added that German support for Ukrainian and Bulgarian claims would be tantamount to an injustice to Romania and the Romanian people, which “is and was anti-Slav, just as it has always been antisemitic.”<sup>20</sup> This rhetoric was well received by Hitler, who used the opportunity to declare that there was space in Europe only for Germanic and Latin “races” and that these two races needed to work together against the Slavs. He also promised Mihai Antonescu that Romania could “grab as much [territory] in the East as it pleases,” as long as Romanian settlers were sent to help win “the common fight against the Slavic race.”<sup>21</sup> Yet, Hitler made no firm promises to support the return of Northern Transylvania to Romanian sovereignty.

### **Romania, Germany, and the Final Solution**

“The Jewish problem,” or the treatment of Jews in Romania, was neither an issue nor the core of a conflict or cause for dissent between Germany and the National Legionary government. It had no impact on the stance of Nazi Germany with regard to the leaders of the Legionary regime in Romania. In the beginning, Berlin viewed the Legionary offensive against Jewish property and the Jews themselves as characteristic of a fascist revolution in Romania similar to that which had taken place in Germany. At the two meetings between Marshal Ion Antonescu and Hitler (November 22-23, 1940, and January 14, 1941), the treatment of Jews was not even addressed seriously. Romania’s complex political situation and Germany’s immediate interests at the time—preparations for war with the Soviet Union and the campaign in the Balkans—constituted the backdrop for a special Romanian-German relationship. The Nazi government (Hitler, the Foreign Ministry and Ribbentrop, and the German military mission and embassy in Bucharest) was chiefly interested in Romania’s resources—primarily wheat, produce, and oil—and in subordinating the Romanian army to the Reich in the upcoming war. The antisemitic policy, which was already central to the ideology of the new Romanian fascist government, was of less interest to the Germans. Another reason the “Jewish problem” was a

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., no. 105, p. 280.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 281.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 284.

matter of only secondary importance was that at that time the objectives and proportions of the Final Solution had not yet been clearly formulated; the Nazis, therefore, did not pressure Romania into adopting their policies.

Some of the antisemitic propaganda in the Romanian press was financed by the German embassy in Bucharest through bribing journalists and newspapers and by providing financial support to the two antisemitic parties, the National Christian Party of Octavian Goga and A.C. Cuza and the Legion. On August 15, 1940, *Porunca Vremii*, the semi-official newspaper of the antisemitic movement, stated: “Any attempt at strengthening Romania will fail as long as the Jewish problem in Romania is not solved according to the wonderful German model.” In conformity with the Nazi model, the solution implied a “staunch repression” and “expulsion” of the Jews from Romania. This is but one example out of hundreds of similar newspaper items.

The Legionnaires believed, and they were not entirely incorrect, that their movement had the full support of the Nazis and that the Reich’s guarantees of Romania’s crippled borders after June-August 1940 were warranted by the existence of a fascist regime in Romania. On the last day of the Iron Guard rebellion (January 23, 1941) when the Romanian army indiscriminately killed armed Legionnaires, their semi-official paper *Cuvântul* (The Word) warned Antonescu that the destruction of the Legionary movement would threaten the very existence of the Romanian state and Romanian sovereignty: “Only the existence in Romania of a national movement similar to the National Socialist and fascist ones guarantees our future.”<sup>22</sup>

Antonescu also believed that the Legionnaires had the full trust and support of the Germans.<sup>23</sup> It seemed that in the minds of Hitler and the Nazis, “Romania cannot be ruled in opposition to the Iron Guard.”<sup>24</sup> On October 15, 1940, Antonescu declared his readiness “for close political, economic, and military cooperation with Germany” and sent Valer Pop, who was known to be pro-German, to Berlin as a special envoy.<sup>25</sup> He then invited a German military mission to Romania to train the Romanian army and consolidate the border defense. The German officers who visited Romania, led by General Tippelskirch, were favorably impressed by the

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<sup>22</sup> *Cuvântul*, Bucharest, January 24, 1941.

<sup>23</sup> Horia Sima, *Era libertății. Statul Național Legionar* (Madrid: Mișcării Legionare, 1982), vol. 2: p. 79.

<sup>24</sup> *DGFP*, vol. 11: no. 652, p. 1094.

<sup>25</sup> Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 9: no. 61, p. 129.



*Conducator* (Ion Antonescu; the Leader) but not by his deputy, Horia Sima, and reported as much to Berlin.<sup>26</sup>

In January 1941, during the struggle between Antonescu and the Iron Guard, the Führer was obliged to choose between two potential partners for the Reich. Although the Legionary movement was the ideological counterpart to National Socialism, Hitler favored Antonescu because he exerted firm control over his army and upheld Romania's economic commitments to the Reich. At the January 14, 1941, meeting with Antonescu, Hitler basically granted him a free hand to crush the Legionnaires. Even before that meeting, it was clear that those with a military role in Berlin supported Antonescu: Hitler, the Wehrmacht generals who had met with Antonescu, the head of the military delegation in Bucharest, various economic offices, and the representative in Bucharest, Wilhelm Fabrizius.

Himmler and all of his organizations as well as Goebbels, on the other hand, supported the Iron Guard. On January 24, Goebbels, who did not know that the battle had already been decided, wrote in his diary: "In Romania, nothing is clear yet. The Legionnaires are continuing their revolt, and Antonescu has issued orders to shoot them. The Führer, for his part, says that he wants an agreement with a state and not with an ideology. Still, my heart is with them."<sup>27</sup> Several days later, after learning of the Legionnaires' defeat, Goebbels added in his diary: "Am with the Führer. He continues to support Antonescu, since he needs him for military reasons. That is one point of view. But it wasn't necessary to wipe out the Legion."<sup>28</sup> Himmler's emissaries in Romania helped the commander of the Legionnaires, Horia Sima, and the heads of the movement to escape to Germany. Throughout the war years, the leaders of the Iron Guard remained in Germany under relatively comfortable conditions, albeit with restrictions on their freedom of movement; Sima and his henchmen could serve as an alternative to Antonescu's regime if something went wrong in Bucharest. In return for their assistance to the Iron Guard, Antonescu forced Himmler's representatives and members of the Foreign Office as well as known Gestapo agents to leave Romania, thereby ensuring himself control over domestic matters.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *DGFP*, vol. 11: no. 75, pp. 126-28.

<sup>27</sup> Josef Goebbels, *Tagebücher* (Munich-Zurich, Herausgeben von Ralf Georg Reuth, Serie Piper), bd. 4, 1940-1942, p. 1524.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1525.

<sup>29</sup> *DGFP*, vol. 12: no. 258, pp. 443-444.

It should be noted that Romanian-German cooperation and Antonescu's consent to satisfy most of the German economic and military demands stemmed in part from his fear of the Soviet Union. For almost four years—from September 1940 to August 1944—this fear was greater than his fear of Germany. The economic obligations Antonescu accepted increased from month to month and became a heavy burden on Romania's finances and natural resources, particularly grain and oil. Yet, something unprecedented for a Nazi ally or satellite country happened in Romania: the local pro-Nazi party was forcefully deposed; its active members were arrested, and its leaders were saved from the death penalty only by representatives of the National Socialist party and the Gestapo. Thus, during the years of the Antonescu government, Romania did not have an actual fascist party. After removing the Legionary element from power, the Antonescu government continued to implement the anti-Jewish measures, which aimed primarily at the confiscation of Jewish property and the elimination of Jews from the national labor market.

In January 1941, Hitler and Göring revealed their plan for the invasion of the Soviet Union, Operation Barbarossa, to both Ion and Mihai Antonescu and agreed on the participation of the Romanian army in recovering Bessarabia and Bukovina. Mihai Antonescu stated: "Following these talks, Romania's participation in the war on the side of Germany was agreed; we set the day, and only we, Marshal Antonescu and I, knew the day when Romania and Germany would declare war on Russia."<sup>30</sup> Several months later, in March, "special emissaries of the Reich and Himmler," as they were described by Mihai Antonescu, arrived in Bucharest to discuss the fate of the Jews in Romania. The emissaries arrived just after the suppression of the Iron Guard rebellion, "when the political situation was still uncertain."<sup>31</sup> This was the first attempt by Himmler and the RSHA to take over the "handling" of the Jews of Romania, done at a critical juncture in the relations between the two states at a time and when a huge German force (680,000 troops) was stationed on Romanian soil. Mihai Antonescu, however, refused to relinquish this control, and it was during this period that he and the Germans reached certain

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<sup>30</sup> Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 9: no. 162, p. 423. The official protocol does not mention that Hitler shared the secret of operation Barbarossa.

<sup>31</sup> Cable from Mihai Antonescu to Romanian legation in Ankara, March 14, 1944, Foreign Ministry Archives, Ankara file, T1, p. 108.

understandings regarding the deportation and extermination of Bessarabian and Bukovinan Jews.<sup>32</sup>

The subsequent arrival in Romania of SS-Hauptsturmführer Gustav Richter at the end of April 1941 would have grave implications for the fate of Romanian Jewry. Richter, a special envoy of the RSHA, was an “expert” on “Jewish problems.” In August 1941, believing that Germany stood on the brink of victory, Mihai Antonescu informed his cabinet that he had discussed the solution to the Jewish problem with representatives of the Reich: “I can report to you that I have already conducted intensive negotiations with a high-ranking German representative...with regard to the Jewish problem. [They] understand that the Jewish problem will ultimately require an international solution, and they wish to help us to prepare this international solution.”<sup>33</sup>

On May 16, 1941, in a report to his immediate superior, Ambassador Killinger, Richter recounted the first achievements:

1. All draft laws...from the Undersecretariat of State for Romanianization will be sent for my confirmation before being seen by...Antonescu.
2. [The dissolution of] all Jewish political organizations, associations and unions, except for the Jewish religious communities, the blocking of their bank accounts and confiscation of their property, the total interdiction of...their legal or underground activity. Their property will be transferred to the future Jewish Center.
3. The creation of a Jewish Center of legal public character as the sole authorized Jewish organization.
4. The obligation to report and declare all Jewish property.
5. The creation of an evacuation (Aussiedlung) fund by the Undersecretariat of State for Romanianization, which would constitute the financial resource for the coming evacuation of the Jews from Romania.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Transcript of the conversation between Ribbentrop and Mihai Antonescu (excerpts), September 23, 1942, United Restitution Organization (URO), *Sammlung* (Frankfurt: URO, 1959), vol. 4: no. 13, p. 578.

<sup>33</sup> Transcript from Cabinet meeting of August 5, 1941 (excerpt), Interior Ministry Archives, file 40010, vol. 9, p. 40.

<sup>34</sup> Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 6: no. 129, pp. 401-404. (Reproduced from Yad Vashem Archives, Microfilm JM13102.)

This was the Richter's working program—essentially, the application in Romania of “the directives for the handling of the Jewish problem” (the Final Solution) as they had been conceived in Berlin shortly before the invasion of the Soviet Union. These included the incitement of the local population against the Jews and the toleration of anti-Jewish violence; defining what constituted a Jew; forcing Jews to wear distinctive yellow badges; and the establishment of ghettos. The third paragraph of these directives explained: “One of the primary goals of the German measures was supposed to be the forceful isolation of Jewry from the rest of the population.”<sup>35</sup>

Before the war with the Soviet Union, Romanian-German military relations had already become closer, and the joint preparations for war intensified with Antonescu seeking not only the return of Bessarabia and Bukovina but also to strengthen Romania in the face of the “Slavic threat.” Antonescu's June 12, 1941, visit to Munich to finalize the details of Romanian-German military cooperation had a decisive impact on the fate of the Jewish population of Bessarabia and Bukovina. At that time, under the influence of his generals, Hitler did not give much credit to the operational capability of the Romanian army, charging it only with the “defense of Romanian territory against penetration by Russian forces.”

At the same time, he wished to stress his personal appreciation of the Romanian dictator. He offered Antonescu the post of commander in chief of both the German and Romanian troops in the Romanian territories and to provide him with a liaison headquarters under the command of General Hauffe, head of the German military mission to Romania.<sup>36</sup> This was not the only manifestation of trust and appreciation for the Romanian dictator. Hitler's translator, Paul Schmidt, later stated that Antonescu “was the only foreigner from whom Hitler ever asked military advice when he was [having] difficulties.”<sup>37</sup>

As Mihai Antonescu reminded Ribbentrop, he had reached certain understandings (*Abmachungen*) with the SS on the policy toward the Jews of Bessarabia, Bukovina, and also Transnistria.<sup>38</sup> Following the meeting in Munich, the earlier conversations with the RSHA delegation, and the *Abmachungen*, the Romanian leaders in Bucharest drew up their own

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<sup>35</sup> Der Prozess gegen die Hauptkriegsverbrecher vor dem Internationalen Militärgerichtshof Nürnberg (Nuremberg, 1947), vol. 14: doc. 218-PS, p. 302.

<sup>36</sup> *DGFP*, vol. 12: no. 614, p. 105.

<sup>37</sup> Paul K. Schmidt, *Hitler's Interpreter*, ed. R.H.C. Steed (New York: Macmillan, 1951), p. 206.

<sup>38</sup> See footnote 32.

guidelines for the military forces and gendarmerie. The fate of the Bessarabian and Bukovinan Jews was therefore quickly decided. Once he returned to Bucharest from Munich, Ion Antonescu—now the commander of the Romanian-German troops in southern Europe—decided to imitate the Nazis and implement his own plan for a “final solution,” which he would call “the cleansing of the land.”<sup>39</sup> Before the ethnic cleansing began, Romanian leaders, convinced of German victory, made known to the inner circle of the civil administration their plans regarding the Jewish population in Bessarabia and Bukovina, known as the “lost provinces.”

On June 19, General Ilie Steflea, one of Antonescu’s reliable senior officers, communicated to the army, by means of a confidential circular, Antonescu’s order “to identify all *Jidani*, Communist agents or sympathizers...as the Ministry of Interior must know where they are in order to ban their movement and in order to be able to enact whatever orders I may transmit at a given time.”<sup>40</sup> This order echoed instructions issued earlier by Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel to the Wehrmacht.<sup>41</sup> In late July 1941, the Romanian army quickly deported up to 25,000 Jews to Moghilev in Ukraine, but the German army forced the Jews back, shooting roughly 12,000 of them.<sup>42</sup> Antonescu sought the assistance of Ambassador Killinger, arguing that the return of the Jews to Bessarabia was “contrary to the guidelines that the Führer had specified...in Munich regarding the treatment of the eastern Jews.”<sup>43</sup> It was clear that both Ion and Mihai Antonescu were not always ready to heed the instructions of their German advisors, whose specific task it was to help the Romanians with “certain migrations in territories under Romanian and German sovereignty.”<sup>44</sup>

Shortly before June 21, 1941, the Romanian Special Intelligence Service (*Serviciul Special de Informațiuni*; SSI) created a select unit called the *Esalon Special* (Special Echelon), which bore similarities to the Einsatzgruppen and was entrusted with the mission of “defending

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<sup>39</sup> Jean Ancel, “The Romanian Way of Solving the ‘Jewish Question’ in Bessarabia and Bukovina, June-July 1941,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 19 (1988): pp. 187-232.

<sup>40</sup> Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 6: no. 1, p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> Trials of War Criminals Before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals under Control Council Law No. 10 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1951), vol. 10, pp. 990-994. (Special instructions for Operation Barbarossa issued by the Wehrmacht High Command on May 19, 1941, including “Directives for the Conduct of the Troops in Russia”).

<sup>42</sup> Cable from Gen. Rîșanu to Gen. Antonescu, July 18, 1941, Arhivele Statului (State Archives), fond Președenția Consiliului de Miniștri, Cabinet, dos. 89/1941, p. 16.

<sup>43</sup> *DGFP*, vol. 13: no. 207, pp. 318-319.

<sup>44</sup> Lya Benjamin, ed., *Problema evreiască în stenogramele Consiliului de Miniștri...* (Bucharest: Hasefer, 1996), no. 99, p. 265.

the rear of the Romanian army from espionage, sabotage, and terrorist actions.”<sup>45</sup> Like the Einsatzgruppen, the *Esalon Operativ*, as it was also called, was divided into smaller *echipe* (teams). The Echelon was comprised of 160 elite men and was soon assigned to Bessarabia. Its first operation was carried out in Iasi, on July 29 and 30, 1941. From Iasi, the Echelon moved on with the Romanian Fourth Army into Bessarabia, where it collaborated with Einsatzkommando 11B in the executions in Balti and Chisinau. In fact, as soon as the Echelon and other Romanian military units involved in the killings crossed the Prut River, they collaborated with the Einsatzkommandos.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, relations between the various units of Einsatzgruppe D and the Romanian army, gendarmerie, police, and Special Echelon were far from ideal. The Germans were content only when the Romanians acted according to their directives and were dismayed at the disorder the Romanians displayed.<sup>47</sup>

Himmler’s emissaries, acting within the framework of the Wehrmacht, also continued their missions in the Romanian-occupied territory of Ukraine known as Transnistria. Representatives of the German and Romanian armies met on August 17, 1941, in Tighina to discuss the boundaries of Transnistria and the distribution of responsibility therein. Due to the inability of the Einsatzgruppen to keep up with the attacking forces and to “handle” all the Jews at the same time, the Jews were not to be transferred across the Bug river yet; instead, they were to be placed into labor camps until such time as they could be moved east, “following completion of military operations.”<sup>48</sup> This agreement, concluded on August 30, 1941, prevented the Romanian regime from forcing the remaining Jews in Bessarabia and Bukovina as well as the up to 200,000 Ukrainian Jews who had survived the first wave of executions by Einsatzgruppe D across the Bug.

On August 7, 1941, Mihai Antonescu asked Himmler to send Gustav Richter, who had returned to Berlin in July after great success, back to Bucharest.<sup>49</sup> Antonescu praised Richter’s activity, stating that he hoped to work with Richter again, “[s]ince the Jewish problem requires an international, radical and final solution, particularly by using the German experience in this

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<sup>45</sup> Matatias Carp, *Cartea neagră* (The black book) (Bucharest: Socec, 1948), vol. 2: p. 43. (Testimony of Eugen Cristescu, former head of SSI.)

<sup>46</sup> NO-2851, NO-2952, NOKW-3233.

<sup>47</sup> NO-2651, NO-2934, NO-2939, NO-2949, NO-2950.

<sup>48</sup> Tighina Agreement, concluded between General Hauffe and Gen. Nicolae Tătăranu, August 30, 1941. Nuremberg Documents, PS-3319. Romanian version: Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 9: no. 83, pp. 188-191. For German version, see Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 5: no. 62, pp. 59-63.

<sup>49</sup> Luther to Killinger, August 27, 1941, Nuremberg Documents, NG-4962.

field....”<sup>50</sup> Already, following Richter’s advice and under some pressure from the German embassy, the Romanian authorities had set up the Central Office of Jews of Romania (*Centrala Evreilor din Romania*; the Jewish Center)—the Romanian equivalent of the *Judenrat*, banned all Zionist activity, carried out a census of “persons of Jewish blood,” and launched technical preparations for the deportation of Romanian Jews to the Belzec death camp. Moreover, the large-scale massacres of Jews and Antonescu’s tenacity in implementing the Final Solution in liberated Romanian territory, and later in Transnistria, had aroused admiration among the Nazis and Hitler, in particular.<sup>51</sup>

On January 23, 1942, two days after the Wannsee Conference, Richter asked Mihai Antonescu to put a halt to the emigration of Jews from Romania, “given the impending final solution of the Jewish problem in Europe.” Mihai Antonescu consented in principle to the request, although ships carrying Jews continued to leave Romania.<sup>52</sup> However, Ion Antonescu did not have patience to wait for the German outcome of the Final Solution. At the Cabinet meeting of December 16, 1941, he stated that “the question of the Yids is being discussed in Berlin. The Germans want to bring the Yids from Europe to Russia and settle them in certain areas, but there is still time before this plan is carried out.”<sup>53</sup>

According to Radu Lecca, commissar for the solution of the Jewish problem and Richter’s Romanian counterpart, “when [Lecca] first met Richter and discussed the reorganization of the Jews with him, [Richter] already had all the plans prepared.”<sup>54</sup> In late April 1942, Richter abandoned his anonymous status and—going above the heads of the Romanian government—informed the Jews of Romania that their fate was sealed. He published an article in the embassy newspaper advising the Jews not to seize upon “false hopes” regarding the possibility of preventing the Final Solution. “The Jewish problem in Romania will be solved within the framework of Europe,” stated Richter.<sup>55</sup> He also focused his attack on the Zionist movement and Chaim Weizmann, president of the World Zionist Organization; and indeed, over

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<sup>50</sup> Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 5: no. 3, pp. 3-6.

<sup>51</sup> Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, pp. 1659-1660.

<sup>52</sup> Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 3: no. 311, pp. 494-495.

<sup>53</sup> *Procesul marei trădări naționale* (Treason trial) (Bucharest, 1946), pp. 34-35.

<sup>54</sup> Transcript of interrogation of Radu Lecca at Securitate in Bucharest, July 8, 1953, Interior Ministry Archives, file 40010, vol. 123, p. 82.

<sup>55</sup> G. Richter, “Jüdische Fata Morgana,” *Bukarester Tageblatt*, April 26, 1942; copy: Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 3: no. 360, p. 588.

the coming months, he did not rest until he had secured a ban on Zionist activity and the closure of the Zionist headquarters in Romania.<sup>56</sup>

The negotiations regarding the “European solution”—that is, regarding the Jews of the *Regat* and southern Transylvania—were conducted diligently and effectively. These Jews were not slated for extermination in the eastern territories or in Russia, but in the death camps in Poland. In June 1942, under the impact of impressive German victories in the USSR and following the Romanian army’s advance to the Caucasus and its crossing of the Don River, Antonescu agreed to the Final Solution for Romanian Jews, which entailed their deportation.<sup>57</sup> During July/October 1942, plans were drawn up for the deportation of Romanian Jews to extermination camps in the General Government. By spring 1942 there were approximately 300,000 Jews left in Romania.<sup>58</sup> With the exception of the town of Cernauti, Bessarabia and Bukovina were already *Judenrein* (cleansed of Jews).

Two German documents, dated July 26, 1942, and August 11, 1942, mentioned the future deportations of Romanian Jews: the first, signed by Heinrich Müller, head of Section IV B of the RSHA, was addressed to the German Foreign Office; the second, a report by Martin Luther of the German Foreign office, was addressed to the Reichsführer-SS, Heinrich Himmler.<sup>59</sup> During his interrogation in Jerusalem, Adolf Eichmann admitted that he had actually authored the letter bearing Müller’s signature.<sup>60</sup> The letter advised Undersecretary Martin Luther, a departmental (Inland II) chief in the Foreign Office, that the deportation of the Romanian Jews was to begin on September 10, 1942.

Gustav Richter left a detailed Nazi plan for the deportation of 250,000 Jews to the Belzec camp in Poland for extermination, enumerating the principal elements of the process: instructions for implementation, including logistics and operational planning; measures to conceal and mislead in order to allay the fears of the Jewish population; settling the legal problems between Romania and Germany; and the use of the local *Judenrat*. According to Richter’s plan, the deportees would lose their Romanian citizenship upon crossing the border,

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<sup>56</sup> Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 4: no. 53, p. 98.

<sup>57</sup> Jean Ancel, “Plans for Deportation of the Rumanian Jews and Their Discontinuation in Light of Documentary Evidence (July-October 1942),” in *Yad Vashem Studies* 16 (1984): pp. 381-420.

<sup>58</sup> According to the May 1942 census of “residents of Jewish blood,” there were 292,192 Jews in Romania.

<sup>59</sup> Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 4: no. 41, p. 78 and nos. 104-105.

<sup>60</sup> Minutes of Eichmann’s pre-trial interrogation by the Israeli Police, Yad Vashem Archives, Police d’Israel, Adolf Eichmann, pp. 1768-71. Eichmann admitted that *Sonderbehandlung* (“Special Treatment”), the term used by Müller, meant killing.



and those “unable” to work would be subject to “special treatment.” In line with the directive issued by the RSHA, Richter obtained a pledge in writing from Mihai Antonescu, expressing his consent to the deportations.<sup>61</sup> The fact that Richter took great pains to obtain a written pledge from Ion Antonescu’s deputy is illustrative of the delicate situation of Eichmann’s subordinates in German-allied countries, such as Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Italy, in which the Nazis could not enforce deportations directly, but required the cooperation of the governments in question.

By August 19, 1942, preparations for the solution to the “Jewish question” in Romania were complete with regard to both the political issues involved and the practical steps to be taken. Richter’s plan was preceded by a lengthy period of negotiations, from the end of December 1941 through July 1942. There were two versions of the plan: the Romanian and the German.<sup>62</sup> On September 11, 1942, Lecca presented the Romanian plan, also the product of negotiations with Richter, to Mihai Antonescu. This plan confirmed the essential Romanian consent to the deportations, but established a series of exceptions, while the German proposal was significantly more restrictive. It also provided for the deportation of Jewish former citizens of Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Croatia, since they had lost their former nationality according to an agreement between Germany and those countries.

Lecca added a stipulation to the Romanian plan, which allowed for the emigration to Palestine of 3,000 Jews in exchange for a payment of two million lei. This payoff was to be made to the Jewish Center “in order to establish a fund supplying cheap credit to the new Romanian enterprises, which will replace the Jewish ones.”<sup>63</sup> The Nazis did not keep their plan secret. Certain of its implementation, they hurried to announce the forthcoming deportations in the August 8 edition of the *Bukarester Tageblatt*, a German newspaper published in Belgrade. When the trains to Belzec failed to start rolling, Richter published another article in the same paper, entitled “Servants of the Jews,” in which he denounced Baron Neumann (a wealthy converted Jew) and Wilhelm Filderman (head of the Federation of Jewish Communities; FUCE) for trying “to foil the deportation of Jews by every means, rallying influential Romanian figures in politics and the economy for this purpose.”<sup>64</sup> Richter vehemently railed against those

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<sup>61</sup> Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 4: no. 65, p. 120.

<sup>62</sup> With respect to Richter and Lecca’s plan, see Ancel, vol. 3: pp. 391-398, 406-415.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 3: p. 167.

<sup>64</sup> *Bukarester Tageblatt*, October 11, 1942. See also Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 4: no. 151, pp. 297-298.

Romanians trying to prevent the deportation of the Jews, claiming that Europe would be rid of Jews by the end of the war and that Romanian relations with Germany would be damaged if they did not join the common effort to deport the Jews. Richter sent this article to Eichmann on November 15, 1942, in explanation of his failure to deport Romanian Jewry.

In Filderman's opinion, the German threats actually helped the cause of Romanian Jews because they provoked negative reactions among the ruling elite, who felt very strongly about the independence of their country.<sup>65</sup> Thus, Richter and Lecca's plans failed, and the deportation of Romanian Jewry did not take place. Ambassador Killinger, accompanied by Richter, visited Mihai Antonescu on November 26, 1942, to demand an explanation for why the deportation of Romanian Jews to the General Government had not begun. The Romanian foreign minister replied that Marshal Antonescu had "decided only to explore the possibility of an evacuation from Transylvania, but that the implementation had been postponed."<sup>66</sup> After Stalingrad, the Romanian government officially informed Berlin that "the only solution to the Jewish problem in Romania is emigration."<sup>67</sup> Antonescu did not yield to the Nazis despite intense pressure—initially through the German ambassador and later during the April 1943 meetings with Hitler and Ribbentrop—to fulfill his commitment to deport Romanian Jews.<sup>68</sup> Thus, Antonescu and his regime spared Jews in the Regat and southern Transylvania from the Nazis and the Final Solution.

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<sup>65</sup> Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 4 : no. 152, p. 302.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 4: no. 186, p. 365.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 4: no. 285, p. 524.

<sup>68</sup> Andreas Hillgruber, ed., *Staatsmänner und Diplomaten bei Hitler* (Frankfurt: Graefe Verlag für Wehrwesen, 1970), p. 233. The conversation with Ribbentrop took place in Salzburg on April 14, 1943. On October 8, 1942, Mihai Antonescu told Killinger: "Marshal Antonescu's opinion is that at present the situation is too delicate to allow forceful action with regard to the Jews." U.S. National Archives (NARA), RG 220, Records of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). Killinger cabled the Gennan Foreign Office (December 12, 1942) that the Marshal "refused to give his consent to the radical solution of the Jewish problem since he has in the meantime learned that the Jews were not Bolsheviks." Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 4: no. 203, p. 399.