



Chapter from the report of the “Elie Wiesel Commission” – the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania – submitted to Romania’s President in 2004.

Introduction

In June 2000, by resolution of the Bucharest town hall, a street in the Romanian capital was named “Dr. Traian Popovici,” after the former mayor of Cernăuți during the Second World War, who saved thousands of Jews from deportation to Transnistria. Popovici was the first Romanian awarded the title “Righteous among Nations” by Yad Vashem to be officially honored by the Romanian government. This happened six decades after the end of the war and thirty-five years after Yad Vashem granted the title to Popovici. This odd delay in celebrating a man who deserves the respect of a national hero was, undoubtedly, the outcome of a process aimed at the rehabilitation of the Antonescu regime for its crimes against the Jews. This process commenced during the Ceausescu regime and continued after the fall of communism with the more overt attempt to turn Antonescu into a martyr and national hero.¹

That Romanians who saved Jewish lives by endangering their own were not paid public homage during their lifetime may be explained by the fact that postwar generations in Romania were educated in the spirit of the patriotic myth of a Romania unsullied by the war, despite the glaring truth that it had been an ally of Nazi Germany. Had they been celebrated as rescuers, it would have implied that there had been Romanian murderers and murderous Romanian authorities from whom thousands of Jews needed saving. Certainly, such an acknowledgement would have questioned the official patriotic propaganda on this dark chapter of Romanian history.

The only book written on the role of Romanian rescuers was authored by a Romanian Jew, Marius Mircu, and published in Romanian in Tel Aviv.² Commemorations of Jewish victims in the Romanian Jewish community and its publication (*Revista cultului mozaic*) as well as ceremonies dedicated to their rescuers were tolerated, but also closely monitored. The only exceptions were selected if they fit into political and propaganda scenarios, such as rescuers in Hungarian-occupied Northern Transylvania. The actions of this specific category of saviors were highlighted and even exaggerated to the point of mystification in order to bring into relief the otherwise genuine participation of Hungarian authorities in the Nazi “Final Solution” or to publicize the zeal and the cruelty of the Hungarian gendarmes. Relative to other European countries that were parties to the war, to the number of victims and the size of the territory on which deportations and massacres took place, Romania has a relatively small number of people who have been granted the title “Righteous among Nations”: sixty, including those who acted in Northern Transylvania. As argued below, this can be explained by a number of contextual variables.

¹ Michael Shafir, “Marshal Antonescu’s Post-Communist Rehabilitation: Cui Bono,” in *The Destruction of Romanian and Ukrainian Jews during the Antonescu Era*, ed. Randolph Braham (New York, 1997), pp. 349-410.

² Marius Mircu, *Din nou șapte momente - din istoria evreilor în România: Oameni de omenie, în vremuri de neomenie* (Tel Aviv: Glob, 1987), 190 pp. Written in a journalistic style, the book does not provide a critical examination of documentary sources used in the evaluation of the described events.



Public Reaction: Between Hostility, Indifference, and Compassion

Despite the Antonescu regime's antisemitic propaganda, Romanian society of those years did not become a fanatical society. The outcome of this propaganda was instead a kind of neutralization of public reaction, a sort of de-sensitization of the majority of the population toward whatever was happening to the Jews. The reactions of compassion and rebellion were accompanied by passive acceptance of killings and even active participation in antisemitic policies.

However, the study of interwar Romanian intellectual life shows that Romania did indeed have a democratic tradition and that many public figures, such as democratic intellectuals (with left-wing affiliations or not), writers, and even politicians, opposed the antisemitism of the 1930s. Highly competent and influential in the intellectual debate at the beginning of the 1930s, these people lost ground after 1935 and after 1937. After the suspension of democratic journals, they were effectively silenced. When Jews were excluded from professional associations, and the Goga government passed and enforced antisemitic legislation in December 1937, their critical voices were virtually mute.

There were numerous intellectuals who adopted antisemitic attitudes, because they passively identified with the most influential representatives of past and contemporary Romanian nationalism. The events of 1940 (the loss of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the Soviets and then of Northern Transylvania to Hungary) made the issue of discrimination against the Jews a topic of secondary importance in Romanian intellectual circles. It remains a fact that when the Antonescu regime and its alliance with Hitler brought hope for the retrieval of the ceded territories, the reestablishment of the Greater Romania of 1918, and the removal of the "Bolshevik danger," many democratic intellectuals chose to support the Antonescu dictatorship.

Historical and political circumstances account for the widely different destinies of Jews from various regions of Romania during the war. Under Antonescu, Romania was a Nazi ally and consequently joined Germany in its attack on the Soviet Union with the stated intent to retrieve the ceded territories. Jewish populations in these territories (200,000 in Bessarabia, 93,000 in Northern Bukovina, almost 200,000 in Transylvania and Banat) were regarded as hostile and foreign, and were slated for extermination in Antonescu's "cleansing of the land." A huge propaganda machine was set up in the army and civil service to portray this population and, by extension, all Jews as an embodiment of the "Bolshevik danger." This propaganda machine depicted the Jewish population in the ceded territories as the culprits of the maiming, humiliation, and even the killing of many withdrawing Romanian soldiers in the summer of 1940.

The situation of Jews under the Antonescu regime fluctuated by region, usually with proximity to the front as the most important variable. The antisemitic atmosphere in Romania was prefigured in 1939 by outbursts of antisemitism and was marked in 1940 by various forms of physical violence against the Jews. Antonescu's military dictatorship brought harsh censorship and a near total silence on the fate of Jews in Romanian public life. This was particularly so after the outbreak of the war. The fact that, despite the alliance with Germany, Antonescu was the leader of an independent country that developed its own policy on "the solution to the Jewish problem" had a dramatic impact on the Jews living in Romania and Romanian-occupied territories. The measures taken by Antonescu to deport or massacre the



Jews were perceived by a significant part of the Romanian population as necessary to the war of national survival and reunification.

Undoubtedly, there was a somewhat general consensus in Romania on participating in the war against the Soviet Union. This consensus was only slightly diminished by the huge number of Romanian soldiers and officers who became casualties of war. The antisemitic rhetorical repertoire now included blaming Romanian military failures on the Eastern front on alleged acts of Jewish espionage committed on behalf of the Red Army. Under these circumstances, to save Jews or express compassion for them became unpatriotic and demanded great courage and strength of character, even when the risk was minimal.

A good indication of the morale of the Romanian citizens, including that of the Jews, can be found in the diaries of Jewish intellectuals during those years.³ Their human and personal perspectives help to provide a better understanding of the nature and sense of the relationships between Jewish and Romanian intellectuals. They also show individual cases of contradictory and inconsistent conduct of the Romanian authorities, who distinguished between “our” Jews (Jews from the Regat) and “foreign” Jews (Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovina) as well as the variation of official policies toward the Jews.

What is characteristic for Romania is the fact that unofficial channels of communications between Jewish leaders and intellectuals on one hand, and Romanian government representatives and influential politicians on the other, existed throughout the period, which eased the flow of information on the developments in state policies toward the Jews. This sometimes led to confusion and panic, because the signals sent by Romanian officials sometimes seemed to indicate policy vacillations or the possibility of instant decision making, whether with beneficial or catastrophic consequences.

Jewish intellectuals often recorded their thoughts about the vehemently antisemitic official policy as well as the issue of personal responsibility for what was happening to the Jews. On August 5, 1941, for example, Jewish writer Mihail Sebastian noted the reaction of his good friend, Romanian diplomat C. Visoianu, upon learning of the Iasi massacre in the summer of 1941:

Each time I see a Jew, I am tempted to approach him, greet him, and tell him: “Sir, please believe me, I have nothing to do with this.” The sad thing is that no one admits having anything to do with it. Everybody disapproves, everybody is revolted, yet to a no lesser extent everyone is a cog in this huge antisemitic factory that is the Romanian state, with its offices, with its press, with its institutions, and with its laws. I don’t know if I have to laugh when Vivi (C. Visoianu, editors’s note) or Braniste assure me that General Mazarini or General Nicolescu are “astonished” and “revolted” at what is happening. Yet, beyond astonishment or revolt, they and another ten thousand people like them sign, ratify, and acquiesce to what is going on, not only through passivity, but also through direct participation.

³ Leon Volovici, “The Victim as Eyewitness: Jewish Intellectual Diaries during the Antonescu Period,” in *The Destruction*, ed. Randolph L. Braham, pp. 195-213; Andrei Pippidi, “Dictatorship and Opposition in Wartime Romania,” paper presented at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, May 20, 2004.



A certain “awakening” of public opinion was evident with respect to the deportation of Regat Jews planned in the Romanian-Nazi deal of summer 1942. Many Bucharest intellectuals suspected of leaning toward communism personally protested the implementation of this plan, and beginning in fall 1942 the planned deportation of Regat Jews was also faced with the resistance of a number of opposition politicians from Romania’s main parties, such as Iuliu Maniu (head of the National Peasant Party; NPP), Nicolae Lupu and Ion Mihalache (also NPP leaders), and Constantin I. C. Bratianu (National Liberal Party leader).⁴ The Romanian Orthodox Church also protested, although until then the leadership of the Church had been traditionally hostile to the Jewish community; the intervention of Nicolae Balan, the bishop of Transylvania, was notable in this respect. Moreover, representatives of the Romanian royal house, particularly Queen Mother Elena, made similar efforts. Also active in condemning the racial discrimination and deportations were Prince Barbu Stirbey and NPP former members of Parliament, Nicușor Graur and Ioan Hudita. Graur also lambasted the deportations of the Roma population to Transnistria.⁵ Unhappy with the criticism, Antonescu ordered that a list be drafted containing the “statements and protests made in favor of the Jews by various public figures.”⁶ During the second half of the war, after the change in official policy toward the Jews, however, Romanian diplomats made many more attempts to rescue Jews with Romanian citizenship in the countries under German occupation.⁷

The “Righteous Among Nations”

The title of “Righteous among the Nations” is awarded by the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem, which was set up in 1953 through a special law issued by the Knesset. Its function is to preserve the memory of the martyrs and heroes during the Holocaust. One of the objectives of Yad Vashem is to honor the “Righteous among the Nations,” those non-Jews who risked their lives in order to save Jews. Up to the summer of 2004, 20,205 people had received this distinction.

Given the circumstances outlined above, the number of Romanian “Righteous among Nations” is rather small. It is important to point out, however, that in the case of Romania, as in other countries, there were actually many more people who could meet Yad Vashem’s criteria to be granted the title and medal. Their recognition largely depends on the existence of direct testimonies and the perseverance of witnesses in going through the necessary procedures to build a convincing file. In many cases, those rescued were caught up in the vortex of the postwar years or simply emigrated and used private channels to reward the rescuer and his/her family and therefore did not pursue the official and symbolic recognition.

Journalist Marius Mircu described examples of rescues in his book, but they were not investigated after its publication.⁸ Also, an eyewitness of the Iasi pogrom listed the names of several Iasi Romanians “whose conduct was beyond reproach, who took on risks and kept

⁴ Jean Ancel, *Contribuții la istoria României: Problema evreiască, 1933-1944* (Bucharest, Hasefer, 2002), vol. 2, part 2: pp. 243-254.

⁵ Nicușor Graur, *In preajma altei lumi...* (Bucharest: 1946), pp. 158.

⁶ Jean Ancel, ed., *Documents Concerning the Fate of Romanian Jewry during the Holocaust* (Jerusalem, 1986), vol. 10: no. 131, pp. 354-355; Lya Benjamin, ed., *Problema evreiască în stenogramele Consiliului de Miniștri* (Bucharest: Hasefer, 1996), no. 179, pp. 535-541.

⁷ Dumitru Hîncu, *Un licăr în beznă: Acțiuni necunoscute ale diplomației române* (Bucharest, 1997).

⁸ Marius Mircu, *op. cit.*



Jews informed or hid them.”⁹ During the war, the odds of meeting a rescuer largely depended on the very different circumstances in which Jewish communities found themselves. Paradoxically, the odds increased during pogroms when, due to the state of anarchy, it was much easier to save a Jewish family or a group of Jews. Such were the many cases of rescue during the Bucharest and Iasi pogroms. Of particular importance were the rescue efforts of Iasi pharmacist D. Beceanu and Viorica Agarici, chairwoman of the Romanian subsidiary of the Red Cross, who initiated and organized the administration of first aid to the survivors of the infamous “death train.” Also exemplary during the Iasi massacre were the undertakings of cereal mill manager, engineer Grigore Profir, who defied death threats from German soldiers and Romanian gendarmes and maintained his resolution to hide dozens of Iasi Jews.

These cases demonstrate that individual initiatives were often successful. Many people, however, who may have otherwise been willing to help, were unable to overcome the paralysis stemming from their feelings toward the Jews. Since antisemitic propaganda was so intense during the war, compassion for Jewish suffering or questioning their humiliation and persecution were construed as socially inappropriate or perceived as evidence of a lack of patriotism or even treason. Viorica Agarici, for example, was attacked so vehemently by the citizens of Roman that she had to resign from her position and take refuge in Bucharest, even though her son was a famous Romanian air force pilot.¹⁰

The situation was even more extreme in regions near the front, particularly in Bessarabia and Bukovina, where potential rescuers were under the threat of the Romanian and German military. In general, in these areas gestures of solidarity with the Jews seemed inconceivable.

Still, there were some rescue initiatives undertaken by local people of Bessarabia, peasants, or elementary school teachers from villages. Up to now, eleven people have received the title “Righteous among Nations” (or it was awarded to their descendants). They were citizens of the former Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova (now the Republic of Moldova). The case of the school principal from Nisporeni, Paramon Lozan, is especially impressive: he, together with his wife, Tamara, released all the Jews confined in the school after discovering that all of them were to be shot. The school principal paid for his brave gesture with his life.

Gestures of solidarity and rescue efforts became more numerous in 1942. Around this time, many Romanians began to sense the official attitude becoming more ambiguous and hesitant and to see the forms of official persecution becoming more “humane” or traditional. The decision of the Romanian government not to adopt the Nazi plan of extermination grew increasingly noticeable. Undoubtedly, many Romanian upper army and civilian leaders grew aware of the fact that in the event of an Allied victory and the war crimes tribunal that would follow in its wake, they had to construct a more positive image for themselves.

Unlike the Nazi-controlled areas, where massacres were systematic and the ideological training of the perpetrators ensured a disciplined and merciless enforcement of the Final Solution, in some of the Romanian-controlled areas, notably Bessarabia and Bukovina, there was a general state of disorder. Bestial torture and murder and compassion and rescue were at times equally possible options for local commanders. Contradictory orders led to great confusion and left room for more freedom of action by commanders, with consequences that

⁹ Adrian Radu-Cernea, *Pogromul de la Iași. Depoziție de martor* (Bucharest: Hasefer, 2002), p. 66.

¹⁰ Marius Mircu, *op. cit.*, p. 37.



were equally contradictory. The whimsical disposition of a sadistic officer or NCOs and privates could have catastrophic consequences for thousands of Jews placed under their authority; or, in rare cases, it could lead to the rescue of some Jews (even by camp commanders).

For example, in a display of great courage and humanity, the commander of the Vapniarka camp, Sabin Motora, rescued dozens of Jews on his own. Lawyer I. D. Popescu, commander of the Tiraspol municipal police, also showed remarkable commitment to saving Transnistria deportees. Although his actions are well documented by the Jews he rescued, the Yad Vashem commission inexplicably did not grant him the title “Righteous among Nations.”¹¹ Another form of protest was to resign in objection to the continuing atrocities and inhumane living conditions in the camps. Col. Alexandru Constantinescu, the first commander of the Vertujeni camp, left his position over the situation of the detainees under his command.¹²

Rescuers and Their Motivations

The rescuers recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous among Nations were of different ages and came from widely diverse social and educational backgrounds: peasants, workers, pharmacists, lawyers, teachers, army officers, gendarmes, and diplomats. Yad Vashem recently awarded the title to Orthodox priest Petre Gheorghe for helping Jewish deportees in Transnistria. The names of many other priests have been listed by survivors, but their cases have not yet gotten to compete for the award. With firm moral conviction, Queen Mother Elena condemned the planned deportation of the Jews, and she was granted the title for her efforts.

In most cases, rescues were motivated by the personal relationship between rescuer and survivor—often they were neighbors, friends, or co-workers. There were also a few cases in which rescues were ideologically motivated, such as those by members of antifascist organizations. When no prior personal relationship existed, rescue was based on a spontaneous manifestation of solidarity and humanitarianism. Anna Pal from Cluj described her motivation to save a Jewish child in this way:

“I simply couldn’t shut my eyes to what was happening during that time so I did everything possible and I heartily took the little Andre giving him shelter. My firm belief that I work for a good and true cause gave such strength that fear could not capture me”¹³

Half of the rescuers recognized by Yad Vashem have been women. After the war, two of them married the men they saved and emigrated to Israel. Many of the rescued Jews struggled to keep in touch with their rescuers and show their gratitude in various forms, including submitting the “Righteous among Nations” paperwork to Yad Vashem. Of those rescuers recognized by Yad Vashem, most (twenty-eight) came from Northern Transylvania, and twelve were ethnic Hungarians. The greater frequency of rescue attempts in this region can be explained by the improving situation of Jews in Romania near the end of the war, which was in sharp contrast to the ever-worsening situation in Northern Transylvania. Once the

¹¹ Dimitrie Olenici, “Un protector al evreilor: ofițerul român I. D. Popescu,” *Studia et Acta Historiae Iudaeorum Romaniae* 7 (2002): pp. 353-376.

¹² Radu Ioanid, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu* (Bucharest: Hasefer, 1997), p. 183.

¹³ Letter of Anna Pal, Yad Vashem Archives, file no. 6540.



Antonescu regime changed its policy toward the Jews, Romanian territory became a place of refuge for the Jews of Northern Transylvanian and Hungary who managed to cross over into Romania. For example, Professor Raoul Sorban was awarded the Righteous among Nations medal in 1987, for rescuing Hungarian and Northern Transylvanian Jews. However, the award was contested by many survivors and historians,¹⁴ despite the backing of Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger, former Chief Rabbi of the Cluj Neolog Jewish community.

An Exemplary Hero: Dr. Traian Popovici

Of the Romanian Righteous among Nations, the case of Dr. Traian Popovici (1892-1946), the mayor of Cernăuți, stands out as unique. Popovici defied the orders of Antonescu and fiercely opposed the ghettoization and the subsequent deportation of Cernăuți Jews, and contributed directly to the rescue of thousands of Jews from deportation and death. His was a case of assuming responsibility for carrying out a moral duty, because to act or to remain passive is ultimately contingent upon making the decision to accept or reject participation in an abominable crime, especially when the crime is “legally” covered.

Immediately after the war, Popovici wrote a book entitled *Confession of Conscience* in which he described the tragedy of Bukovinian Jewry, which he believed to be the consequence of a “barbaric” enterprise. At the same time, he also viewed those events as a Romanian tragedy with deep implications for the moral consciousness of the Romanian nation. Traian Popovici was not an adversary of Antonescu. He confessed, “Like many others in this country I believed in the myth of the strong man, of the honest, energetic, and well-meaning leader who could save a damaged country.”

What was the inner mechanism of Popovici’s formidable resolution? Popovici posed this question to himself and arrived at the following answer:

As far as I am concerned, what gave me strength to oppose the current, be master of my own will and oppose the powers that be, finally to be a true human being, was the message of the families of priests that constitute my ancestry, a message about what it means to love mankind. What gave me strength was the education I received in high school in Suceava, where I received the light of classical literature, where my teachers fashioned my spirit with the values of humanity, which tirelessly enlightens man and differentiates him from the brutes.¹⁵

Yet, many other people received the same education and had the same family tradition. But, unlike most of the people with similar family and educational backgrounds, Popovici was able to turn a moral lesson into a philosophy of life and a set of daily ethical norms. He refused to accept the comfortable “escape clauses” people around him offered: official orders, wartime, the advancing enemy, “national priorities.” In decisive moments, Popovici was aware that his

¹⁴ Randolph L. Braham, *Romanian Nationalists and the Holocaust: The Political Exploitation of Unfounded Rescue Accounts* (New York, 1998), pp. 95-119; Zoltán Tibori Szabó, *Élet és halál mezsgyéjén. Zsidók menekülése és mentése a magyar-román határon 1940-1944 között* (Between life and death: the escape and rescue of Jews across the Hungarian-Romanian border between 1940-1944) (Cluj-Napoca, 2001).

¹⁵ Traian Popovici, *Spovedania unei conștiințe*, in Matatias Carp, *Cartea Neagra* (Bucharest, 1946), vol. 3: pp. 150-181.



intransigence compensated for what he called the “moral disorder” and the “anarchy” of most people. He was confident that he would thus build a basis for asking for forgiveness.

Gestures of Solidarity of Romanian Intellectuals and Artists

Along with the political opposition to the dictatorial regime, there were many acts of solidarity with the Jewish victims of the Antonescu regime's policies. The instances of Romanians' solidarity with the Jews during those years have not been researched and emphasized enough. There is no doubt that there were many more cases of rescue during the Holocaust than are currently known. This is an issue that must be studied thoroughly in order to present a balanced picture, as close to the reality of the 1940-1944 period as possible.

Most gestures of solidarity were made by simple people without any kind of financial or political calculation, who, through their courageous actions, saved Jews from death, without thinking of any reward. Most often, these acts were not recorded in documents, but remained alive in the hearts and minds of those Jews who found themselves in extreme situations and survived only because of the intervention of such Romanians. To them must be added other categories of citizens with positions in various sectors, such as culture and the liberal professions as well as economic, administrative, or even military structures. In addition, high clergymen, leading politicians from the opposition, and Queen Mother Elena were also involved in rescue efforts between 1941 and 1944.

The decree-law of September 8, 1940, stipulated that Jewish employees of Romanian theaters be fired. However, some theater managers opposed this. Thus, Constantin Tanase continued to pay salaries to some Jewish actors (Henrieta Gamberto, Teodora Gamberto, N. Stroe). N. Stroe continued to write together with Vasilache, his old friend, but under a pseudonym. When the Jewish community established its own Barasheum Theater,¹⁶ Tanase often ostentatiously attended the Barsheum shows. In addition, Romanian director Sica Alexandrescu, manager of the Theater of Comedy, requested a compulsory labor detachment to be set up in his theater in order to save Jewish actors (Leny Caler, Agnia Begoslova, Tina Radu, Alexandru Finti, Villy Ronea), stage decorators (W. Siegfried), prompters (Victor and Bebe Godean), and theater clerks from the harsh conditions of the compulsory labor camps. Also, Ion Vasilescu refused to fire Jewish actor Eugen Mirea.

Lucia Sturza-Bulandra, manager of the Regina Maria Theater, maintained her troupe of Jewish actors (Flori Carbuneanu, Maria Sandu, Alexandru Finti), her Jewish director (Baum) and her prompter (M. Vladimir).¹⁷ Not only was the Bulandra troupe publicly reprimanded by Radu Gyr, chief of the Theater Division of the Romanian Ministry of Culture, for staging a play with a Jewish actress, but it also lost its government subsidies. Liviu Rebreanu, the manager of the National Theater who refused to fire Jewish actress Leny Caler, was another example. Teodor Musatescu allowed Jewish playwrights Elly Roman and Henri Malineanu to use his name to sign their compositions.¹⁸ Thanks to similar gestures of solidarity, Jewish director Alexandru Braun directed and created the set and costumes for the drama *Mihai Viteazul*, which was staged in Craiova in September 1942, in a year of full-fledged repression against the Jews.¹⁹

¹⁶ Marius Mircu, *Oameni de omenie în vremuri de neomenie* (Bucharest: Hasefer, 1996), p. 210.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 212-213.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 122.



On July 14, 1942, the decree-law of December 5, 1941, took effect. Its regulations stipulated that the Military High Command could use all Jews, ages eighteen to fifty, in “various kinds of work demanded by the public interest, by the needs of the army and other public institutions” for 60 to 180 days a year.²⁰ The “work detachments” were organized under military command, though the Jews “recruited” for these departments were allowed to wear civilian clothes. The workday was nine hours long, with breaks on official (non-Jewish) holidays. Highly-educated Jews were pointedly assigned all kinds of jobs that entailed public humiliation—shoveling snow, sweeping, and digging ditches in the city. Some Romanian intellectuals acted to protect Jews and convince authorities to give educated Jews jobs appropriate to their background. Thus, the head of the Romanian Institute of Statistics, Sabin Mănuilă, managed to persuade the military authorities in charge of the work detachments to put at his disposal 2,800 highly-educated Jewish professionals.²¹

Others made symbolic gestures of moral support. Well-known actress Silvia Dumitrescu-Timica, for example, offered tea and invited the Jews forced to shovel snow on her street into her home.²² Famous Romanian composer George Enescu often took hot tea to the Jews shoveling snow in the center city (Biserica Alba).²³ Gala Galaction, priest and Romanian writer of great renown, once stopped to publicly encourage Jews shoveling snow (“Courage! You are not alone!” he said) and then took over the work of an elderly Jew. Galaction often hugged his Jewish friends when he saw them in the street, and once he went so far as to help a Jew under surveillance (Emil Feder) to evade the authorities by driving off with him until the police lost their trail.²⁴

Some Jews in labor detachments were fortunate enough to be under the authority of humane administrators or to be helped by various state employees. In July 1941, around 1,500 Jews from Botosani were transported in cattle car trains to Braila, a forced labor site (a building on a small dam on the banks of the Siret River). On the way, another 500 Jews from Botosani and Husi were crowded in the train, too. After they had finished work in late-October, the authorities left them there to fend for themselves; so, the Jews pleaded to the detachment commander and his deputy for help. Both men were in the army reserve and worked as primary school instructors in civilian life. Upon learning of the Jews’ desperate situation—living outdoors with no means of subsistence—Avram Moisi, the stationmaster in Marasesti, used his connections to get the Jews on a “special train” and send them back to their families in Botosani. Moisi’s initiative would not have ended successfully had it not been for the cooperation of the two rail traffic specialists in the Braila station (Valeriu Tanasescu and Constantin Luchian).²⁵ Also noteworthy was Matasareanu, a train driver from Banat who stopped his train in specific places to help the Jews—close to Station 21-Oravita, so that Jews could jump off the train, and near the Lisava labor camp, so that parcels with food and clothes could be thrown to the Jews working there.²⁶

Some municipal authorities also showed sympathy for the plight of the Jews during those years. Thus, in May 1941, municipal authorities in the Bucharest satellite village of

²⁰ *Monitorul oficial*, no. 164, July 14, 1941.

²¹ SRI Archives, fond Documentar, dos. 3.116, f. 14.

²² Marius Mircu, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 224-225.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 123.



Baneasa (Mayor Mircea Balteanu, Deputy Radulescu, and Vasile Calmus, the town hall secretary) received 104 Jews evacuated from other rural areas, just as they would have any citizen in need. Mayor Balteanu fed them and gave them days off to travel to Bucharest for work, so that they could support their families. He also took them out of the police station and the Bucharest recruiting center whenever the local gendarmerie made round-ups. Once, four Jews were missing from inspection. After finding them in their homes, they were sent to the train station to be deported. Balteanu, however, persuaded army corps Gen. Constantin Niculescu to cancel the order.²⁷

The Antonescu regime established concentration camps for Jews in the Regat to isolate them from Romanian society. They suffered many abuses at the hands of the camps' administrators. But in some cases, camp commanders or their subordinates displayed more humanity than the rules allowed. For example, in the 3,000-person work camp at Cotroceni, a suburb of Bucharest, the camp commander, Colonel Agapiescu, illegally reduced the work schedule for the Jews there to nine hours and to only five hours a day for Jews with large families.²⁸ Agapiescu also used soldiers under his command and Romanian workers on the site to replace Jews missing during the roll call. When General Cepleanu came to inspect the camp in September 1942 and found ninety-six Jews missing, he ordered that they be found and deported to Transnistria. Faced with this situation, Agapiescu persuaded some officers in the Army High Command, such as Colonel Locusteanu, Colonel Chirescu and Major Miclescu, to nullify the order.

Agapiescu also did fundraising with wealthy Jews, such as Max Auschnitt to set up a free food facility for a thousand people and a makeshift healthcare center where Doctors Popper and Rosenthal, both of whom were Jewish, administered counsel and drugs free of charge. He allowed Jews to buy food, clothing, and books brought there from the city and wrote fake medical exemption papers for them. When 300 of "his" Jews were taken to Giurgiu to unload a German train and were then prevented from leaving by the Germans, the commander again used his Army High Command connections to have them freed. Agapiescu then personally went to Giurgiu to make sure the Germans released them. After the war he wrote, "Is there a greater satisfaction than being greeted by unknown people in the street? I know they cannot be but the Jews who worked under my command."

The Romanian gendarmerie can be singled out for abusing Jews and contributing directly to their physical extermination. There were, however, some exceptions. For example, NCO Dumitru Prisacaru, of the Tutova-Barlad gendarmerie, made sure that 400 Jews crowded in the Bacani police station were given adequate medical care and housing in local homes; he forged the papers of twelve Jews accused of being communist sympathizers by removing the "suspicion note"; and although he was ordered to make the Jewish column walk on, Prisacaru disobeyed the command and eventually arranged for Jews to be transported by the wagons of local peasants. NCO Prisacaru was consequently reprimanded and imprisoned in Petrosani.²⁹

Constantin Hrehorciuc, chief of the gendarme station in Stanestii de Jos, Bukovina, liberated the Jews from several villages taken hostage by Ukrainian gangs that would execute between ten and fifteen of them every day. He then refused to send them to the Storojinet and Vascauti camps.³⁰ Ştefan C. Rus, lieutenant-colonel of the Bihor gendarme legion (*Legiunea*

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 185-192.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 134-143.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 50-56.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 82-83.



de Jandarmi Bihor), based in Beius between 1942 and 1944, is said to have softened orders instituting harsh work conditions for the Jews in his labor battalions. He also gave them better food and days off and facilitated transportation back to their homes. After the deportations of Jews from Hungarian-occupied Northern Transylvania began, he offered refuge to 100 Jews from there and other areas of Hungary.³¹ When some locals in Banila and Ciudei committed robberies and atrocities against the Jews on July 6, 1941, NCO Rosu aided and defended the victims.³² Between July 4 and July 6, 1941, Romanian officers in Socolita and Vascauti saved the lives of Jews scheduled for execution.³³

In November 1941, Lieutenant Colonel Dumitru Vasiliu, head of the Ministry of the Navy's work detachment, was informed by Jews living in his apartment building that 200 of them were to be taken to an unknown location the next day.³⁴ They asked Vasiliu to set up a detachment at the Ministry of the Navy in order to save them. Vasiliu persuaded Col. Aurel Malinescu of the Army High Command that such a labor detachment was needed, thereby saving the Jews who were to be deported. Furthermore, since many of these Jews were poor, he made sure that they and their families were properly fed. He also had the 200 Jews work in turns—thirty people each day.

Carp Valentin, a courier for the Army High Command, attempted to cross the Dniester River with money and 400 letters for the Jews in the Moghilev camp. The courier was arrested by the Romanian police in the village of Otaci, Soroca County.³⁵ Similarly, Sergeant T. R. Ispravnicelu of the Army High Command was arrested for attempting to deliver twenty-six letters from Jews interned in the Golta camp. The sergeant was court-martialed, and the Jews were tried.

Two Romanian army specialists of the elite 3rd Mountain Troops Battalion (*Batalionul 3 Vinatori de Munte*) organized a courageous escape for three Jews in Transnistria. During their leave, Specialists Constantin Barascu and T. R. Latiu went to the Moghilev camp in Transnistria and gave military uniforms to two Jewish men and forged papers to a Jewish woman. In addition, together with the Bucharest police commissioner, Popescu Gheorghe, Constantin Barascu organized the escape of David Edelmann's entire family from Transnistria. Specialists Latiu and Barascu made several other attempts until they were caught in Transnistria and court-martialed.³⁶

NCO Constantin Anghel of the Lapusna gendarme legion was punished for having allowed Jews on a train bound for Transnistria to get off the train in railway stations to buy food on July 10, 1942. He was also accused of "conversing cordially with them on the train" during the voyage.³⁷ In Tiraspol, Major Iacobescu, commander of the local gendarmerie, set up workshops for the Jews so that they would not be deported and could earn a living.

³¹ Marius Mircu, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-104.

³² Radu Ioanid, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 192-194.

³⁵ ANIC, fond Inspectoratul General al Jandarmeriei, dos. 121/1943, p. 287; dos. 79/1943, p. 347; dos. 78/1943, pp. 42, 191.

³⁶ Arh. SRI, fond Documentar, dos. 3.118, f. 225; dos. 3.116, f. 14

³⁷ Lya Benjamin, "Realitatea evreiască," no. 5, May 1995.



Acts of Solidarity from Ordinary Civilians

In a recent book, Adrian Radu-Cernea, a survivor of the Iasi pogrom, wrote the following about the conduct of the local population: “The overwhelming majority of intellectuals and educated people, upper- and lower-middle-class families as well as the employees of the local town halls and prefectures did not lower themselves to committing atrocities during the pogrom. On the contrary, there were many examples of people who undertook rescue attempts.”³⁸ The author listed several cases of Iasi inhabitants who warned or hid Jews, such as army physician Colonel Iamandi and his high school friend, Bogdan.³⁹ Other locals, such as lawyer Dimitriu and university student Scripca, initiated and carried out similar efforts. Orthodox priest Razmerita and lathe worker Ioan Gheorghiu were killed because they tried to save Jews.⁴⁰ With the assistance of several other locals, young lawyer Viorica Zosin walked from house to house warning Jews and even hiding some of them.⁴¹ The Romanian police severely beat Vasile Petrescu for hiding a number of Jews in his home.⁴² The chief commissioner of the third police precinct, which included several Jewish streets in Iasi (Socola, Nicolina, and Podu-Rosu), courageously liberated all the Jews rounded up in the precinct building on June 28, 1941.⁴³

Attempts to save Transnistria deportees were severely punished by the regime; therefore, rescue efforts—and they were not few—deserve great respect. Unfortunately, no systematic research has been done on this topic. However, several individual cases are highly relevant. First, Martha Bibescu, a Romanian aristocrat, public intellectual, and well known French-language author, took care of the family of journalist Carol Drimer, who was killed on the Iasi “death train” of June 1941. She also successfully used her connections to liberate Drimer’s daughter and her family from the Cernăuți camp.⁴⁴ The distinguished Romanian doctor, D. Gerota, used his foundation to send 6,000 lei every month to two Jewish children interned in Transnistria. His humanitarian intentions are documented in his correspondence.⁴⁵ Serban Flondor, a doctor of agronomics and renowned specialist in heraldry and genealogy and son of Iancu Flondor (who played an important role in uniting Bukovina with Romania), supplied the Jews in the Storojinet camp with food. Additionally, with the assistance of railway managers, he sent Jews to Bucharest by locking them in unoccupied sleeping car compartments. While serving as councilor for the Chamber of Agriculture, he used his train car to take Jews from Bukovina to Bucharest, where they could hide more easily.⁴⁶

Sonia Palty, a Transnistria deportee, described the humanitarian efforts of agronomist Vasiliu in the book *Evrei, treceti Nistrul!* Vasiliu was a Romanian farm manager in Alexandrovka, who, despite express prohibitions, gave Jews meat rations for a whole week during the Christmas holidays. He also defended a Jew being beaten by Lieutenant Cepleanu. In retaliation, Lieutenant Cepleanu informed his father, General Cepleanu, and Vasiliu was sent to fight in the advanced lines of the Romanian defenses, where he was killed.

³⁸ Adrian Radu-Cernea, *Pogromul de la Iași. Depoziție de martor* (Bucharest: Hasefer, 2002), p. 66.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ioanid, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu*, p. 101.

⁴¹ Iorgu Iordan, *Memorii* (Bucharest: Eminescu, 1977), vol. 2: p. 328.

⁴² Marius Mircu, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 30.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 60.

⁴⁵ Emil Dorian, *Jurnal din vremuri de prigoană. 1937–1944*, ed. Marguerite Dorian (Bucharest: Hasefer, 1996).

⁴⁶ Marius Mircu, *op. cit.*, p. 87.



Another farm administrator in Transnistria, Vucol Dornescu, then based in Kazaciiovka, saved a group of 120 Jews from being executed by the Germans. Upon learning that these Jews were ordered by the Germans to dig their own graves in the field, Dornescu rushed to the scene on horseback. He asked that the Jews be given to the farm, which he claimed was experiencing labor shortages. The German officer in charge of the execution agreed after he was promised farm products in exchange, and the 120 Jews were saved. Dornescu did the same for many other Jews by visiting camps and persuading commanders that he needed more labor on his farm. Dornescu also used his trips to Bucharest to deliver letters and parcels for the Jews.⁴⁷

Many Romanian guards and camp administrators participated in the effort to deliver letters and parcels, a fact recorded in official documents. Thus, the Gendarmerie Inspectorate of Transnistria issued a report on February 5, 1943, which noted that “Marinescu and Captain Petrescu Teodor, commander of field bakery no. 82 of Berezovka, deliver letters and money to the Jews in Mostovoi.” In March 1943, the General Police Division reported the following:

We have been informed that various individuals (soldiers and officers on leave, civil servants or former civil servants, most of them from Bucharest) use expired papers, leave permits, hospital papers, duty orders, and even forged papers to visit villages in Transnistria with Jewish deportees to deliver letters and sometimes money. They would help some of them escape to Romania by giving them military gear and forged or expired papers. On trains, they travel together. At checkpoints, they take the Jews under their protection and do so energetically by using their ranks.⁴⁸

Tudor Teodorescu-Braniste wrote in *Jurnalul de dimineata* (January 25, 1945) about engineer Constantin Paunescu, undersecretary of the Romanian Railway Authority, who allotted special train cars for the transportation of parcels for local Jews in Moghilev, Balta, Vapniarca, and Grosulovo. In addition, there are many testimonies that do not record the names of those who helped the Jews. For example, an unknown Romanian army sergeant stopped retreating Germans from killing 370 Jews in the Trihati camp on March 14, 1944. Although his name remains a mystery, his deed is well known.⁴⁹

Acts of Solidarity in Northern Transylvania

The situation of Jews in Hungarian-occupied Transylvania was worse than in Romania. According to recent evaluations, 135,000 Jews from Transylvania died during the war.⁵⁰ Hungarian authorities made escape from work detachments punishable by death. For those who assisted or sheltered escapees, the punishment was also death or prison. Nevertheless, there were numerous local Romanians and Hungarians who assumed enormous risks to shelter fleeing Jews or help them to cross the border into Romania.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 157-182.

⁴⁸ Arh. SRI, fond Documentar, dos. 3.118, ff. 225-226.

⁴⁹ Marius Mircu, *op. cit.*, pp. 153-154.

⁵⁰ Marcu Rozen, *60 de ani de la deportarea evreilor din România în Transnistria* (Bucharest: Matrix Rom, 2001), p. 76.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 51.



In 1942, soon after Iosze Szucs was placed in charge of several forced labor battalions, he proceeded to fundamentally improve their situation: he offered shelter, brought a physician, cancelled arrests and physical punishments, improved food, replaced abusive guards, and instituted the right to rest leave. In 1944, he helped dozens of Jewish families to leave the ghetto and take refuge in Romania. Unfortunately, Szucs was unable to save his own Jewish wife and children from deportation.⁵²

As a member of the Oradea railway station command, Lt. Kalamán Appan helped Jews forced to work on the tracks by stamping their assignment papers for long-distance travel to repair nonexistent damage from accidents that never happened, thereby allowing them to skip entire workdays. When he was later appointed manager of a soap factory (Iohanna), he managed to relocate the factory outside of the ghetto. In this way, Appan was able to smuggle the thirty-seven Jews hiding in the attic, whom Appan's wife had been feeding, out of the ghetto. Among these Jews were Rabbi Weiss and his family, Rabbi Fuchs, and the Iacob Schreiber family. Three weeks later, Nicolae Bodoran obtained a truck and smuggled all thirty-seven across the border. The Appan family fled to Budapest after the authorities discovered what had happened, and there they continued their rescue efforts by opening a shelter for several Jewish families.⁵³

Rozalia Antal of Satu Mare, was a former employee and friend of a Jewish doctor, Sarkány Lipót. With the help of her husband, Stefan Antal, she hid Handler Isidor, her shop employee, and four other Jews during police raids. When the situation worsened, they helped the five Jews travel by car to Budapest, where authorities lost their trail. Rozalia Antal was awarded the title Righteous among Nations.⁵⁴ Foldes Dezideriu sheltered several Jews in his home, Zigmund Freund and his brother, Solomon, among them. When danger became imminent, Foldes and his wife assumed the risk of taking them to Budapest by train using their sons' identity papers. The Foldes also rented a house where between eight and ten Jews could be found at any given time and gave them clothes, food, and false identification documents.⁵⁵

Following are several other examples of solidarity and rescue in Northern Transylvania: Ioan Osan from Baia Mare hid a Jew named Izsák in his home⁵⁶; Alexandru Vaida, a railway worker from Baia Mare, saved the life of porter Zinger and his family⁵⁷; Alexandru Ritoc, a peasant from Carei, saved Helena Gun and her young daughter;⁵⁸ Nicoara Pomut of Borsa, Maramures, hid Tobias Yertherger in his home until the town was liberated by the Romanian army.⁵⁹ Elisabeta Farcas from Targu Mures hid Abraham Erno and the Hidegs.⁶⁰ Rozalia Grosz from Dej sheltered Olga Hirsch-Schnabel from spring to autumn 1944, when the Romanian and Soviet armies liberated Dej.⁶¹ Ilona Bott from Timis-Torontal hid twelve

⁵² Marius Mircu, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-105

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 96-99.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

⁵⁶ Marius Mircu, *op. cit.*, p.101.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 101-102.

⁶¹ Marius Mircu, *op. cit.*, p. 102.



The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority רשות הזיכרון לשואה ולגבורה children.⁶² Several rescuers were caught and punished. Veronika Deak, a clerk in the Lazuri town hall in Satu Mare County, issued fake identity papers for eighteen Jews, who were consequently saved from deportation. Deak was sentenced to one year in prison.⁶³ Emil Socor from Cluj was jailed for six months for having helped Jews.⁶⁴

Some clergymen also protested the persecution of the Jews and worked to help them. Gheorghe Mangra, manager of a religious school in Oradea (*Seminarul Roman Unit*), and teacher Emil Maxim hid several Jewish children in the school building.⁶⁵

The names of many rescuers remain unknown, as sometimes rescuers would not reveal their identity. For example, Rabbi Iosef Panet of Ileanda Mare and his nine children were rescued from the Dej ghetto by shepherds who gave them peasant clothes so that authorities would lose track of them.⁶⁶

On May 18, 1944, Bishop Aron Marton delivered a sermon in Saint Michael Cathedral in Cluj deploring the persecution of Jews in Northern Transylvania. He was declared *persona non grata* on Hungarian-controlled territory and had to move to Alba Iulia (in Romanian-controlled territory), where he remained until the end of the war.⁶⁷ On April 2, 1944, Bishop Iuliu Hossu issued an appeal to the clergy asking them to help the Jews (*Catre preoti si mireni. Chemare pentru ajutorarea evreilor*):

We call on you brothers to help the Jews not only by thoughts of solidarity, but also with deeds, as we know that today there can be no better Christian or Romanian deed of human warmth. Helping the Jews is the most important task ahead of us today.⁶⁸

Acts of Solidarity and Rescue Undertaken by Romanian Politicians

After Wilhelm Filderman's deportation to Transnistria on May 31, 1943, many politicians, including leaders of democratic parties (N. Lupu, I. Maniu, M. Popovici, and C. Angelescu) assailed Antonescu with protests aimed at Filderman's liberation. After two months, Filderman was allowed to return to Bucharest. Dimitrie Lupu, chairman of the Romanian Supreme Court, helped many Jews through counseling and by bringing together Jewish leaders (such as Filderman or C. S. Cristian, leader of the Iasi Jewish community) with Romanian officials in order to prevent or stop antisemitic measures; Filderman, for example, was given access to Mihai Antonescu and King Mihai.⁶⁹

Prince Barbu Stirbey, former vice president of the 1927 Romanian Council of Ministers, sent large sums of money to Jews in Transnistria. The police discovered this and issued the following statement: "As a result of our investigation, we have learned that Barbu Stirbey,

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Marcu Rozen, *op.cit.*, p. 110.

⁶⁶ Marcu Rozen, *op.cit.*, p. 112

⁶⁷ Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, vol. 1: p. 631 and vol. 2, pp. 1191-1192.

⁶⁸ Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger, *Istoria evreilor din Transilvania (1623-1944)* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedica, 1994), p. 175. The existence of this appeal is disputed by Professor Braham in *Romanian Nationalists and the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), pp. 207-208.

⁶⁹ Marius Mircu, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-61.



owner of the Buftea lands, factories, and castle, once sent 200,000 lei in cash to help poor Jewish deportees in Transnistria."⁷⁰

On July 14, 1942, Dori Popovici, a former minister in the Averescu government, leader of the Democratic Union Party of Bukovina, and subsequently leader of the People's Party, sent a letter to Mihai Antonescu vehemently denouncing the deportations of Jews from Bukovina to Transnistria:

These methods are alien to a civilized country, alien to the spirituality of the Romanian population in this region, a population educated for fifty years to respect the law and public morals. These methods were applied without any reason or motivation, and this population was condemned to watch convoys of hundreds and thousands of Jews, many of them lifetime acquaintances or neighbors, being escorted by armed guards in the streets of Cernăuți with only what they could carry on those Sunday mornings when church bells announce the beginning of the mass. This Romanian population had to watch the heartbreaking scene of thousands of Jews crying and yelling with desperation during this pitiful march in the streets of the city.⁷¹

Aurel Socol, a top-ranking NPP member, "carried out dangerous activities to facilitate the passage of Jewish refugees through Romania. Socol, along with twelve Jewish refugees from Poland, was caught by the Hungarian authorities and taken to Budapest to the Gestapo prison at Svabhegy."⁷²

The leaders of the historical parties were also involved in saving the Jews. Iuliu Maniu and Constantin I. C. Bratianu repeatedly expressed their hope that Great Britain and the United States would eventually win the war, and the two leaders and their colleagues adopted a critical stance toward the antisemitic policies of the Antonescu regime. This position was consistent with the National Peasant Party and the National Liberal Party's hostile rejection of the Antonescu regime. Recently consulted archival sources show that Iuliu Maniu's intervention to Ion Antonescu in September 1942 was decisive in stopping the implementation of the deportation plan to send the Romanian Jews to the death camps in Poland. The Romanian Secret Intelligence Service closely monitored every move made by the leaders of these parties. A January 24, 1944, report of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers on the statements and interventions of political figures in favor of the deported Jews noted, "Two domestic political groups sought to and did act in favor of the deported Jews: the Liberals and the National Peasant Party leaders. The leaders and prominent personalities in these two groups, in concert or individually, intervened by means of memoranda and special hearings to stop completely the deportations of Jews to Transnistria or at least to slow their pace in certain areas or with respect to certain guilty persons."⁷³

⁷⁰ SRI Archives, fond Documentar, dos. 3.116, f. 83.

⁷¹ Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 5: pp. 278-287.

⁷² Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

⁷³ ANIC, fond Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Cabinet Collection, dos. 163, ff. 89-90.



A May 1943 Secret Intelligence Service report mentioned that on August 14, 1942, Iuliu Maniu was gathering “materials on the manner in which the deportations from Bessarabia and Bukovina had been carried out.” Maniu’s theory was that “deportations had been ordered by the Germans, agreed to by the Romanian government, and accelerated by a group of government officials with the aim of appropriating Jewish property; the overwhelming majority of Romanians reject such barbaric actions.”⁷⁴ Unfortunately, Iuliu Maniu did not intervene in 1941 to stop the massacre of the Jews. Along the same lines, NPP vice president Ion Mihalache stated on September 14, 1942, that the deportation of Jews was ordered “at the suggestion of foreign circles of power and influence,” and they were “alien to the humane traditions of our people.” Ghita Pop, general secretary of the NPP, declared on September 16, 1942, that his party opposed the deportation of the Jews, and other party leaders also protested based on the serious consequences that the deportations could have for Romania. In his turn, Dr. Nicolae Lupu, another NPP leader, declared on September 28, 1942, that he was deeply disturbed by the news of the deportation of the Jews and that he would protest against them in front of Antonescu.

An extensive report on the activities of the NPP and Iuliu Maniu, from September 1, 1940, to May 1943, mentioned that Maniu “was publicly known to have pleaded with Marshal Antonescu to stop the deportations; he demands that he not be told in which way. Only when the ambassadors of Turkey, Switzerland, and Sweden show him photos with the school buildings where Jews were rounded up does he reveal that he tried to convince Marshal Antonescu that such measures may have ‘deleterious consequences for our country.’”⁷⁵ In fact, new archival sources, which have become available only recently, clearly show that Maniu’s September 1942 intervention had a huge impact on Antonescu’s decision to cancel the deportation of the Jews from Romania to the extermination camps of Poland.

A comprehensive Secret Intelligence Service report, dated January 24, 1944, noted that on September 23, 1942, while in a board meeting at the Bank of Romania, Bratianu, leader of the National Liberal Party, stated that he had sent the Marshal a memorandum analyzing the situation of the Jews in Romania from humanitarian, economic, social, and foreign policy perspectives.⁷⁶

A note from Richter, written on October 30, 1942, confirms that Dr. Victor Gomoiu had informed the queen mother that a new group of Jews was to be sent to Transnistria:

The queen mother told the king that what was happening to the people in this country was awful, that she can no longer stand this, all the more so that her name and the king’s will be connected with the murders of the Jews and so she can expect to remain in history as the mother of ‘Michael the Terrible.’ She threatened the king in earnest that unless deportations stop immediately, she would leave the country. Therefore, the king called Prime Minister Mihai Antonescu, who called for a Crown Council meeting, during which it was decided that those arrested would be set free; moreover, as a consequence of the same initiative [of the queen mother], the

⁷⁴ Iuliu Maniu–Ion Antonescu. *Opinii și comentarii politice. 1940–1944*, p. 171.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ ANIC, fond Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Cabinet Collection, dos. 163/1940, f. 91. The report covers the period of September 1940–May 1943.



Presidency issued a communiqué that confirmed the Crown Council decision.⁷⁷

Another intelligence report mentions that a group of intellectuals (university professors, high school teachers, writers) sent a memorandum to the royal palace decrying the fact that many Jews deported from Bukovina and Bessarabia died of hunger, violence, and cold and argued that deportation “becomes, in fact, a methodical and steadfast method of extermination.”⁷⁸ The same memo emphasized, “it was only in occupied countries that could not defend themselves that the Jewish population, in fact only a part of it, was deported.” They went on to caution, “a country may also be regarded as an institution based on international treaties issued from the agreement of the Great Powers that decide the fate of the world,” and “we have to build a new unity despite the hardships of today.” The memo also asserted that for two years Romania had been at the forefront of those states persecuting the Jews...In the atmosphere of the most savage persecution, of incessant falsification of truth, through the cult of hatred and the exasperation of hostilities, we have turned the Jewish problem into the only state problem of Romania. In the internal order we promoted a sort of anarchic fanaticism, which opened the way to kill, rob, and oppress. We were and we are ourselves an oppressed nation. With what right can we complain about oppression by our brothers who remained outside the borders, when we are on our way to exterminating a minority whose rights to life were granted by the same treaties that guaranteed our national frontier? It is a duty inspired by concern for the future [that demands] we stop...the persecution of the Jews who are being led in an organized manner toward a national catastrophe. Long ago, we passed the limit allowed to a state of law and a state of human beings. We can wait until the Jewish problem is solved as a whole at the peace conference, which will decide the fate of all states. There the situation of the Jews from Romania will be decided, and there the fate of the Jews will be decided, as well.

Solidarity and Rescue Efforts of Clergymen and Diplomats

Rabbi Alexandru Safran wrote that the Orthodox Church leader, Bishop Balan, had asked Antonescu not to transfer authority over southern Transylvanian Jews to the Nazis.⁷⁹ Safran noted that after he told Balan about the plight of the Jews imprisoned in a building on Sfântul Ioan Nou Street in Bucharest, the bishop pleaded with Mihai Antonescu. As a result, the prime minister decided that they were to be set free.⁸⁰ In addition, according to Safran’s testimony, Patriarch Nicodim appealed to the government to cancel the order forcing Jews to wear the yellow star.⁸¹

Romanian diplomats also became involved in rescuing the Jews, beginning in 1943. The Romanian Legation in Budapest, headed by Eugen Filotti, issued numerous transit visas.⁸² The Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent instructions to its embassies in Berlin,

⁷⁷ *Martiriul evreilor din Romania. 1940–1944. Documente si marturii* (Bucharest: Hasefer, 1991), p. 224.

⁷⁸ Ion Serbanescu, ed., *Evreii din Romania intre anii 1940–1944*, (Bucharest: Hasefer, 1997), vol. 3, part 2: p. 461.

⁷⁹ Alexandru Safran, *op. cit.*, p. 99. His assertions are not confirmed by official documents.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁸² Radu Ioanid, *op. cit.*, p. 360.



Rome, and Athens to protect Jews of Romanian origin.⁸³ Constantin Tincu, representative of the Romanian Consulate in Budapest, participated in the rescue of “hundreds of persecuted Jews” who would have otherwise been sent to Auschwitz.⁸⁴

Mihai Marina, chief representative of the Romanian Consulate in Oradea, and a number of civil servants (Anghel Lupescu, Ion Romascan, Mihai Hotea, Mihai Mihai) actively helped Jews in northeastern Transylvania emigrate to Romania.⁸⁵ They would drive to ghettos, pick up Jews, and drive them across the border in the Romanian Consulate’s car. Sometimes, they also gave the rescued Jews some money. On the basis of a report received by Dr. Kupfet Miksa of the Oradea Ghetto as well as his own findings, Mihai Marina wrote a comprehensive report on what was happening to the Jews sent by train to Auschwitz. This report was transmitted to Vespasian V. Pella, the Romanian ambassador in Switzerland, upon Pella’s visit to Oradea. Pella took the report to the International Red Cross in Vienna. This report supported the mounting evidence on the fate of the Jews in the ghettos and in Auschwitz.

Dumitru Metta of the Romanian embassy in Vichy, France, acted on Mihai Antonescu’s request that Romanian Jews in France be spared. Over 4,000 Romanian Jews living in France were saved thanks to various Romanian diplomats, and several hundreds were repatriated via Nazi Germany.⁸⁶ Constantin Karadjea, head of the Romanian Consulate in Berlin and, for a short time, head of Consular Services of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, made remarkable efforts to rescue Romanian Jews in Germany and German-occupied countries. In his official reports, he often referred to the extermination of the Jews in Germany and German-occupied territories and the need to save the Romanian Jews who lived there.

The “Righteous Among Nations” in Post-Communist Public Discourse

Heavily ideologized and manipulated by communist rule, Romanian historiography also contributed to the political manipulation of research on Romania’s participation in the Holocaust.⁸⁷ The consequences of this distortion lasted beyond 1990. The excessive propagandistic concern for “Romania’s image abroad,” rather than sincere concern for exposing historical truths, also affected how the topic of Romanian rescuers was approached. For example, there was a unilateral focus on cases of ethnic Romanian rescuers, particularly those acting in Hungarian-occupied Northern Transylvania.⁸⁸ This approach rendered a twisted image of reality by publicly projecting a deceptive correlation between the number of rescuers in a specific region to the scope of atrocities in that region. This manipulation also obscured the atrocities in Romanian-controlled territory and the responsibility of Romanian perpetrators. More recently, however, a new generation of historians has emerged. It is

⁸³ Moshe Camilly-Weinberger, *op. cit.*, p. 176. For more details, see: *Emigrarea populatiei evreiesti din Romania in anii 1940-1944*, Document Collection from the Archive of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ed. Ion Calafeteanu, Nicolae Dinu and Teodor Gheorghe (Bucharest: Silex, 1993).

⁸⁴ Marius Mincu, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 108-109.

⁸⁶ Radu Ioanid, *op. cit.*, p. 367

⁸⁷ Victor Eskenasy, “The Holocaust and Romanian Historiography: Communist and Neo-Communist Revisionism,” in *The Tragedy of Romanian Jewry*, ed. Randolph L. Braham (New York, 1994), pp. 173-236.

⁸⁸ Braham, *Romanian Nationalists*, pp. 233-234; Michael Shafir, *Between Denial and “Comparative Trivialization”: Holocaust Negationism in Post-Communist East Central Europe* (Jerusalem: ACTA, 2002).



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legitimate to expect from them an adequate approach to the topic of the Holocaust in
Romania, in general, and of the topic of the Righteous among Nations, in particular.