

# **FINAL REPORT**

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## **THE DEPORTATION OF THE ROMA AND THEIR TREATMENT IN TRANSNISTRIA**

### **The Antonescu Regime and the Emergence of the “Gypsy Problem”**

The deportation of Roma to Transnistria, from its conception to its implementation, was altogether the work of the Antonescu government. Before the Antonescu regime, there was no “Gypsy policy” to speak of in Romania. Politicians did not see the Roma as a “problem.” Even though they were registered in censuses as a separate ethnic group with their own language, the Roma were treated more as a social category. Consequently, Romanian authorities never actively treated the Roma as a national minority per se; therefore, legislation concerning minorities was never applicable to them. Moreover, interwar Romanian nationalism was not accompanied by anti-Roma manifestations, and the Romanization policies of the 1938 Goga government and the Royal Dictatorship did not pertain to the Roma. The General Commissariat for Minorities (*Comisariatul General al Minorităților*), established in 1938, never considered the Roma within the scope of its jurisdiction.

If the “Jewish problem” figured largely in Romanian interwar politics, there was no comparable “Gypsy problem.” Romanian political parties and politicians even developed collaborative relationships with Roma leaders, some of whom became formal members of Romanian parties. During the 1937 electoral campaign, the *Țara Noastră* journal of the National Christian Party (Octavian Goga’s party) printed a special weekly for the Roma.<sup>1</sup>

The situation of the Roma in the decades preceding the World War II is well known, mainly due to sociological and ethnographic research done in those years.<sup>2</sup> The 1930 census recorded 262,501 people who declared themselves to be of Gypsy descent (1.5 percent of Romania’s population). Of these, 221,726 (84.5 percent) lived in villages and 40,775 (15.5 percent) in towns. Most of these resided primarily on the outskirts, yet during the economic transformations of the epoch, such as the land reform of 1920, many rose to the same social status as Romanian peasants. This contributed to the integration of these socially mobile Roma into the village community, a process that had begun with their sedentarization. Moreover, the

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<sup>1</sup> Viorel Achim, *Țigani în istoria României* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedica, 1998), p. 132.

social and economic development of many Roma led to the emergence of a new type of Roma elite (artists, traders, and intellectuals) who became involved in community affairs and even formed Roma associations. The most important was the General Union of Roma in Romania, established in 1933, which formally continued to function during the war.

Sociological studies from the 1930s explored the socio-economic role of Roma in Romanian villages as well as their relations with the ethnic majority. These studies showed that the Roma were part of the community and worked as craftsmen and farmers. Still, prejudices and stereotypes, some of which were inherited from the centuries of Roma slavery, affected them unfavorably; yet overall, the relations between the Roma and Romanian peasants were good. A significant number of Roma chose to assimilate into the majority culture.

During the same decade, however, the Roma became the target of some Romanian proponents of eugenics.<sup>3</sup> Drawing on the ideas of Robert Ritter, the intellectual mastermind of the Roma tragedy in Nazi Germany, these Romanian researchers considered the Roma to be a plague. In supporting their opinion, they argued that the Roma were socially peripheral paupers with high criminality rates. These self-appointed experts racialized the Roma and warned of the menace that the ongoing assimilation of the Roma presented to the “racial purity” of Romanians. Iordache Făcăoaru, a leading proponent of eugenics and biopolitics, argued the following:

Assimilation is activated and made more threatening not only by the great number of Gypsies, but also by specific Romanian socio-political elements: the traditional Romanian tolerance, the spread of Gypsies over all Romanian territory, their mixture with the Romanian population in rural and urban areas, unsegregated schools, the fact that Gypsies were given land by the state, sedentarization, the lack of any segregation legislation, and finally, the protection granted to them by the government.<sup>4</sup>

The same author decried the fact that although Romania had the highest number of Roma in Europe—he estimated at least 400,000—the authorities had not taken any measures

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<sup>2</sup> On the Roma in the interwar period, including their perception by the Romanian society, *ibid.*, pp. 120-132.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 133-136.

<sup>4</sup> Iordache Făcăoaru, “Amestecul rasial și etnic în România,” *Buletinul Eugenic și Biopolitic* 9 (1938): p. 283.

against them. Yet, despite praising anti-Roma policies in some countries, especially in Germany, he rejected such solutions as “biological isolation” or “complete ethnical separation” from the majority as being too difficult to operationalize or too economically and/or morally problematic.<sup>5</sup> The extermination of the Roma was, however, proposed by another author, Gheorghe Făcăoaru:

Nomadic and semi-nomadic Gypsies shall be interned into forced labor camps. There, their clothes shall be changed, their beards and hair cut, their bodies *sterilized* [emphasis in original]. Their living expenses shall be covered from their own labor. After one generation, we can get rid of them. In their place, we can put ethnic Romanians from Romania or from abroad, able to do ordered and creative work. The sedentary Gypsies shall be sterilized at home....In this way, the peripheries of our villages and towns shall no longer be disease-ridden sites, but an ethnic wall useful for our nation.<sup>6</sup>

But such racist opinions were not widespread in Romania. Academia, the press, and public opinion were reluctant to accept them, and not even the extreme right adopted them. This situation changed after 1940, when Romanian democratic values were abandoned and the country entered the sphere of Nazi political and ideological domination.

After coming to power, the Legionary movement was the first to consider adopting a racial policy toward the Roma. The Legion journal *Cuvântul* published an article on January 18, 1941 (a few days before the Iron Guard rebellion), that stressed the “priority of the Gypsy issue” on the government agenda and suggested that appropriate legislation be passed to make marriages between Romanians and Roma illegal and to gradually isolate the Roma into some kind of ghetto.<sup>7</sup> Yet, during the time the Legion was in power, they adopted no specific anti-Roma measures.

Even though the Roma had never before been an issue in the Romanian social sciences, some researchers—some of them from among the best—began to approach what they called the “Gypsy problem” during the war. One such study, published in 1944, proposed either their

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 282-286.

<sup>6</sup> Gheorghe Făcăoaru, *Câteva date în jurul familiei și statutului biopolitic* (Bucharest, 1941), pp. 17-18.

<sup>7</sup> L. Stan, “Rasism față de țigani”, *Cuvântul*, vol. 18, no. 53, January 18, 1941, pp. 1, 9.

concentration in an isolated area of Romania, their deportation to Transnistria, or their sterilization.<sup>8</sup> Despite their marginal status, the racist opinions expressed in Romanian society during the 1930s and 1940s did play a certain role in the preparation for Antonescu's policies on the Jews and Roma. Yet it must be stressed that, unlike in the case of Jews, anti-Roma policies were not rooted in the Romanian past, but rather in new political realities resulting from Marshal Antonescu's entry into the political arena. The best evidence is that the Romanian population, notably peasants, opposed the deportations of Roma to Transnistria.<sup>9</sup>

The deportation of the Roma to Transnistria was Antonescu's personal decision, as he would later admit during his trial in 1946.<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting that none of the orders concerning the Roma bore Antonescu's signature and none were published—not in the *Official Gazette* or anywhere else. All were made verbally by Antonescu to his ministers and carried out by the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie. That Antonescu closely monitored their enforcement suggests that Romania's wartime policy on the Roma was his creation.

The idea of the Roma's deportation to Transnistria did not exist at the beginning of Antonescu's rule. When the discussion on taking measures against the Roma began in February 1941, Transnistria was not considered. At the Council of Ministers meeting on February 7, 1941, Ion Antonescu requested the removal of the Roma from Bucharest and spoke of settling them in compact villages in Bărăgan; he suggested three to four villages to be built for this purpose, each able to accommodate 5,000 to 6,000 families.<sup>11</sup> Although this idea was not implemented, it is illustrative of the way in which the solution to the Roma "problem" was seen at that time. Only after Romania obtained Transnistria was there the possibility to deport the Roma to outside of Romania's boundaries. By 1942, when measures against the Roma began, there was already the precedent of the Jews' deportation, which had commenced in fall 1941. Antonescu made the

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<sup>8</sup> Ion Chelcea, *Țigani din România. Monografie etnografică* (Bucharest: Editura Institutului Central de Statistică, 1944), pp. 100-101.

<sup>9</sup> See the section below, "The Romanian Population and the Deportation of Roma."

<sup>10</sup> *Procesul mării trădări naționale: Stenograma debaterilor de la Tribunalul Poporului asupra Guvernului Antonescu* (Bucharest: Eminescu, 1946), p. 66.

<sup>11</sup> Marcel-Dumitru Ciucă, et al., eds., *Stenogramele ședințelor Consiliului de Miniștri. Guvernarea Ion Antonescu*, vol. 2 (Bucharest: Arhivele Naționale ale României, 1998), p. 181. Antonescu stated, "...all Gypsies in Bucharest must be removed. But before removing them, we must consider where to take them and what to do with them. A solution might be to wait until the marshes of the Danube are drained and build some Gypsy villages there and let them fish... Another solution would be to negotiate with the big landowners. There... is a considerable shortage of workers in Bărăgan. We could build these villages there... at least some houses and barracks, a sanitation system, stores, inns, etc. We should set up a census and arrest all of them en masse, and bring them to these villages. We will

decision to deport the Roma across the Dniester in May 1942. By the time of the census of the Roma considered to be “problems” (May 25, 1942), their fate had already been decided by the Conducator. On May 22, 1942, the Presidency of the Council of Ministers informed the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Marshal Antonescu’s decision to deport certain categories of Roma to Transnistria.<sup>12</sup>

### **The May 1942 Census of Roma Considered to be “Problems”**

The “census” conducted by the gendarmerie and police all over the country on May 25, 1942 (although it had initially been planned for May 31), was ordered by Marshal Antonescu in order to find the Roma who fit into the category of “problem” Roma. The following were registered, along with their families: nomadic Roma; and from the sedentary Roma, those with criminal records, recidivists, and those with no means of subsistence and without a definite occupation with which to support themselves. A total of 40,909 individuals were registered on these lists: 9,471 nomadic Roma and 31,438 sedentary Roma. The order of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of May 17, 1942, stated that the Roma on the list were to be kept under close surveillance by local authorities and prevented from leaving the county until further instruction.<sup>13</sup> The lists—with Roma from both categories recorded by commune, town, and county—were sent to the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie.<sup>14</sup> The subsequent deportations consisted of the citizens registered in this census. With only a few exceptions, the roughly 25,000 Romanian Roma “evacuated” to Transnistria were included on the lists set up by the gendarmerie and police at the end of May.

### **Reasons for the Deportation of the Roma**

The May 1942 census, through its definition of the two categories of Roma, also showed the criteria for “selection” of those to be deported. It was based on nomadism and, in the case of the sedentary Roma, on criminal convictions, theft, and the lack of means to subsist. In some documents authorities also referred to the necessity of ridding villages and towns of the

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build three-four villages, each for 5–6,000 families, and install guards around them so they cannot get out. They will live their life there and find work there too.”

<sup>12</sup> Viorel Achim, ed., *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, 2 vols. (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2004), vol. 1: no. 6, pp. 9-10.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 3.

<sup>14</sup> ANIC, fond IGJ, dos. 201/1942, dos. 202/1942, dos. 203/1942.

poor Roma population without an occupation or trade and no means of subsistence, without any possibility to earn a living, and those who made a living from theft and begging. At the 1946 trial of the principal war criminals, Ion Antonescu evoked the murders and thefts Roma had committed in towns during anti-aircraft alarm exercises.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the criteria appear to have been mainly social, relating to public order. Although it is unknown whether the accusations against the Roma were true, the crimes they supposedly committed in towns could not have been the main reason for the deportations, since nearly all Roma lived in villages. Moreover, these deportations could not have been a purely social measure. Otherwise, this process of “cleansing” the country of socially problematic elements would have extended to the entire population, regardless of ethnic origin; yet it applied only to the Roma. Government documents on the Roma did not invoke race as a reason for deportation. They did not refer to racial “inferiority” or to a racial “danger” posed by the Roma, as did some Romanian publications at the time.<sup>16</sup> In short, while such terms as “dangerous” and “undesirable” were used in reference to the Roma, the authorities did not use race to motivate the deportation.

The reason for the Roma’s deportation was likely another: it was part of the Antonescu regime’s ethnic policy.<sup>17</sup> Achieving ethnic homogeneity in Romania—by “transferring” the minority out of the country and bringing in Romanians from neighboring countries—was a genuine preoccupation of the Romanian government at that time. Effective measures were taken and documents were drafted to deal with this problem. The most important of these documents was the project of Sabin Manuilă, general director of the Central Institute for Statistics, written in the form of a memorandum addressed to Marshal Antonescu on October 15, 1941. This memo took aim at all ethnic minorities in Romania. According to Manuilă, they should be subject to transfer agreements or population exchanges between Romania and different states. For the Jews and the Roma, who did not have a state of their own, the planned solution was the “unilateral transfer,” which actually meant sending them across the border.<sup>18</sup> The territory where the Romanian government could do this was Transnistria. Thus, the partial deportation of Jews and

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<sup>15</sup> *Procesul mării trădări naționale*, p. 66.

<sup>16</sup> See footnote 8.

<sup>17</sup> On the objectives of the government’s deportation of the Roma, see Viorel Achim, “The Antonescu Government’s Policy towards the Gypsies,” in Mihail E. Ionescu and Liviu Rotman, eds., *The Holocaust in Romania: History and Contemporary Significance* (Bucharest, 2003), pp. 55-60.

<sup>18</sup> For Sabin Manuilă’s memorandum, see Viorel Achim, “The Romanian Population Exchange Project Elaborated by Sabin Manuilă in October 1941,” *Annali dell’Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento* 28 (2001): pp. 593-617.

Roma to Transnistria in 1941 and 1942 can be understood as elements of this policy of ethnic purification.

The contemporary documents currently available do not elucidate why—if the “transfers” across the border were part of an ethnic policy—the deportations to Transnistria were limited to the Roma categories explained above. However, during those years in which the Roma overnight became a “problem” for the authorities, the government could not stray too far from the opinions held by Romanian society, as reflected in the sociological studies of the 1930s. The “selection” and the deportation of Roma aimed at only those who led a very “Gypsy” way of life.

Out of a population of 208,700 Roma in Romania within the borders of 1942, as estimated by the Central Institute for Statistics,<sup>19</sup> almost 41,000 (20 percent) Roma were registered in May 1942. Of these, more than 25,000 were deported (12 percent of the total Roma population).

### **The Deportations of Roma to Transnistria**

#### *The Deportation of Nomadic Roma (July-August 1942)*

The deportations began on June 1, 1942, with the nomadic Roma. That day, the gendarmes began to gather them in the capital cities of the counties and then to send them to Transnistria. Marshal Antonescu gave the order himself for the deportation “of all nomadic Gypsies’ camps from all over the country.”<sup>20</sup> The nomadic Roma traveled on foot or with wagons from one precinct to the other, making their trip several weeks long. Officially, the operation ended on August 15, 1942. Those who were at the front or mobilized within the country at the time of the deportation were expelled from the military by order of the Army General Staff, sent back home, and made to follow their families to Transnistria. Until October 2, 1942, a total of 11,441 nomadic Roma were deported to Transnistria (2,352 men, 2,375 women, and 6,714 children).<sup>21</sup>

#### *The Deportation of Sedentary Roma Deemed “Undesirable” (September 1942)*

In terms of the sedentary Roma registered in May 1942, the authorities first undertook to sort them. Those selected for the initial deportation were Roma who were considered

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<sup>19</sup> Achim, *Documente*, vol. 1: no. 104, pp. 162-177.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1: no. 15, pp. 22-23.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1: no. 179, pp. 269-271.



“dangerous and undesirable” along with their families—a total of 12,497 individuals. The remaining 18,941 were to be deported later. Families of mobilized Roma and Roma eligible for mobilization together with their families were to remain in the country, even if they had been categorized as dangerous. At the time of the deportation of nomadic Roma, the authorities had not yet formed a definite plan of action concerning the sedentary Roma. They were either to be deported to Transnistria or imprisoned in camps within Romania. In the end, the authorities chose deportation. According to the initial plan, the Roma were to be transported by ship to Transnistria in July, first on the Danube and then the Black Sea. This plan was prepared in detail but ultimately abandoned, and they were transported by train instead. Ion Antonescu set the beginning of the operation for August 1, 1942.<sup>22</sup> However, the deportation of sedentary Roma did not take place until September. It lasted from September 12 to September 20, 1942, used nine special trains, and began in different towns in the country. The modification of the plan from water to land explains why the deportations did not begin until September 1942.

During that month, 13,176 sedentary Roma were deported to Transnistria. This number exceeded the number on the lists drafted for deportation and, moreover, the list of those deported did not coincide with the lists of those selected for deportation. An investigation into this discrepancy concluded that some who had been slated for deportation could not be found, while others, having been misled, volunteered; a rumor had been circulated among the Roma that once they arrived in Transnistria, they would be granted land. This, in part, explains the desire of some Roma to leave. Because most did not carry identity papers with them, it was easy for these volunteers to mingle among the other Roma. Some Roma traveled by regular trains to Tighina (on the Dniester), where they joined various groups of deportees.

The deportation operation led to many abuses by the gendarmes and policemen who conducted the operation. Some families of mobilized Roma and some Roma likely to be mobilized, along with their families, were deported. There was one case in which a Roma soldier’s wife and in-laws were seized by gendarmes and deported to Transnistria while he was on leave.<sup>23</sup> Some Romanian, Turkish, and Hungarian families were also rounded up by mistake. Some of the deported Roma had Romanian wives, and some had an occupation or owned land.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, vol. 1: no. 42, pp. 66-67.

<sup>23</sup> ANIC, fond PCM, dos. 202/1941-1944, pp. 274-277.

A large number of complaints were filed decrying these occurrences; the number of requests for repatriation was even larger. Roma serving at the front or mobilized within the country raised their voices against these actions. As a consequence, the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and the Army General Staff demanded reparation. In an order issued by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, these actions were described as causing “turmoil among soldiers of Gypsy origin, and rightly so, for while serving their country with great honor, their families were being rounded up and deported to Transnistria.”<sup>24</sup> This order went on to recommend that appropriate steps be taken and requested that the families of these people be treated with all possible care; moreover, “family” was to be understood in the Roma sense of the word; thus, concubines of the conscripted Roma and Roma who were slated for mobilization as well as their children were to be exempt from deportation.<sup>25</sup> After an investigation, repatriation was granted to 311 heads of families and 950 family members—a total of 1,261 individuals.<sup>26</sup> Not all of them were repatriated, however. Deported Roma who had relatives at the front or had fought in World War I or the anti-Soviet war were guaranteed, at least on paper, better treatment than the rest of the Roma.<sup>27</sup>

At the same time, Roma were forced from their homes without even their most necessary personal and household belongings and were not given time to sell their possessions. So, heads of local gendarmerie and police stations would often buy the Roma’s belongings and livestock at extremely low prices. The National Center for Romanianization took possession of the houses and all other goods belonging to the deported Roma.<sup>28</sup>

### *Later Deportations*

The deportation of the sedentary Roma categorized as dangerous was to be followed by that of the other Roma listed in May 1942. When the selection of the sedentary Roma was made, it was intended that conscripted or soon-to-be conscripted Roma would later be imprisoned in the camps inside Romania. But, the authorities eventually settled on deportation. It never occurred, however. The deportation was postponed at the beginning of October 1942 until the following spring. Then, on October 13, the Council of Ministers decided to call off any future deportations

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<sup>24</sup> Achim, *Documente*, vol. 1: no. 203, pp. 302-303.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2: no. 306, pp. 107-108.

<sup>27</sup> ANIC, fond DGP, dos. 77/1943, p. 47; dos. 43/1943, p. 286.

of Jews and Roma.<sup>29</sup> The following day, the Ministry of Internal Affairs ordered that no more Roma were to be sent to Transnistria—neither the nomads still in the country nor those with criminal records; only those Roma “who by their very presence were a threat to public order” were still to be deported.<sup>30</sup>

It can be argued that problems encountered during the deportations by the Romanian military bureaucracy played an important part in bringing them to an end.<sup>31</sup> The Roma deportations were discussed at the September 29, 1942, Council of Ministers meeting, during which Gen. Constantin Vasiliu, secretary of state at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, stated that he would not send any more Roma to Transnistria.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, deportations of Roma to Transnistria continued even after that date—some in fall 1942 and others during the following year. These were of small groups and isolated individuals from among those who had escaped the two major deportation operations, those who had escaped from prison, and some whom the authorities had registered later on the list of the “undesirables.” They amounted to several hundred people deported after October 1942. The last deportations took place in December 1943, when a transport arrived in Transnistria with fifty-seven Roma from Pitești and from the county of Argeș; thirty-six of them were considered to have been “evacuated” (deported) and the other twenty-one were “re-evacuated” (re-deported).<sup>33</sup>

#### *Number of Roma Deported to Transnistria*

The total number of Roma deported to Transnistria from June 1942 to December 1943 reached slightly over 25,000. In early October 1942, after both major deportations, there were 24,686 Roma in Transnistria: 11,441 were nomadic, 13,176 were sedentary, and another 69 had been deported after having been released from prison.<sup>34</sup> This number later increased by a few hundred with the additional deportations of some who had escaped the major operations, been released from prison, or become “undesirable.”

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<sup>28</sup> Achim, *Documente*, vol. 1: no. 101, pp. 158-160.

<sup>29</sup> *Timpul*, vol. 6, no. 1954, October 16, 1942, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Achim, *Documente*, vol. 1: no. 189, pp. 286-287.

<sup>31</sup> Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies Under the Antonescu Regime, 1940-1944* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), p. 227.

<sup>32</sup> Radu Ioanid, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu* (Bucharest: Hasefer, 1997), pp. 312-313.

<sup>33</sup> Achim, *Documente*, vol. 2: no. 573 (Report, January 3, 1944), p. 420.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1: no. 179, pp. 268-271.

## **The Treatment of the Roma in Transnistria**

### *“Gypsy Colonies”*

The Roma were settled at the border or inside villages located in eastern Transnistria on the bank of the Bug in the counties of Golta, Otchakov, Berezovka, and Balta. Initially, most of the nomadic Roma were settled in Golta County, while sedentary Roma were almost all settled in Otchakov County. Some Roma were accommodated in huts, others in houses. Usually half of the local Ukrainian residents in a village would be evacuated from their houses and then moved into the homes of their non-evacuated neighbors; the Roma were then placed into the newly-empty houses. A few villages on the Bug were completely evacuated for this purpose, with the Ukrainian population being relocated to the central areas of the county. These were the so-called Gypsy colonies in Transnistria, consisting of several hundred people (in the beginning there were even thousands of people). They were neither camps nor ghettos, even if the documents sometimes use these terms. Certain zones of the village were reserved for the Roma. The deportees were overseen by the local gendarme precinct, but had a certain freedom to move around inside the commune and vicinity in order to go to work to earn their living.

### *The Status of the Roma Deportees*

The Government of Transnistria issued an order on December 18, 1942, establishing the status of Roma deported to Transnistria. It stipulated the following: the Roma would be settled in villages in groups of 150-350 individuals (according to the local need for laborers) with one of their own as a leader; they would be obligated to perform any kind of work required of them in exchange for wages similar to those earned by local laborers; skilled laborers would be employed according to their skills in existing workshops and workshops to be built in the future; the remaining Roma would be organized into teams of laborers under the supervision of a leader they chose, and they would be employed in agriculture, woodcutting, lumbering, and in the collection of such items as hides, hair, metal, old rags, and garbage; it was mandatory for all Roma, aged twelve to sixty, male and female, to be engaged in an activity, either in workshops or in teams of laborers; Roma with above-average levels of productivity would be recompensed with 30 percent of the value of their extra work; the leaders would be responsible for preventing the Roma in their village from leaving and would be required to monitor the work attendance of all members on a daily basis; and Roma leaving the villages where they were settled without

authorization or those absent from work would be imprisoned in reformatory camps to be established in every county.<sup>35</sup>

### *Living Conditions in the Deportation Sites*

These measures were supposed to provide the deported with the necessary means to earn a living under circumstances of compulsory residence. Yet, they would remain on paper only. The situation of the Roma in Transnistria was extremely difficult at first. They were given few possibilities of work or means to live. Only some were used on former state and collective farms (*sovhoz* and *kolkhoz*, respectively), which needed but a small number of workers and usually just for seasonal work, and preferred to use native Ukrainians. Only a few workshops mandated in the above order were organized.

Living conditions in Transnistria were very harsh. The Roma were not provided with enough food and were unable to support themselves. The food rations established by the government were not observed; sometimes none would be distributed for weeks. The Roma were also not provided with firewood; so, they could neither prepare their food nor warm themselves. Clothing was another major problem, since they had not been allowed to take any clothes or any personal belongings with them. The deportees lacked the most elementary items, including pots for preparing their food. Medical assistance was almost nonexistent, and they lacked medicine. Those who were fortunate enough to have gold, Romanian currency, or other belongings of value managed to buy food from local people. This desperate situation was clearly described in reports and other documents drafted by the authorities in charge of the deportees, such as gendarme precincts and legions, and district pretures and county prefectures. For example, a December 5, 1942, report signed by an intelligence agent explained the situation in the county of Otchakov and was representative for almost all Roma “colonies”:

During the time that they have spent in the barracks in Aleksandrodar, the Gypsies have lived in indescribable misery. They weren't sufficiently fed. They were given 400 grams of bread for the ones that were capable of working and 200 grams each for the elderly

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., vol. 2: no. 268, pp. 54-55.

and the children. They were also given few potatoes and, very rarely, salty fish, and all these in very small quantities.

Due to the malnutrition, some of the Gypsies—and these make up the majority—have lost so much weight that they have turned into living skeletons. On a daily basis—especially in the last period—ten to fifteen Gypsies died. They were full of parasites. They were not paid any medical visits and they did not have any medicine. They were naked...and they didn't have any underwear or clothing. There are women whose bodies...were [completely] naked in the true sense of the word. They had not been given any soap since arriving; this is why they haven't washed themselves or the single shirt that they own.

In general, the situation of the Gypsies is terrible and almost inconceivable. Due to the misery, they have turned into shadows and are almost savage. This condition is due to the bad accommodations and nutrition as well as the cold. Because of hunger...they have scared the Ukrainians with their thefts. If there had been some Gypsies in the country who were stealing...out of mere habit, here even a Gypsy who used to be honest would begin stealing, because the hunger led him to commit this shameful act.

Due to maltreatment, by November 25, three hundred nine Gypsies had died. Roma bodies were found on the Otchakov-Aleksandrodar road. They died of famine and cold.

But, while the Gypsies in the Aleksandrodar barracks were lodged in a more humane way in the above-mentioned villages, this did not mean that the Gypsy problem in Otchakov was solved. Their situation has somewhat improved; they were less exposed to the cold and were disinfected. But if they do not receive any wood or other fuel, the Gypsies will be able to do to the houses what they did to the barracks, turning them into places impossible to live in. And the cold will lead them to that as well, not thinking that they only make their bad situation worse, and that the danger of dying from cold increases

this way. Also, if they will not be given humane nourishment, medical assistance, and medicine as well as clothing for some of them, the mortality of the Gypsies will not decrease, but will increase simultaneously with the increase of the frost. Also, they will increase the thefts from the Russians [i.e., Ukrainians]. As a matter of fact, the local population is outraged, and its state of mind is very low because they have been evicted from their own houses during the winter so these houses could be given to the Gypsies, whom they cannot stand.”<sup>36</sup>

Until spring 1943 the situation of the deportees was dramatic from every perspective. Many thousands of Roma died. In fact, almost all deaths among the Romanian Roma deported to Transnistria occurred in winter 1942/1943. A report of the Landau district preture to the prefect of the county of Berezovka regarding the exanthematic typhus epidemic that broke out in the middle of December 1942 in the Roma camps stated that due to typhus, the number of Roma located in Landau had decreased from around 7,500 to approximately 1,800–2,400.<sup>37</sup> The situation in Landau was an exception, but the number of deceased was high everywhere.

The confiscation of their horses and wagons, which served as both “mobile homes” and means to earn an income, affected the nomadic Roma very harshly. Gheorghe Alexianu, governor of Transnistria, issued an order in this respect on July 29, 1942.<sup>38</sup> Lt. Col. Vasile Gorsky, former prefect of Otchakov County, gave one of the most graphic descriptions of the situation of the Roma deported to Transnistria in a memo written in 1945.<sup>39</sup> This memo also represents a detailed account of what was recorded in documents issued by the Transnistrian administration. In addition to Roma suffering, the bad administrative skills of the authorities were depicted in detail.

The situation of the Roma later improved somewhat. Since the concentration in large groups made it extremely difficult to provide work and food as well as supervision, and after the dramatic experience of winter 1942/1943, the authorities dissolved the colonies and distributed

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., vol. 2: no. 249, pp. 26-28.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., vol. 2: no. 590, p. 437.

<sup>38</sup> Ioanid, *Evreii*, p. 315.

the Roma among the villages in the spring and summer of 1943. Thus, the Roma began to live—long-term or short-term—in many of the villages in the counties of Golta, Balta, Berezovka, and Otchakov where they used to work, either on former state farms and *kolkhoz*, or in workshops or other places where they were compensated for their work.<sup>40</sup>

The archives created by the occupation authorities in Transnistria or by the administration of some communes and farms provide great detail about the type of work done by the Roma, including agricultural labor, repairing roads and railroads, chopping down willow trees on the bank of the Bug, chopping wood in forests, and military-related tasks in the Nikolaev region (on the opposite side of the Bug in German-occupied territory). Through a series of steps taken in summer 1943, the authorities tried to provide the deportees with work. At the time, these measures were referred to as the “organization of labor.” There was a positive side, for the work was paid and the deportee and his family could earn somewhat of a living.<sup>41</sup>

Some of the deportees adapted to the unfavorable circumstances in Transnistria. They found niches in the village economy, doing some work and making crafts for the natives, exactly as they had done in their villages in Romania. One group that managed to preserve its occupation and thereby ensure its welfare was the *pieptănari* (comb makers). In February 1944, 1,800 Roma living in the county of Berezovka earned their living by making and selling combs.<sup>42</sup> In a March 11, 1944, request to the prefect of Berezovka County, the “mayor of the Gypsies” of the Suhaja Balka farm wrote:

We didn’t receive anything from the farm or village for four months and lived only by our work and by the income earned selling combs. With the income we have from selling combs, we have managed to dress and eat decently this winter.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Achim, *Documente*, vol. 2: no. 641, pp. 495-500. Vasile Gorsky’s memorandum is discussed in Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, pp. 231-235.

<sup>40</sup> The situation of the Roma deportees and the changes that occurred over time are best summarized in the monthly reports of the Labor Service within the district prefectures. These documents contain a chapter dealing with “The Gypsies’ Labor and Regimen of Life.” For example, see Achim, *Documente*, vol 2: no. 473 (from the county of Golta, August 1943), pp. 303-304.

<sup>41</sup> See footnote 40.

<sup>42</sup> Achim, *Documente*, vol. 2: no. 589, p. 436.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2: no. 605, p. 455.



Păun Marin, foreman of the Roma comb workshop on the Suhaja Balka farm, wrote in similar manner on the same day, when requesting permission to sell combs.<sup>44</sup>

However, not all deportees could be provided with work. So, efforts were made at the county or district level to provide them with food. The various departments of the Government of Transnistria—particularly the Department of Labor, which dealt with Jews and Roma deported to Transnistria—did not always share a good working relationship. In summer 1943, in the county of Balta, Roma were removed from their houses, moved into huts, and given land to work for food. Other colonies were dissolved, and the Roma were distributed among Ukrainian villages, thus making them easier to feed and use for work. There were even proposals to create Roma agricultural colonies with farmland and agricultural equipment. The gendarmerie appealed to the county prefectures to ensure the Roma's living.<sup>45</sup>

The situation was not the same everywhere. In some places, Roma were confronted with hunger and cold again in 1943. The situation was extremely serious in Golta County. The May 10, 1943, report of the Golta Gendarme Legion to the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie described the extermination regime applied to Jews and Roma:

I have the honor to report to you that, from the information I have verified in the whole county, the following are the results: The Jews are not given food for months. The same is true of the Gypsies and prisoners in the Golta camp, where 40 individuals are imprisoned. All of them work and are forced to work until they are exhausted from hunger. Please advise.<sup>46</sup>

In another report, dated November 22, 1943, to the Prefecture of the county of Golta, the Gendarmes' Legion stated that the Roma interned in the Golta labor camp (including some who had tried unsuccessfully to flee from Transnistria) were faced with starvation.<sup>47</sup> Likewise, in September that year, Ion Stancu, "mayor of the Gypsies" in Kamina Balka in Golta, denounced the fact that the Roma were not given sufficient food:

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., vol. 2: no. 604, pp. 454-455.

<sup>45</sup> Documents referring to these efforts: Ibid., vol. 2: no. 474, pp. 304-305; no. 481, p. 312; no. 506, pp. 340-341; no. 522, p. 359; no. 528, pp. 365-366; et cetera.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., vol. 2: no. 375, p. 187.

During the day we work at the kolkhoz, but at night we patrol the precinct; they give us very little food: 300 grams of [corn] flour, 500 grams of potatoes and 10 grams of salt per person, without any other kind of food; we haven't been given oil for 8 months.<sup>48</sup>

At the same time, authorities often criticized the fact that Roma tried to avoid work when it was available. According to the documents, the Roma preferred to travel around the villages and beg. In order to procure food, some Roma began to steal; there were Roma gangs of thieves. These deportees terrorized the Ukrainian population with their criminal activity and caused difficulties for the Romanian authorities. At the same time, the Roma had a tendency to flee from the "colonies" on the Bug. Either individually or in groups, they attempted to return to Romania by any means possible. However, the runaways were usually caught and brought back. The authorities in Transnistria discovered that it was impossible to put a stop to this. Punishment camps were planned for such situations, but were never realized. Only in fall 1943, when the exodus of Roma had grown considerably and the number of those who had fled and been caught exceeded 2,000, was the measure taken to create such a camp in Golta, where 475 Roma were interned.<sup>49</sup>

The situation of the Roma varied from county to county, district to district, and even farm to farm. It depended on many factors, including the Romanian official at the head of the administrative unit (county or district). Food provision depended heavily on local communities, but the local Ukrainians considered the Roma to be a burden. County and district authorities often had to force the Ukrainian communes and communities to give the Roma food in conformance with the government regulations. The Roma's situation also depended on the group or sub-group to which they belonged. In some places, Roma communities managed to secure their subsistence and survive almost two years of deportation. Elsewhere, though, only a small number were able to survive.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., vol. 2: no. 543, pp 379-380.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., vol. 2: no. 488, p. 319.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., vol. 2: no. 553 (Report of the Gendarmerie Inspectorate Balta, December 9, 1943), pp. 390-394.

### *Number of Victims*

Under these circumstances, many deported Roma died in Transnistria of hunger, cold, or disease. There is no document indicating that the Romanian civil or military authorities in Transnistria organized executions of Roma. Nevertheless, there were instances when gendarmes shot Roma, as in Trihati (Otchakov County) where, according to a May 1943 report, gendarmes shot the Roma who had come there from neighboring villages in search of work.<sup>50</sup>

The exact number of Roma who died in Transnistria is not known. On March 15, 1944, when Romanian citizens—regardless of origin—were to be evacuated from Transnistria, the General Gendarmerie Sub-Inspectorate Odessa reported that it had on its territory 12,083 Roma.<sup>51</sup> This number represented the Roma who had survived the deportation. To this number must be added the number of Roma who escaped from Transnistria before the above-mentioned date. These include Roma who were repatriated at different times for various reasons as well as those who had escaped from Transnistria illegally without being caught and returned. There were approximately 2,000 Roma who fit into these categories, which raises the number of the survivors to approximately 14,000. This means that out of the over 25,000 deported Roma, approximately 11,000 died and 14,000 survived.

The 6,439 Roma recorded by the gendarmerie in the second half of July 1944, when it began to register those who returned to Romania, are only part of the survivors.<sup>52</sup> The Roma in urban areas, supervised by the police, were not included in this number. Moreover, a considerable number of Roma were able to escape registration due to the conditions of war. The Soviet army already occupied part of Romania's territory by then or was located in the vicinity of the front line. At that time, some Roma were still traveling home, while others were stranded behind when the army and Romanian authorities retreated. From the latter, some were repatriated at the end of the war, while others scattered about on Soviet territory.

### **Return of Roma Survivors to Romania (1944)**

The Roma who survived deportation returned to Romania in spring 1944 at the same time as the army and Romanian occupation authorities that withdrew because of the Soviet offensive. As early as fall 1943, the unauthorized desertion of the deportation sites had become

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., vol. 2: no. 383, pp. 196-198.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., vol. 2: no. 608, p. 458.

<sup>52</sup> ANIC, fond IGJ, dos. 86/1944, dos. 97/1944.

widespread. Those caught trying to flee were sent back to Transnistria. In March/April 1944, in the absence of any official measures of repatriation, the Roma withdrew to the other side of the Dniester and then back to Romania. In some cases, they received direct assistance from the retreating Romanian and German armies and from the Romanian railway workers. On April 19, 1944, the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie ordered all Roma from Transnistria to be stopped in their flight and put to work where they were caught.<sup>53</sup> The order was repeated on May 17, 1944.<sup>54</sup> These Roma were given a temporary place of residence and were forbidden to move around. They were to be employed in farming activities. Life in Transnistria had made most of them unfit for work, however. Others were placed with various landowners to do agricultural work. But, there were frequent instances of Roma refusing to work on the grounds that they did not know how to perform the tasks, which exasperated the local authorities; and the Roma continued to starve. In such conditions, some groups of Roma obtained permission to return to their native villages.<sup>55</sup>

### **The End of Anti-Roma Policies**

With the ousting of the Antonescu government on August 23, 1944, and the abrogation of fascist legislation, the regime's Roma policy was brought to an end. On September 13, 1944, the State Undersecretariat for the Police issued an order that all Roma who had returned from Transnistria were to be "left to their occupations, while measures are to be taken to entice them into various work."<sup>56</sup>

### **The Situation of the Other Roma of Romania**

More than 25,000 Roma were deported to Transnistria—approximately 12 percent of the Roma population in Romania. But, most were of no interest to the authorities. From a juridical point of view they were unaffected by the measures of persecution instituted by the Antonescu government. Most Roma continued to enjoy full citizenship rights (given the conditions of that time, of course) along with all the other citizens of the country. They did not lose these rights, and their property was not subject to the Romanianization policies applied to

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<sup>53</sup> Achim, *Documente*, vol. 2: no. 613, p. 463.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2: no. 621, pp. 472-473.

<sup>55</sup> Numerous examples can be found in ANIC, fond IGJ, dos. 86/1944, et cetera.

<sup>56</sup> Achim, *Documente*, vol. 2: no. 639, p. 494.

the Jewish population. Yet, the Roma still experienced insecurity during these years. Documents reveal that they feared the deportations would extend to other categories of Roma, as well. This fear was sometimes fed by local authorities, who—usually in their own interest—would threaten these citizens with deportation.<sup>57</sup> However, there was no special policy aiming at the entire Roma population in Romania from 1940 to 1944. What is now referred to as the Roma policy of the Antonescu regime actually consisted of measures taken against only part of this population.

In addition to the Roma deported to the Bug, two other groups of Roma were targeted by the Romanian authorities: 1) The several hundred Roma who fled from Northern Transylvania, which was under Hungarian occupation from 1940 to 1944, and settled in the counties of Cluj-Turda and Arad. They crossed the frontier to Romania mainly because they refused to join the Hungarian army (more precisely, to join the work battalions). These Roma were not sent to Transnistria, though some gendarme legions at the border threatened to deport them.<sup>58</sup> 2) Another several hundred Roma on the large estates in the south of the country, who had been working there for many years in precarious conditions in terms of both wages and housing. In November 1942, the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie ordered that all landowners provide permanent accommodations for the Roma working their lands. Marshal Antonescu himself issued the same order in June 1943. Few houses would actually be built for these Roma, though.<sup>59</sup> This measure was part of the government's social policy.

Since the deportation was limited to only part of the Roma, their situation may seem to have been parallel to that of the Jewish population. Only Jews from Bessarabia, Bukovina, and the county of Dorohoi were deported; the other Romanian Jews, with only a few exceptions, were not. Nevertheless, during the war, the Romanian state led a policy that aimed at all Jews; the antisemitic legislation, the measures with racial content, and the Romanianization policies affected all segments of the Jewish population, albeit in different ways. From 1940 to 1944, the entire Jewish population was subject to heavy discrimination. It was not so with the Roma population. During those years there was no measure taken in Romania against all Roma—that

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<sup>57</sup> The state of mind of the Roma after the deportations in the summer and fall of 1942 is seen, for example, in the reports of the Regional Police Inspectorate Alba Iulia from September 30 (Achim, *Documente*, vol. 1: no. 162, p. 247) and December 3, 1942 (ibid., vol. 2: no. 243, pp. 14-15) or in the report of the Regional Police Inspectorate Timișoara from November 27, 1942 (ibid., vol. 1: no. 238, pp. 352-353).

<sup>58</sup> Some documents with respect to these Roma: ibid., vol. 1: no. 119, p. 194; vol. 2: no. 568, pp. 413-414; vol. 2: no. 577, pp. 424-425.

<sup>59</sup> Documents referring to this issue: ibid., vol. 2: no. 400, pp. 215-216; no. 622, pp. 473-474; no. 623, pp. 474-475; no. 626, pp. 479-480.

is, against the entire population registered on the census as “Gypsies” or identified as such by the authorities or the local population. Thus, the Antonescu government’s plans for the Roma were not limited to Transnistria. The deportation to the territory between the Dniester and Bug Rivers remains the most important element, though.

### **The Romanian Population and the Deportation of Roma**

The deportation of the Roma did not enjoy the support of the Romanian population, and protests came from all quarters.<sup>60</sup> One category of protests came from the political and cultural elite. Thus, on September 16, 1942, while the deportations were underway, the president of the National Liberal Party, Constantin I. C. Brătianu, sent a letter to Marshal Antonescu that invoked both humanitarian and moral arguments, calling the deportations persecutions “that will make us regress several centuries.”<sup>61</sup> This letter was a political move: Brătianu argued that the responsibility of this decision was entirely Antonescu’s and that Antonescu’s policy toward the Roma had no relation to the policies of previous governments. He went on to argue, “These Romanian citizens have not been subject to a special treatment in our state before now.” Brătianu also did not fail to mention “the persecutions and the deportations of the Jews as reprisals against their co-religionists in Bukovina and Bessarabia and under the influence of German policies.”<sup>62</sup> The leaders of the National Peasant Party expressed their solidarity with Brătianu’s protest.<sup>63</sup> The famous Romanian composer George Enescu pleaded in person with Antonescu against the deportation of Roma musicians and threatened to go with them should that occur.<sup>64</sup> Also, the management of several companies, such as the state-run Romanian Railway Company, defended their Roma employees out of fear that deportations would extend to new categories of Roma.<sup>65</sup>

Most documents indicate popular opposition to the deportation of Roma from all social classes, whereas few documents show support for the measure.<sup>66</sup> Protest was usually expressed

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<sup>60</sup> See Viorel Achim, “Atitudinea contemporanilor față de deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria,” in Constantin Iordachi and Viorel Achim, eds., *România și Transnistria: problema Holocaustului. Perspective istorice și comparative* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2004), pp. 204-236.

<sup>61</sup> Jean Ancel, ed., *Documents concerning the fate of the Romanian Jewry during the Holocaust* (New York: Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1986), vol. 4: p. 225.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Achim, *Documente*, vol. 1: no. 202, pp. 301-302.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., vol. 1: no. 220, p. 331.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., vol. 1: no. 190, pp. 287-288.

<sup>66</sup> One such case is that of a retired officer (Captain Dogaru) from Târgu Jiu, who suggested in June 1942 that local Roma either be “colonized” in Transnistria or gathered from around the county and confined in an ethnically pure Roma village. Ibid., vol. 1: no. 44, pp. 69-70.

in the form of letters or memoranda sent by individuals or entire communities to such public authorities as the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Ion Antonescu personally, the Queen Mother, the Ministry of Interior, and the Army General Staff. These efforts aimed either to stop deportations from a certain village or town or to secure the return of deportees to their homes. Most of these protests were made in fall 1942 after the deportation of the “dangerous” sedentary Roma, and they most likely were made out of fear that new categories of Roma would be added to the deportation lists. Also, many local municipalities issued “good behavior” papers for the local Roma who felt threatened, or they intervened more directly to shield the local Roma from possible deportations. For example, in an October 1942 memorandum sent to Antonescu, the inhabitants of the village of Popoveni in the Balta Verde commune of Dolj County and from other villages as well from Craiova, requested that a Craiova blacksmith, Ilie Dinca, not be deported to Transnistria.<sup>67</sup> Before that, in September 1942, a group of citizens from the town of Craiova asked the Council of Ministers that Ștefan Gâdea, the local tin sheet specialist, not to be deported to Transnistria.<sup>68</sup> In addition, in October 1942, 127 Romanians from Zimnicea made the same plea to Marshal Antonescu on behalf of local craftsmen who “only by distant lineage can be considered Gypsies.”<sup>69</sup> The arguments invoked in these appeals included the considerable integration of the Roma in the local community and their importance in its economic life (in many cases, the Roma were the only craftsmen available in the village).

However, these objections to the deportation of the Roma never pertained to the nomadic Roma, whose deportation seems to have been considered justifiable by the Romanian majority. In fact, one of the arguments used by the sedentary Roma to defend themselves against actual or possible deportations was that they were not nomadic but had stable homes and performed useful work.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., vol. 1: no. 167, pp. 255-256.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., vol. 1: no. 157, p. 241.

<sup>69</sup> ANIC, fond PCM, dos. 202/1942, pp. 234-235.

<sup>70</sup> The chairman of the General Union of Roma in Romania, Gheorghe Niculescu, demanded in September 1942 that “the execution of deportation orders must concern only nomadic Roma and exempt sedentary Roma who have a stable abode and are skilled in the practice of various professions.” Achim, *Documente*, vol. 1: no. 169, pp. 258-259.

## **The Postwar Years and the Treatment of the Roma Deportations in the War Crimes Trials**

After the return of the surviving Roma from Transnistria in spring and summer 1944 and the regime change of August 1944, the “Gypsy issue” no longer figured on the political agenda in Romania, and the reinstatement of the Roma’s rights went smoothly. For the new government, the Roma became once again what they were before Antonescu came to power: a marginalized social category, rather than an ethnic minority. As a consequence, the policies adopted vis-à-vis the Roma included such measures as the creation of incentives to make the nomadic Roma sedentary and the re-establishment of former restrictions on their freedom of movement. There is no evidence indicating that the deportees received reparations, and the Roma’s problems did not reach the agendas of the political parties.<sup>71</sup>

Although the fate of the Roma during the war—the deportations to Transnistria and the killings—were no longer of interest to either the government or the public, the postwar trials of war criminals temporarily brought attention back to these events. Yet, the fate of the Roma was fairly marginal to the topics of interest. When the first group of war criminals was tried in 1945, only one indictment document mentioned the Roma deportations (in the case of Col. Modest Isopescu, prefect of the county of Golta), and even then the offenses concerned only the confiscation of Roma’s wagons and horses.<sup>72</sup> The remainder of the indictment was dedicated exclusively to the murder of Jews.

The situation was similar when Ion Antonescu and his main collaborators were tried in 1946. While charges were formally brought against Antonescu for the deportation of the Roma, the prosecutor did not dwell on the details. Thus, during Antonescu’s trial, the plight of the Roma was mentioned only four times: in the indictment, in the formal reading of the charges, and in statements taken from Antonescu and General Vasiliu.<sup>73</sup> The indictment noted in passing that “Thousands of unfortunate families were taken out of their huts and shanty houses and deported beyond the Dniester; tens of thousands of men, women, and children died due to

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<sup>71</sup> For more information on the Roma in Romania after 1944, see Viorel Achim, “Romanian Memory of the Persecution of the Roma,” in *Roma and Sinti: Under-Studied Victims of Nazism*, Symposium proceedings, Washington D.C.: Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2002, pp. 59-77.

<sup>72</sup> *Actul de acuzare, rechizitoriile și replica acuzării în procesul primului lot de criminali de război* (Bucharest: Apărării Patriotice, 1945), p. 76.

<sup>73</sup> *Procesul marii trădări naționale*, pp. 42, 65-66, 104, 108, 305.



starvation, cold, and diseases.”<sup>74</sup> In addition, it mentioned 26,000 deported Roma, while General Vasiliu acknowledged only 24,000.<sup>75</sup> In the statement he gave during the interrogation, Ion Antonescu argued that the deportations were motivated by considerations of law and order: the Roma had committed many thefts, robberies, and murders in Bucharest and other cities during the wartime curfew.<sup>76</sup> He made the same argument in his May 15, 1946, memorandum to the Peoples’ Court.<sup>77</sup> At the time, press coverage of the fate of the Roma during the war was scant, even as the details of the trials were systematically presented.<sup>78</sup>

In the early postwar years the fate of the Romanian Roma during the war did not seem to interest anyone. The only initiative to support the ex-deportees came in early 1945 from the General Union of Roma in Romania. Its central committee announced that the organization’s main objective was “to give moral and material support to all the Roma, and in particular to all the Roma deported to Transnistria.”<sup>79</sup> However, after this organization began to function effectively again on August 15, 1947, its activities no longer concerned the former Roma deportees.<sup>80</sup>

Finally, in 1948 the Roma were close to obtaining the status of ethnic minority (“co-inhabitant nationality”). The December resolution on the issue of ethnic minorities of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers’ Party—a key document of Communist-era minority policies—denied the Roma this status. The situation remained unchanged until the collapse of the Communist regime in 1989. In addition, the issue of the deportation of the Roma was not mentioned in communist Romania except in rare instances.<sup>81</sup>

## Conclusions

In 1942, as part of the policy of ethnic cleansing promoted by the Antonescu government, 25,000 Romanian Roma were deported to Transnistria. This number included all

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., pp. 65-66.

<sup>77</sup> *Revista Istorică*, N.S., 4 (1993), nos. 7-8, p. 763.

<sup>78</sup> *Scântea* (The Spark), a Communist Party daily, mentioned the topic only in its coverage of the Vasiliu case—and even then, only when it reported the reading of the charges by the prosecutor. *Scântea*, May 9, 1946, p. 4; May 16, 1946, p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> Police report, February 3, 1943, ANIC, fond DGP, dos. 87/1943, p. 318.

<sup>80</sup> Secret Police report, April 7, 1948, ANIC, fond DGP, dos. 87/1943, pp. 352-353.

<sup>81</sup> The reappearance of the Roma deportation in a Romanian scientific publication dates from 1974: Gheorghe Zaharia, *Pages de la resistance antifasciste en Roumanie* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1974), p. 44.

nomadic Roma and part of the sedentary Roma—all of whom were considered to be “problems” because of their way of life, criminal convictions, or lack of means to subsist. The deportees represented approximately 12 percent of the total Roma population in the country.

Given the very harsh living conditions at the deportation sites, especially because of hunger, cold, and disease, approximately 11,000 deported Roma died in Transnistria. The survivors returned to the country in spring 1944 at the same time as the Romanian retreat from Transnistria.