

FINAL REPORT

of the

International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania

Presented to Romanian President Ion Iliescu

November 11, 2004
Bucharest, Romania

NOTE: The English text of this Report is currently in preparation for publication.

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

HISTORICAL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Statement of Fact and Responsibility

The Holocaust was the state-sponsored systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany, its allies, and collaborators between 1933 and 1945. Not only Jews were victimized during this period. Persecution and mass arrests were perpetrated against ethnic groups such as Sinti and Roma, people with disabilities, political opponents, homosexuals, and others.

A significant percentage of the Romanian Jewish community was destroyed during World War II. Systematic killing and deportation were perpetrated against the Jews of Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Dorohoi County. Transnistria, the part of occupied Ukraine under Romanian administration, served Romania as a giant killing field for Jews.

The Commission concludes, together with the large majority of bona fide researchers in this field, that the Romanian authorities were the main perpetrators of this Holocaust, in both its planning and implementation. This encompasses the systematic deportation and extermination of nearly all the Jews of Bessarabia and Bukovina as well some Jews from other parts of Romania to Transnistria, the mass killings of Romanian and local Jews in Transnistria, the massive execution of Jews during the Iasi pogrom; the systematic discrimination and degradation applied to Romanian Jews during the Antonescu administration—including the expropriation of assets, dismissal from jobs, the forced evacuation from rural areas and concentration in district capitals and camps, and the massive utilization of Jews as forced laborers under the same administration. Jews were degraded solely on account of their Jewish origin, losing the protection of the state and becoming its victims. A portion of the Roma population of Romania was also subjected to deportation and death in Transnistria.

Determining the Number of Victims

The number of Romanian Jews and of Jews in the territories under Romania's control who were murdered during the Holocaust has not been determined with final precision. However, the Commission concludes that between 280,000 and 380,000 Romanian and Ukrainian Jews were murdered or died during the Holocaust in Romania and the territories under its control. An additional 135,000 Romanian Jews living under Hungarian control in Northern Transylvania also perished in the Holocaust, as did some 5,000 Romanian Jews in other countries. Referring to Romania, Raul Hilberg concluded that "no country, besides Germany, was involved in massacres of Jews on such a scale."

Cognizant of the enormous responsibility that has been placed in its hands, the Commission determined not to cite one conclusive statistic as to the number of Jews killed in Romania and the

territories under its rule. Instead, the Commission chose to define the range of numbers as they are represented in contemporary research. Further research will hopefully establish the exact number of victims, though there may never be a full statistical picture of the human carnage wrought during the Holocaust in Romania.

Between 45,000 and 60,000 Jews were killed in Bessarabia and Bukovina by Romanian and German troops in 1941. Between 105,000 and 120,000 deported Romanian Jews died as a result of the expulsions to Transnistria. In Transnistria between 115,000 and 180,000 indigenous Jews were killed, especially in Odessa and the counties of Golta and Berezovka. At least 15,000 Jews from the Regat were murdered in the Iasi pogrom and as a result of other anti-Jewish measures. Approximately 132,000 Jews were deported to Auschwitz in May-June 1944 from Hungarian-ruled Northern Transylvania. Detailed information about the origin of these statistics, the calculation, and references are provided in the relevant chapters of the report.

A high proportion of those Roma who were deported also died. Of the 25,000 Roma (half of them children) sent to Transnistria, approximately 11,000 perished. Centuries-old nomadic Roma communities disappeared forever.

Evolution of Destruction

The story of the near destruction of Romanian Jewry during the Second World War is filled with paradoxes. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the antisemitic propaganda, instigation, and street violence of the Iron Guard poisoned the political atmosphere and stirred up Romanians' animosity toward the country's Jewish population. During the period in which it played a role in government, from mid-1940 through to January 1941, it spearheaded the enactment of antisemitic laws and decrees that severely damaged the Jews and prepared the way for their destruction by vilifying them and depriving them of rights, property, dignity, and, for the most part, the organizational and material means of self-defense. The victims of the Legionnaire pogroms of January 1941 were few in number compared to those who perished at the hands of the Romanian government, army, and gendarmerie later on. While the Iron Guard advocated violent action against the Jews and is often blamed for the Holocaust in Romania, and while many former members of the Iron Guard and many Iron Guard sympathizers took part in the systematic forced deportations and murders of Jews that began in 1941, the Iron Guard as an organization had been banned by the time most of the killing took place, and its leadership (most of which had fled to Nazi Germany under SS protection) played no role in the country's government. Direct responsibility for the Holocaust in Romania falls squarely on the Antonescu-led Romanian state.

In Romania, as in Hungary in 1941 and Bulgaria in 1942, anti-Jewish discrimination was compounded by geography. Jews were killed first and foremost in territories that had changed hands and were annexed to these countries. In Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia, territories once lost to and then regained from the USSR, Jews were being deported and murdered, while in Bucharest,

paradoxically, leaders of the Jewish community were engaged in a dialogue with the government aimed at saving them. Branded enemies of the Romanian nation along with the rest of their kinsmen by an ugly official propaganda, those leaders nevertheless proved able to maintain channels of communication with Romanian officials.

Although the Romanian leadership and bureaucracy shared Germany's desire to liquidate the Jews, they coordinated their efforts with the Germans with difficulty and only for limited periods. Differences over matters of style, timing, and methodology triggered negative reactions from the Germans, who were often angered by the Romanians' inefficient pogrom "techniques," the improvised nature of the "death marches," the haste of Romanian officials in pressing huge columns of deportees across the Dniester in 1941 and the Bug in 1942, and the fact that the Romanians often did this with little clear plan for what to do with the Jews once they were there, or even expected the Germans to handle the problem for them. In addition, in early 1943, Romanian policy was influenced by Realpolitik. German pressure to hand over the Jews of Old Romania produced a counter-effect: no foreign power would be allowed to dictate to Romanian nationalists what to do with their Jews.

In the summer of 1942, the Antonescu regime agreed in writing to deport the Jews of the Regat and southern Transylvania to the Nazi death camp in Belzec, Poland, and was planning new deportations to Transnistria. Yet only months later, the same Romanian officials reversed course and resisted German pressure to deport their country's Jews to death camps in Poland. Initially, Romania had also approved the German deportation of Romanian Jews from Germany and German-occupied territories, which resulted in the death of about 5,000 Romanian citizens. But when the shifting tides of war changed minds in Bucharest, thousands of Romanian Jews living abroad were able to survive thanks to renewed Romanian diplomatic protection. And while Romanian Jews may have been deported en masse to Transnistria, thousands were subsequently (if selectively) repatriated. Ironically, as the vast German camp system realized its greatest potential for killing, the number of murders committed by the Romanians decreased, as did the determination with which they enforced their country's antisemitic laws. Such contradictions go a long way toward explaining the survival of a large portion Romania's Jews under Romanian authority.

Documents do record some instances of Romanians—both civilian and military—rescuing Jews, and many of these have been recognized by Yad Vashem as "Righteous Among the Nations." But these initiatives were isolated cases in the final analysis—exceptions to the general rule, which was terror, forced labor, plunder, rape, deportation, and murder, with the participation or at least the acquiescence of a significant proportion of the population.

The treatment of the Jews from Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transnistria triggered a series of external and internal appeals, which influenced Ion Antonescu's decision to cancel the planned deportations from Moldavia, Walachia, and southern Transylvania. Swiss diplomats tried to intervene. The question of whether the Papal Nuncio appealed on behalf of the Jews is still a matter of debate and merits further research. The American War Refugee Board, established in January 1944, was

involved in the rescue of orphans from Transnistria. International Red Cross representatives visited some ghettos in Transnistria in December 1943 and were involved in the rescue of orphans from this area. The Jewish Agency, the World Jewish Congress, and the Jewish Emergency Committee in the United States appealed to the Romanian government to put a stop to the persecution of the Jews. Within the framework of the negotiations with Radu Lecca at the end of 1942, the Jewish Agency proposed to transfer the Jews who had survived in Transnistria first to Romania and then to enable them to leave. The ransom plan was viewed as a possibility to make the Romanian government change its policy or at least to win time. And, indeed, various liberal, or simply decent, Romanian politicians and public figures occasionally intervened on behalf of the Jews or Roma.

It must be remembered, however, that voices of moderation were not the only ones clamoring for Ion Antonescu's attention. He also received numerous pleas to proceed still more vigorously against Romanian Jewry. In an October 1943 memorandum, the so-called 1922 Generation (former Legionnaires and Cuzists) demanded that "all the assets" of the Jews be "transferred to the state" in order that they might "be placed in the hands of pure-blooded Romanians." (Although by that date the assets of the Jews, with few exceptions, had already been transferred to the state.) These diehards continued to demand "the mandatory wearing of a distinctive insignia by all Jews" and the prohibition of Jews from numerous professions. "The radical and final solution of the Jewish question," they wrote as if the recent course of the war had been completely lost on them, "must be carried out in conjunction with [the plan for] the future Europe." When the repatriation of Jews from Transnistria began, Gheorghe Cuza, son of A.C. Cuza of the National Christian Party, and Colonel Barcan, prefect of Dorohoi, publicly protested.

Romania under Antonescu was a dictatorial regime, and Antonescu's orders could condemn to death the Jews of Bessarabia and Bukovina, just as they might allow for the survival of most the Jews of Moldavia and Walachia. The entire repressive military, police, and judicial apparatus was mobilized against the Jews during the first half of the war. Official propaganda successfully presented the Jews as the most important domestic enemy, as Moscow's or London's agents, and as the main cause of Romania's economic difficulties. Acceptance of these lies weighed more heavily than fear as an explanation for the lack of protest against the regime's policies.

The Antonescu regime's anti-Jewish policies drew strength from a long history of antisemitism among Romanian political and intellectual elites. They also directly borrowed from the ideology of both the fascist Iron Guard and the single-mindedly antisemitic National Christian Party. Longstanding propaganda stances of both parties found their way into Antonescu's positions. Many civil servants in mid-level positions were former members of the National Christian Party. Moreover, the regime's antisemitic legislation was typically fascist and sometimes overtly inspired by Nazi racial laws, even though Romania's first antisemitic legislation was already issued by the National Christian Party government in December 1937 before its alliance with Nazi Germany.

The idea of forced emigration had found widespread support among fascist and non-fascist antisemites in many European countries during the interwar period. The Nazis had promoted such a solution before 1939. In Romania, the Legion of the Archangel Michael and the National Christian Party had propounded this doctrine, which Antonescu wholeheartedly assimilated. Some historians have argued that forced emigration was the intent of the regime's program, but the main tools employed by Antonescu and his regime in their plan to eliminate the Jews from Romania were executions, deportations, forced labor, and starvation.

If the antisemitic policies and practices of the Antonescu regime were inspired by hatred, the behavior of its bureaucrats was guided for the most part by petty, pragmatic criteria, which sometimes lent its practice a distinct, opportunistic flavor. Perhaps Raul Hilberg described the essence of the situation best when he wrote,

Opportunism was practiced in Romania not only on a national basis but also in personal relations...The search for personal gain in Romania was so intensive that it must have enabled many Jews to buy relief from persecution...In examining the Romanian bureaucratic apparatus, one is therefore left with the impression of an unreliable machine that did not properly respond to command and that acted in unpredictable ways, sometimes balking, sometimes running away with itself. That spurting action, unplanned and uneven, sporadic and erratic, was the outcome of an opportunism that was mixed with destructiveness, a lethargy periodically interrupted by outbursts of violence. The product of this mixture was a record of anti-Jewish actions that is decidedly unique.

The result was tragedy for innumerable Romanian Jews, while also leaving the door to salvation open for many. For example, when it became evident that "Romanianization" was having a negative effect on the economy, Antonescu curtailed this extra-legal process. Bureaucratic inefficiency and disorganization also helped. The haste to destroy the Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovina created a chaotic situation, which provided opportunities for Jews to improvise means of surviving the process. At first it seemed only a matter of time before the government would deport the Jews of Walachia and Moldavia—those deemed less "treasonous," according to the official line, than the Jews of Bessarabia and Bukovina—but still deserving of dispatch to the German death camps in occupied Poland. But as time passed, the calculation that it would be useful to have some Jews still alive at the end of the war saved the surviving Jews from this fate.

Internal and external appeals, misunderstandings in Romania's relations with Germany, but mostly Mihai Antonescu's early realization that the war on the Eastern front might be lost impeded

completion of the extermination plan. By fall 1942, a second phase in Romanian policy had begun. Ion Antonescu remained a violent antisemite (in fact, in February 1944, he voiced regret at not having deported all the Jews), but as the war dragged on, pragmatic and opportunistic considerations became more and more dominant in Romanian decision-making.

When Romania joined Nazi Germany in a war against the Jewish people, the Antonescu regime drew on pre-Nazi Romanian antisemitic and fascist ideologies to initiate and implement the Holocaust in Romania. The Romanian state utilized the army, gendarmerie, police, civil servants, journalists, writers, students, mayors, public and private institutions, as well as industrial and trade companies to degrade and destroy the Jews under Romanian administration. The orders were issued in Bucharest, not in Berlin.

When the Antonescu government decided to stop the extermination of the Jews, the extermination did stop. The change in policy toward the Jews began in October 1942, before the Axis defeat at Stalingrad, and deportations were definitively terminated in March-April 1943. Discussions regarding the repatriation of deported Jews followed. The result of this change in policy was that at least 290,000 Romanian Jews survived.

Of all the allies of Nazi Germany, Romania bears responsibility for the deaths of more Jews than any country other than Germany itself. The murders committed in Iasi, Odessa, Bogdanovka, Domanovka, and Peciora, for example, were among the most hideous murders committed against Jews anywhere during the Holocaust. Romania committed genocide against the Jews. The survival of Jews in some parts of the country does not alter this reality.

In light of the factual record summarized in the Commission's report, efforts to rehabilitate the perpetrators of these crimes are particularly abhorrent and worrisome. Nowhere else in Europe has a mass murderer like Ion Antonescu, Hitler's faithful ally until the very end, been publicly honored as a national hero.

Official communist historiography often tried to dilute or completely deny the responsibility of Romanians in the slaughter of the Jews, placing all blame on the Germans and déclassé elements in Romanian society. In postcommunist Romania, political and cultural elites often chose to ignore and sometimes chose to encourage pro-Antonescu propaganda, which opened the door to explicit Holocaust denial and the rehabilitation of convicted war criminals. There have been few public voices in opposition to this dominant trend.

CONTEMPORARY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on its findings and conclusions, the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania makes the following recommendations:

Public Awareness of the Holocaust

Acceptance of the Report

The government of Romania should issue an official declaration acknowledging the report of the Commission and adopting the entirety of its contents and conclusions.

Publication of the Commission's Report

The full report of the Commission, once accepted and endorsed by the president of Romania, shall be published in Romanian and English and made available in both print and Internet editions. Consideration should also be given to publishing a French language version.

Dissemination of Summary Findings

The full report shall be distributed throughout the country to all libraries, schools, universities, and other educational and research institutions. At the same time, the Commission shall also prepare an abridged summary report of its findings, and all efforts should be undertaken to ensure its widest distribution. The Commission recommends that this could include publication in newspapers or journals as well as the preparation and publication of a paperback book version that would be distributed to each household in Romania, just as the government of Sweden distributed copies of the publication, *Tell Ye Your Children*, to every household in Sweden.

Public Information Efforts

Special consideration should be given to engage the media in order to enhance public interest in the report and the primary sources on which it is based. Efforts should be made to organize conferences and roundtable discussions on radio and television that make use of Commission members and experts to disseminate the report and its findings.

Holocaust Education in Romania

One of the most basic reasons for the creation of the Commission has been the need for correcting and supplementing what is currently known about the Holocaust in Romania. The long-term success of the Commission will, in no small measure, be judged by its impact on the teaching of the Holocaust to present and future Romanian students.

Review and Preparation of Textbooks

Many Romanian textbooks currently in use that do refer to the Holocaust present incomplete or even factually incorrect information. The Commission recommends that the Ministry of Education create a working group, in cooperation with experts of the Commission and appropriate international institutions, with the purpose of reviewing, correcting, revising, and drafting appropriate curricula and

textbook material on the Holocaust based on the findings of the Commission's report, with the goal of completing this work as soon as possible but no later than June 2006. In doing so, consideration should also be given to describing the historical experience of Jews and Roma in Romania prior to their persecution during the Holocaust.

Commission Publication of Material Inserts

In order to ensure that the findings of the Commission are quickly integrated into school curricula, the Commission should prepare its own (age-specific) materials as a free-standing insert for primary and secondary school use. Those institutions with experience in teacher training (e.g., Yad Vashem and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum) should be asked to assist in providing the necessary instruction to Romanian teachers on how to use this new material.

Higher Education

Universities and the Romanian Academy should be called on to organize conferences and symposia on the Holocaust in Romania. Colleges and universities should be encouraged to establish courses on the subject, not only for their students but also for professional, cultural, and public opinion leaders in the country. In so doing, they should address the long tradition of antisemitism in intellectual circles, which provided a foundation for the Holocaust and current negationist trends.

Teacher-Training and Resource Sharing

The Ministry of Education should commit itself to the long-term training of teachers qualified to teach about the Holocaust. Several national initiatives in the area of Holocaust education and remembrance are already underway. These include a one-week course offered by the National Defense College, the participation of master teachers in Yad Vashem seminars, and the Romanian application for membership in the International Task Force on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research. These initiatives should be commended and supported. Consideration should be given to the creation of a national network that would aid in the distribution and sharing of materials and resources for teaching the Holocaust.

Commemoration of the Holocaust

Government Observance of Holocaust Remembrance Day

The government of Romania has adopted October 9 as the official date of Holocaust commemoration. The Commission calls on the President and government to mark this date in several appropriate ways, including proclamations by the President and the Prime Minister, convening a special session of the Parliament, a public display of mourning, such as draping official flags in black

and a having a national moment of silence, and organizing seminars and discussions in the media and at universities and other public institutions.

Educational Programs to Mark Remembrance Day

The Ministry of Education and schools throughout Romania should organize special programs and assemblies to mark the commemoration date. Consideration should be given to holding essay contests, inviting Holocaust survivors to speak of their experiences, and other means of engaging students' interest.

Other Commemorative Events

Religious leaders should be encouraged to observe Holocaust Remembrance Day through an interfaith ceremony and service. Additional efforts should be made to engage religious leaders and theological students in the subject, so that they can include the Holocaust in their studies and their sermons.

[Note: When October 9 falls on a weekend, the proposed programs for schools, Parliament, and other institutions should be scheduled on a nearby weekday.]

Holocaust Memorials and Exhibitions

A national memorial to the victims of the Holocaust in Romania should be erected on public property in Bucharest. Additionally, there are several mass graves of Holocaust victims on Romanian territory (most notably victims of the Iasi pogrom), and they should be properly identified and maintained by the government of Romania.

Furthermore, consideration should be given to the establishment of permanent exhibitions on the Holocaust in Romania at the National Historical Museum in Bucharest and at other regional museums. Likewise, a traveling exhibition on the Holocaust should be produced for use throughout the country.

Local authorities, particularly in former centers of Jewish populations, should be encouraged to find ways to recognize their prewar Jewish communities as well as to commemorate the Holocaust. For example, this could be accomplished with special exhibits in local museums, memorial plaques at historically significant sites, and the restoration of the Jewish names to streets and public squares.

Documentation of Holocaust Victims

Every effort should be made to document the names of Holocaust victims in Romania. The Romanian government and its archival institutions and repositories should assist Yad Vashem and the

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in their work of collecting information and digitizing their findings.

Archival Access

Access to Holocaust-related records in the Romanian government archives is essential for present-day and future historians to do their work. The Commission calls on the Romanian government to remove all impediments to access and further recommends that a central Holocaust-related archive center be established in Bucharest at the Central University Library or the Library of the Academy.

Unfinished Matters

In offering its recommendations for furthering awareness and understanding of the Holocaust in Romania, the Commission draws attention to several contradictory and detrimental matters that require swift and positive resolution:

Reversing the Rehabilitation of War Criminals

Since the fall of Communism in Romania, we have witnessed the rehabilitation of various war criminals who were directly responsible for the crimes of the Holocaust. These include, for example, the noted war criminals Radu Dinulescu and Gheorghe Petrescu, whose “rehabilitation” was recently upheld by the Supreme Court. The government of Romania must take every measure available to it to annul their rehabilitation and, in any case, should forcefully, unequivocally, and publicly condemn these war criminals (and others like them) for their crimes.

Accepting Responsibility for Perpetrators of Crimes during the Holocaust

The government must also demonstrate that Romania accepts responsibility for alleged Romanian war criminals through actions that include, but are not limited to: initiating prosecution actions for war crimes against individuals in cases where this remains a viable possibility; implementing all provisions of international law and all treaty obligations that pertain to the treatment of war criminals; and cooperating fully with other governments in keeping with the highest standard of international practice in such matters.

Correcting and Enforcing Legislation on Holocaust Denial and Public Veneration of Antonescu

Romanian legislation presented in March 2002 bans fascist, racist, and xenophobic organizations and symbols. It prohibits the denial of the Holocaust. It also makes illegal the cult of all persons guilty of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity (for which Antonescu was

sentenced to death), including erecting statues, mounting plaques, and naming streets or public places after such people. Although many public monuments dedicated to Antonescu have been dismantled, there are still streets bearing his name. His portrait still hangs in some government buildings, which must be considered public space. Holocaust denial literature continues to be published and sold freely. Furthermore, two commissions of the Romanian Senate proposed amending the law by defining the Holocaust as limited only to actions organized by Nazi authorities, thereby excluding the Romanian experience in which Romanian officials, and not the Nazis, organized the exterminations.

The Commission calls for the formal adoption of the legislation without any changes and urges the government and its agents to enforce all of its provisions and all other existing legal provisions in this area.

Implementation and Follow-Up

The Commission recommends that the government of Romania establish a permanent agency, commission, or foundation that will be responsible for monitoring and implementing the recommendations listed above and fostering the study of the Holocaust in Romania.