

## Romania

Eastern European country established in 1859 with the union of the former Walachia and Moldavia principalities. These two areas together were called the Regat. During and after World War I, Romania was enlarged significantly by annexing Southern Dobruja from Bulgaria, Transylvania from Hungary, and Bessarabia from Russia. These new areas had a very high percentage of Jews, sometimes up to 30 percent of the population.

Between the two world wars, the lack of political stability in Romania led to the creation of right-wing nationalist and antisemitic political parties such as the Iron Guard, and to the growth of antisemitism. After the Nazis came to power, they also encouraged anti-Jewish measures in Romania. In late 1937 the Nazis' Foreign Policy Office, headed by Alfred Rosenberg, helped form the short-lived Goga-Cuza government. Octavian Goga and Alexandru Cuza only ruled Romania for 40 days, but they did their best to turn their antisemitic ideals into reality. The parliamentary government established next was so weak that King Carol II instituted a dictatorship in February 1938. The Jews' situation became even worse under this regime; Romania's new constitution included several sections that allowed racial discrimination against them.

In March 1939 Romania signed a trade agreement with Germany. This was followed by several other deals giving Germany power over the Romanian economy. In addition, when Germany and the Soviet Union made their non-aggression pact during the summer of 1939, Germany agreed to take Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina from Romania and return them to the Soviet Union. Germany also forced Romania to return Northern Transylvania to Hungary, and Southern Dobruja to Bulgaria. These withdrawals caused severe problems for the Jews of those areas. In Bukovina and Northern Moldavia, villagers and withdrawing Romanian troops took out their fury on the Jews, killing hundreds. Also at that time, the Romanians wanted to please the Germans, so they instituted laws that canceled the citizenship of most Jews and forbid marriages between Jews and Romanians. With the return of lands to the Soviet Union, Hungary, and Bulgaria, the Jewish population of Romania was reduced from 760,000 to 342,000.

In September 1940 General Ion Antonescu asked King Carol II to set up a new pro-German cabinet. Carol fled Romania and his son nominally became king. Antonescu took over as a fascist dictator and destroyed any remnant of democracy. He instituted a government that consisted of Iron Guard members and army officers. Under Antonescu, there was mass plundering of Jewish property, Jews lost the right to vote, and were barred from doing business.

In January 1941 the Iron Guard tried to take over the government completely. This revolt was put down by Antonescu's army, but was also accompanied by anti-Jewish riots 127 Jews were murdered. After the rebellion was crushed, the government passed more anti-Jewish laws that aimed to eliminate Jewish involvement in Romanian life. Antonescu, aided by the office of Adolf Eichmann, set up a "National Romanianization Center" which officially organized terror acts against Jews. The police and a special intelligence unit persecuted those who opposed Antonescu's regime, including Communists and Jews.

The Germans turned on their Soviet allies in June 1941. The Romanians sided with the Germans, hoping to reannex the land they had been forced to give back to the Soviet Union. In fact, Romania did regain some of its land, but lost it again in 1944 to the Soviets. During this time, Antonescu ordered the expulsion of 40,000 Jews from their villages and towns. Some were sent to detention camps, while others were transferred to other areas.

Antonescu treated Jews of different areas in different ways. He called for the extermination of the Jews of Bessarabia and Bukovina, but not of the Jews of the Regat. When Romania joined Germany in fighting the Soviet Union, Hitler informed Antonescu of his plan to exterminate Europe's Jews; Antonescu agreed to go along with Hitler's designs. The Romanian army was commanded to imprison city Jews, while the police were ordered to kill any Jew found in rural areas. German and Romanian army units, aided by *Einsatzgruppen*, carried out the extermination of Romania's Jews. About 160,000 were killed in the first phase, with local Romanians and Ukrainians joining in the murders; tens of thousands of Ukrainian Jews were also killed by the police and Romanian army. In September 1941 Antonescu ordered that

the 150,000 remaining Jews be banished to Transnistria. Tens of thousands died on the way.

During 1942 Antonescu began to doubt that Germany would win the war. In addition, the Jewish leadership of Romania was exerting great pressure on him to help the Jews. These elements convinced Antonescu to cancel the next phase to which he had originally agreed: the deportation of most of the remaining 292,000 Jews to Belzec. Instead, he decided that the solution for Romania's Jews was to leave Romania. He agreed to the emigration of 70,000 Jews in exchange for a large payment. However, Eichmann blocked the plan and less than 5,000 Jews reached Palestine. Once the plans for extermination were aborted, Jewish organizations fought hard for the return of the Jews who had been deported to Transnistria. In late 1943 the first of the surviving deportees were brought home, and the rest returned in 1945 and 1946.

Antonescu's government was overthrown on August 23, 1944 by an anti-fascist group called the National Democratic Bloc. In September the new government signed an agreement with the Soviet Union that formally acknowledged that Romania was no longer allied with Germany.

In all, about 420,000 Jews who had been living in Romania in 1939 died in the Holocaust. This includes those killed by the Romanian army, those who died in or on the way to Transnistria, the victims of pogroms, and the Jews of Hungarian-occupied Northern Transylvania who were murdered at Auschwitz. This number does not count those Jews living in the Soviet territory taken over by Romania during the war who also died during the Holocaust.