

FINAL REPORT

of the

International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania

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THE ROLE OF ION ANTONESCU IN THE PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF ANTISEMITIC AND ANTI-ROMA POLICIES OF THE ROMANIAN STATE

Ion Antonescu's responsibility for the death of the Jews of Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transnistria is beyond debate. And yet, the survival of the Jews from Walachia, Moldavia, and southern Transylvania was due to his decision in fall 1942 to postpone indefinitely the deportation of Romanian Jews to Poland. During his trial in 1946, Antonescu asserted that "if the Jews of Romania are still alive, this is due to Ion Antonescu."¹ Additionally, others have cited his contact with Jews as a mitigating factor.²

But, in general, Ion Antonescu was dominated by his loathing of Jews and Judaism. He revealed this hatred at a session of the Council of Ministers on April 15, 1941: "I give the mob complete license to massacre [the Jews]. I will withdraw to my fortress, and after the slaughter, I will restore order."³ This was a rather accurate prediction of what was to take place in Iasi shortly thereafter. In numerous instances Antonescu personally instigated specific antisemitic steps adopted by the Romanian fascist state: on June 19, 1941, Antonescu ordered the closure of all "Jewish communist cafés" and the completion of lists—region by region—of all "*Jidani*, communist agents, and [communist] sympathizers"; the Ministry of the Interior was to "prevent them from circulating" and to prepare "to deal with them" when Antonescu gave the order;⁴ and as early as June 21, 1941, Ion Antonescu ordered that all able-bodied eighteen- to sixty-year-old Jewish men in the villages between the Siret and Prut Rivers be removed to the Tirgu Jiu Camp in Oltenia and to surrounding villages. Their families and all Jews in other Moldavian villages were evacuated to the nearest urban districts.⁵ During the Iasi pogrom, at 11:00 p.m. on June 28, 1941, Ion Antonescu telephoned Colonel Lupu, chief of the Iasi garrison, who reported to him about the situation in town. The head of state ordered the "evacuation of the Jewish population,

¹ *Procesul marii tradari*, (Bucharest: Eminescu, 1946), p. 71.

² For example, Aureliu Weiss, secretary to NPP leader Iuliu Maniu, wrote after the war, "An antisemite to the core...[Ion Antonescu] did, however, nurture relationships with Jews....One day, in my absence, on the veranda of the villa where I stayed in Prédéal, forgetting my wife's presence, he launched into an antisemitic diatribe against a humble [town] official who came to collect local taxes. At one point, realizing that my wife was present, he said, as if making an excuse: 'not all Jews are alike.'" Jean Ancel, ed., *Documents Concerning the Fate of Romanian Jewry during the Holocaust* (New York: Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1986), vol. 8: p. 608.

³ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum/Romanian Information (Intelligence) Service (henceforth: USHMM/SRI), RG 25.004M, roll 31, fond 40010, vol. 1; Problema evreiasca in stenogramele Consiliului de Ministrii, p. 229.

⁴ USHMM/SRI, RG 25.004M, roll 32, fond 40010, vol. 1; Carp, *Cartea Neagra: Suferintele evreilor din Romania. 1940-1944* (Bucharest: Atelierele grafice Socec, 1946-1948), vol. 2: p. 39.

⁵ Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 2: pp. 414-415.

group after group,” indicating that it was also “necessary” to include the women and children.⁶ On July 4, Antonescu asserted that “the Jewish people had embezzled and impoverished, speculated on and impeded the development of the Romanian people for several centuries; the need to free us from this plague is self-evident.”⁷ In spite of his propensity for pogroms, Antonescu criticized the private instigation of them; and on July 12, 1941, after the Iasi pogrom, he condemned the soldiers who had taken part.⁸ Despite this rebuke, however, he still asserted that the Jews were “the open wound of Romanianism” and “had robbed bread from the poor.”

For Ion Antonescu, the main enemy of his country was the Jew. On September 6, 1941, in a letter to Mihai Antonescu, he wrote, “Everybody should understand that this is not a struggle with the Slavs but one with the Jews. It is a fight to the death. Either we will win and the world will purify itself, or they will win and we will become their slaves....The war, in general, and the fight for Odessa, especially, have proven that Satan is the Jew.”⁹ Such was the justification, perhaps, for less ideologically and more materialistically motivated steps like Order no. 8507 of October 3, 1941 (formally promulgated by Colonel Davidescu, head of Antonescu’s military office), in which the Romanian dictator ordered the National Bank of Romania to “exchange”—i.e., confiscate—money and jewelry belonging to Jews about to be deported.¹⁰

Ion Antonescu was directly involved in his regime’s major repressive acts against the Jews. Unlike in Hitler’s case, there is a wealth of documentary evidence proving this direct involvement. In early October 1941, for example, Col. Gheorghe Petrescu of the Supreme General Staff and gendarmerie General Topor initiated the deportation of the Jews from Bukovina on Antonescu’s personal order. Petrescu declared in 1945 that they had received their orders from Radu Dinulescu of Section Two (Sectia II) of the Supreme General Staff;¹¹ this order—no. 6651 of October 4, 1941—also cited Marshal Antonescu’s decision to deport all Jews in Bukovina to Transnistria within ten days.¹² The governor of Bukovina, General Calotescu, also confirmed that Petrescu and Topor had only been fulfilling Antonescu’s instructions.¹³ Ion Antonescu did indeed state on October 6, 1941, in a meeting of the Council

⁶ USHMM/SRI, RG 25 004M, roll 48, fond 108233, vol. 29.

⁷ USHMM/SRI, RG 25.004M, roll 32, fond 40010, vol. 1.

⁸ Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 10: p. 79.

⁹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum/Romanian State Archives (henceforth: USHMM/RSA), RG 25.002M, roll 18, fond Presedentia Consiliului de Ministrii, cabinet, dos. 167/1941.

¹⁰ USHMM/SRI, RG 25.004M, roll 35, fond 40010, vol. 89.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, roll 35, fond 40010, vol. 5.

¹² *Ibid.*, roll 31, fond 40010, vol. 1.

¹³ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum/Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives (henceforth: USHMM/RFMA), RG 25.006M, roll 10, fond Presedentia Consiliului de Ministrii, vol. 20.

of Ministers: “I have decided to evacuate all of [the Jews] forever from these regions. I still have about 10,000 Jews in Bessarabia who will be sent beyond the Dniester within several days, and if circumstances permit, beyond the Urals.”¹⁴ On November 14 in another meeting of the Council of Ministers, Ion Antonescu stated: “I have enough difficulties with those Jidani that I sent to the Bug. How many died on their way is known only by me.”¹⁵ Participants at the same meeting heard the following situation reports from General Voiculescu, governor of Bessarabia: “The Jidani don’t exist anymore. There are 100 sick Jews in the ghetto at the crossing point for the deportees from Bukovina.”¹⁶

In the November 13, 1941, session of the Council of Ministers, Antonescu ordered that deported Jewish state retirees be denied their pensions. In the same session, Antonescu expressed a deep interest in the campaign against the Jews of Odessa, then underway:

Antonescu: Has the repression been sufficiently severe?

Alexianu: It has been, Marshal.

Antonescu: What do you mean by “sufficiently severe”?...

Alexianu: It was very severe, Marshal.

Antonescu: I said that for every dead Romanian, 200 Jews [should die] and that for every Romanian wounded 100 Jews [should die]. Did you [see to] that?

Alexianu: The Jews of Odessa were executed and hung in the streets....

Antonescu: Do it, because I am the one who answers for the country and to history. [If the Jews of America don’t like this] let them come and settle the score with me.¹⁷

During his trial, Ion Antonescu acknowledged his responsibility in the Odessa executions in the following way:

Public Prosecutor Saracu: Who signed the order to execute 200 people for every officer and 100 for every soldier?

¹⁴ Matatias Carp, *Cartea neagra*, vol. 3: p. 143.

¹⁵ USHMM/SRI, RG 25. 004M, fond 40010, vol. 78.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ USHMM/SRI, RG 25.004M, fond 40010, vol. 28; USHMM/SRI, roll 35, fond 40010, vol. 78.

Accused Ion Antonescu: I gave that order, because I also did it in Romania, and I promulgated many more repressive laws, as did all states during that period....We did not execute any Jews, we did not execute any youth; I did give the order for reprisals, but not for massacres.¹⁸

In fact, on October 24, 1941, General Macici, commander of the Second Army Corps (the Romanian military command in Odessa), received Telegram no. 563 from Colonel Davidescu, chief of the Military Cabinet, which stated that Marshal Antonescu had ordered further reprisals: “1) Execution of all Jews from Bessarabia who have sought refuge in Odessa; 2) All individuals who fall under the stipulations of [Telegram 562] of October 23, 1941, not yet executed and the others who can be added thereto [*sic*] will be placed inside a building that will be mined and detonated. This action will take place on the day of burial of the victims; 3) This order will be destroyed after being read.”¹⁹ On October 27, 1941, Colonel Davidescu asked if this order had been carried out, and the Fourth Army replied that it had indeed been executed (Telegram 3218).²⁰

At the December 4, 1941, meeting of the Council of Ministers, Antonescu indicated his frustration that the Jews of Chisinau had been deported before they could be plundered. Because of that oversight, the Jews were robbed by their escorts at the crossing points on the Dniester rather than by the state bank in the ghetto. This is what underlay Antonescu’s demand for a commission of inquiry rather than any outrage at the abuses suffered by the Jews. “Instead of eating the bread of the Romanian country, it is better that they eat the bread of that region.”²¹ Observing at the December 16, 1941, Council of Ministers’ meeting that even Nazi Germany was slow to act, Antonescu urged his lieutenants to hasten Romania’s solution to its “Jewish question”: “Put them in the catacombs, put them in the Black Sea. I don’t want to hear anything. It does not matter if 100 or 1,000 die, [for all I care] they can all die.”²² This order resulted in the deportation of the surviving Jews of Odessa to Berezovka and Golta.

One of the documents most revealing of Ion Antonescu’s antisemitic convictions is the letter he sent on October 29, 1942, to Liberal Party leader C.I.C. Bratianu shortly after

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁹ USHMM/MStM, RG 25.003M, roll 12(203) fond Armata a IVa, vol. 870.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum/Serviciul de Stat de Arhiva al Republicii Moldova (henceforth: USHMM/SSARM), RG 54.001M, roll 3, fond CBBT Bir. 3.

²² USHMM/SRI, RG 25.004M, roll 31, fond 40010, vol. 1.

canceling his decision to deport the Jews from southern Transylvania, Moldavia, and Walachia to occupied Poland. The letter is especially noteworthy because it does not actually deal directly with the “Jewish question”; nonetheless it conveys powerful xenophobic undercurrents in its frequent antisemitic discursions. Similar to pre-fascist Romanian antisemites of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well as Legionnaire and Nazi theoreticians, Antonescu was obsessed with the interference of foreign powers in the defense of minorities in Romania and boasted about having put an end to it: “The Romanian people are no longer subject to the servitude imposed by the Congress of Berlin in 1878, by the amendment of Article 7 of the Constitution [granting Jews citizenship], nor the [humiliation] imposed after the last war as concerns the minorities.”²³ In particular, Antonescu felt that as a result of Article 7, “the country has been Judaized, the Romanian economy compromised, just like our country’s purity.”²⁴

Like Legionnaire ideologues, Antonescu believed the general corruption of Romanian political life stemmed from “Judaic and Masonic” influences.²⁵ He cast himself as the savior of the Romanian nation after the proclamation of the National Legionary State.²⁶ Antonescu accused Iliu Maniu, leader of the National Peasant Party, and other political adversaries of being supported by “Jewish newspapers.”²⁷ He accused his predecessors of having been brought to power by “the occult, Masonic, and Judaic lobby.”²⁸ Antonescu faulted Bratianu, leader of the Liberal Party, for allegedly wavering in his nationalism: “You are a nationalist—at least it would seem so—and yet you side with the Jews and you protest, like Mr. Maniu, against the Romanianization measures I have just introduced.”²⁹ In Antonescu’s view, Germany had always been Romania’s ally, while “the Jew from London,” and “the British, the Americans, and the Jews who had dictated their terms for peace after the previous war,” were Romania’s outside enemies.³⁰ Its internal enemies were the “communists...Jidani, Hungarians, and Saxons,” who waited for the first signs of anarchy “to ignite trouble...to strike the final blow to our nation.”³¹

Ion Antonescu’s antisemitism had an obsessive quality. For example, on February 3, 1942, in a meeting of the Council of Ministers, he explained to members of the Romanian

²³ *23 August 1944, Documente* (Bucharest: Stiintifica si Enciclopedica, 1984), vol. 1: p. 429.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 437.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 433.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 436.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 422.

²⁸ *23 August 1944, Documente*, p. 424.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 442.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 426, 438.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 444.

government that the reason a Romanian peasant allowed a large quantity of nuts to rot was that he did not know how to peel them. According to Antonescu, the peasant lacked this knowledge because this “operation was done previously by the Kike. [The peasants] were giving away the nuts 5-6 years in advance and...no longer knew what the Kikes were doing with them. This is the stage our nation is in; here is where the Kikes (*jidanimea*) have brought it.”³² During two meetings of the Council of Ministers—on April 22, 1944, and on May 6, 1944—Ion Antonescu enounced the cliché of the “kikes with glasses who are spying for the enemy.”³³ For him, democracy itself was a pejorative term: “I fight to win the war, but it might be that it will be won by the democracies. And we know what democracy means: it means judeocracy.”³⁴

The Conducator’s attitude toward the Jews alternated between violent hatred and moments of feigned patriarchal generosity. During fall 1941, for example, Antonescu claimed before the Council of Ministers that he was “fighting to cleanse Bessarabia and Bukovina of Jidani and Slavs.”³⁵ But on September 8, 1941, Antonescu promised Wilhelm Filderman, head of the Federation of Jewish Communities (*Federatia Uniunilor de Comunitati Evreiesti*; FUCE), that he would rescind the order forcing Jews in Romania to wear the Star of David, allow Jews to emigrate to Spain or Portugal, and not deport the Jews of Moldavia and Walachia.³⁶ The next day Antonescu also asked the government to differentiate between “useful” and “useless” Jews, presumably to halt the persecution of at least some.³⁷ And yet, one month later in response to Filderman’s appeal for clemency toward the Jews of Bessarabia and Bukovina, Antonescu issued a violent reply accusing the Jews in those two regions of having been the enemies of the Romanian people and justifying their deportation to Transnistria.³⁸ Published in the press, Antonescu’s reply provided ammunition for a savage antisemitic campaign, which cited his so-called arguments about Jewish “acts of barbarism” in 1940 and 1941. Relevant in this respect is the following excerpt from a reply from the Conducator to Filderman, who had begged Antonescu to show the Jews mercy: “In response to the generous reception and treatment granted your Jews among us,” the leader wrote, they

³² Stenogramele Sedintelor Consiliului de Ministrii, Guvernarea Ion Antonescu, vol. 6, p. 19.

³³ *Evreii din Romania intre anii 1940-1944*, vol. 2, *Problema evreiasca in stenogramele Consiliului de Ministrii*, ed. Lya Benjamin, pp. 551, 557.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 511.

³⁵ USHMM/SRI, RG 25.004M, fond 40010, vol. 77.

³⁶ Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 3: pp. 130–32

³⁷ USHMM/SRI, RG 25.004M, fond 40010, vol. 1.

³⁸ Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 3: pp. 258–62, 378–81.

“have become Soviet commissars,” who urged the Soviet troops in the Odessa region into senseless resistance “for the sole purpose of making us suffer losses.”³⁹

On December 3, 1941, Dr. Nicolae Lupu, a National Peasant Party leader who was sympathetic to the Jews, sent Antonescu three memoranda concerning, respectively, the judicial inquiry on Filderman, the repatriation of the Dorohoi deportees, and the repatriation of the deportees from Bessarabia and Bukovina. Antonescu refused to intervene on behalf of Filderman, claiming that he could not stop the course of justice. But, he promised to issue instructions to repatriate the deportees from Bessarabia and Bukovina, provided that the Federation of Jewish Communities guarantee that the peasants would not kill them.⁴⁰

Ion Antonescu was well aware of the mass murders committed by the SS in Transnistria. According to a report from the Supreme General Staff of the Romanian Army to Antonescu in March 1942, German policemen subjected the Jewish population of the county of Berezovka to mass executions:

I. 1.) In the county of Berezovka (Transnistria), German policemen executed 4,067 [*sic*] Jews who had been interned in that county’s camps; specifically: 1,725 Jews on March 10; 1,742 Jews on April 20; 550 Jews on April 22; 30 Jews on April 24. 2.) Following the executions, the German police burned the corpses, and donated the clothes to the German population without having disinfected them, which caused cases of typhoid in one particular town.

II. The Supreme General Staff wishes to find out if the German policemen can conduct such undertakings under Romanian administration.⁴¹

Marshal Antonescu wrote in response, “it is not the responsibility of the General Staff of the Army to worry about such things.”⁴²

Ion Antonescu was also directly responsible for or complicit in even the pettiest decisions on the persecution of the Jews. It was he who signed the April 1942 order

³⁹ Carp, *Cartea neagra*, vol. 3: p. 184, plate VII; Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 3: p. 286.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 425.

⁴¹ Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 10: p. 193.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 193

(462/CBBT), to deport the remaining 425 Jews of Bessarabia to Transnistria.⁴³ It was his decision to carry out the second deportation of Jews from Bukovina, formally enacted on May 28, 1942.⁴⁴ On August 31, 1942, Antonescu reviewed some late-1941 statistics indicating the presence of 375,422 Jews in Romania—2.2 percent of the population; on his copy he wrote, “a very large number.” Where the text reported a remaining 6,900 Jews (3.4 percent of the 1930 number) in Bessarabia, Antonescu wrote: “Impossible! My order was to have all the Jews deported.” When he saw the figure of 60,708 Jews in Bukovina at the time (1941), Antonescu noted: “Impossible. Please verify. My order stated that only 10,000 Jews should remain in Bukovina. Please check. This is fantastic! Judaized cities, simply, purely Judaized.”⁴⁵ (The figures for Cernauti, Dorohoi, Botosani, Iasi, and Bacau, had indeed risen by anywhere from 26 percent to 58 percent, but this was because of Antonescu’s decision to move the Jews from rural areas to the towns.) Antonescu resolved to publicize this information “to show Romania to what extent its economic life has been compromised, threatened...owing to felonious Judaic and Masonic politicking.” The Conductor swore, “If my legacy to the heirs of this regime reflects the same situation, I will have made this regime an accomplice to a crime,” and promised that “in order to purify the nation...I will flatten all those who [attempt] to prevent me from carrying out the wish of the absolute majority.”⁴⁶

On October 12, 1942, Antonescu reassured the *Centrala Evreilor* (Jewish Center) of his openness to moderation: “the better the Jews behave, the better they will be treated.” He was even big enough to acknowledge the good Jews who had “paid dearly for the mistakes of some of their own, [and that those] bastards [were] comparable only to some of our own bastards.” Fully aware of the corruption of the Romanian bureaucracy in charge of the “Jewish question,” Antonescu even promised that if Jews helped him to identify Romanians who had blackmailed them, “they can rest assured, I will not spare them.” But, he warned, neither would he spare the Jews who were “guilty.”⁴⁷ During that same autumn in 1942, Ion Antonescu made the crucial decision to postpone the implementation of the Romanian-German plan to deport all the Jews from the Regat and southern Transylvania to Belzec. This planned deportation was never carried out, and consequently, at least 290,000 Romanian Jews survived the war.

⁴³ Ibid., roll 25, fond 20725, vol. 10.

⁴⁴ Ibid., roll 34, fond 40010, vol. 75.

⁴⁵ Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 10: pp. 214–15.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 215.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 215.

Nonetheless, Ion Antonescu's vacillations concerning the Jews continued during 1943. On one hand, he still declared that he tolerated the Jews, who might deserve partial protection by the Romanian state; on the other, he demanded that his subordinates display stern behavior toward the Jews. In a letter written on February 6 to his personal architect, Herman Clejan, Antonescu stated that the Jews "displayed only hostility and bad faith toward the Romanian state," which was "only defending and continuing to defend itself against the Jews' perfidy."⁴⁸ Antonescu nevertheless decided that Jews who had settled in Romania before 1914 and who had "participated sincerely...in the interests of the Romanian state" should enjoy the opportunities that existed there, though "based on the criteria of proportionality."⁴⁹ Antonescu also promised to protect Jews who had "served the country on the battlefield or in other areas of public life."⁵⁰ However, according to Antonescu, Jews who had come to Romania after 1914 (those from Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina, and beyond the Dniester) were corrupt and had employed criminal methods, such as embezzling from the state treasury, to acquire wealth; he asserted that they were a subversive and negative influence on Romanian society. Thus, these Jews were to be "struck without pity and kicked out of the country. They do not have the right to seek humanitarian sympathy because humanitarianism would mean weakness [on our part]. After having repaid with hostility and crimes the limitless tolerance they have enjoyed in Romania, where their prosperity defied even their own dreams, these Jews no longer have any right to human understanding. They [should] receive only their just deserts for their misdeeds....All those who support them, will suffer the same fate."⁵¹

But on April 30, 1943, Filderman argued again on behalf of Jews in Romania, contrasting their situation to the tolerance enjoyed by those in Finland. This seems to have made an impression on Antonescu, who told General Vasiliu: "if that is the case in Finland, let's leave [the Jews of the Regat] alone...."⁵² Six months later, on October 30, Ion Antonescu declared that he was "happy" with the results obtained in Romanianizing (i.e., Aryanizing) trade in Moldavia: "all trade in Moldavia, Dorohoi, right up to Focsani must be Romanianized in a civilized fashion."⁵³

Documents originating from the military office of Ion Antonescu show that in 1943, high-ranking members of his administration frequently informed him about the fate of Jewish

⁴⁸ Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 3: p. 522.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 522

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 523.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 523

⁵² Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 4: p. 544.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 667.

and Roma deportees in Transnistria. For example, a May 20 report emphasized the terrible conditions of the Jews interned in Mostovoi (“dirty, without clothes, very thin”) and the fact that the Roma from Berezovka kept their dead in their houses in order to receive their food allowance.⁵⁴ Several more such reports moved Antonescu to decide on June 3, 1943, to decrease the number of inmates in the Bersad ghetto (from 8,061 internees), to reorganize the Vapniarka concentration camp, to relocate the Roma outside the villages where they could cultivate land, and to improve the general sanitary conditions in the camps and ghettos.⁵⁵

Ion Antonescu was also directly responsible for both the death and the survival of the Romanian Jews who lived in occupied Europe under German jurisdiction. On August 8, 1942, in Bucharest, Steltzer, the German Legation counselor, informed Gheorghe Davidescu of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that Ion Antonescu “had agreed with Ambassador Killinger that Romanian citizens of Jewish ancestry in Germany and the occupied territories should be treated in the same fashion as German Jews.”⁵⁶ As early as November 1941, Killinger told the *Auswärtiges Amt* (Foreign Office), that Antonescu had approved the intention of the Reich to deport Romanian Jews under German jurisdiction to eastern ghettos together with German Jews; the Romanian government “had stated no interest in bringing Romanian Jews back to Romania.”⁵⁷ Therefore, on August 21, 1942, Gheorghe Davidescu telegraphed (no. 5120) the Romanian Legation in Berlin to inform them that earlier orders concerning the protection of Romanian Jews abroad were being revoked as a consequence of the agreement between Marshal Antonescu and Ambassador Killinger. Romanian diplomats were henceforth forbidden to protest German measures against Romanian citizens of Jewish ancestry, and their only concern was to be the recovery of Jewish assets.⁵⁸ The conversation between Antonescu and Killinger in which Antonescu agreed to hand over Romanian Jews living in Nazi-occupied Europe to the Germans, had actually taken place sometime before July 23, 1942, when a ciphered telegram from the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs first mentioned it; it was not, however, immediately translated into policy.⁵⁹

As a direct result of this decision, 1,600 Romanian Jews from Germany and Austria, 3,000 from France, and an unknown number from Poland, Bohemia-Moravia, and Holland

⁵⁴ USHMM/RSA, RG 25.002M, fond Presedentia Consiliului de Ministrii, cabinet Militar, folder 205.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ion Calafeteanu, “Regimul cetatenilor romani de origine evreiasca aflati in strainatate in anii dictaturii antonesciene,” *Anale de Istorie* 5 (1986): p. 132.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Calafeteanu, “Regimul,” p. 312; USHMM/RFMA, RG 25.006M, roll 17, fond Germania, vol. 32.

⁵⁹ USHMM/RFMA, RG 25.006M, roll 17, fond Germania, vol. 32.

perished in German concentration camps. During spring 1943, the Romanian government reversed its decision, and over roughly 4,000 Romanian Jews living in France survived the war. Ion Antonescu even approved the repatriation of some of these Jews; in fact, although the repatriated Jews were slated for deportation to Transnistria, Ion Antonescu consented to their staying in Romania.⁶⁰ He formally committed to this on July 20, 1943.⁶¹

In a speech to Romanian soldiers on January 1, 1944, Ion Antonescu struck a new tone, basically denying the antisemitic atrocities of his regime:

[Y]our deeds in the occupied lands and wherever you have been, have been marked by humanity....Man to us is a human being regardless of the nation he belongs to and the evil that he may have caused. All those whom we have encountered on our journey, we have helped and protected as no one else would. The children have been cared for like our own; the old people as if they were our own....We have deported no one, and you have never driven the dagger into the chest of anyone. In our jails there are no innocent people. The religious beliefs of all and everyone's political creeds have been respected. We have not uprooted their communities...or families for our own political or national interests.⁶²

But in a private letter to Clejan, dated February 4, 1944, Antonescu demonstrated again how virulent his antisemitic tendencies still were. He justified anew the deportations, regretting only that they had not removed all Jews from the regions that had been cleansed. He acknowledged that he had refused to repatriate the surviving Jews of Transnistria—the “enemies” of the Romanian nation—but at the same time, he would not tolerate their abuse:

Mr. Clejan, concerning your letter about the fate of the Jews in Transnistria and those of the Bug, and the compulsory labor exemption fees, allow me to broach anew some issues that relate to the Jewish question in Romania in terms of reality, the results of war, and the events that preceded it.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ USHMM/RFMA, RG 25.006M, roll 16, fond Germania, vol. 30.

⁶² Ansel, *Documents*, vol. 4: p. 712.

As I have told you in person, I was forced to [plan the deportation of] the Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovina because of their terrible behavior during the Russian occupation; the population was so angry at them, that the most horrible pogroms would have otherwise occurred. Even though I decided to evacuate all the Jews...various intercessions and initiatives prevented it. I regret today that I did not do it because...the largest number of this country's enemies is recruited among the Jews who remained there. There is no terrorist or communist organization that does not have Jews in it, and often they are made up exclusively of Jews...Under these circumstances, it is morally and politically inconceivable...to return the Jews from Transnistria....But, I will give the order to allow them to stay away from the front line and to settle them in southern Transnistria where the Jewish community, with help from abroad, can [help] them leave the country. Among those [already] repatriated were those who had been mistakenly deported, 7,000 Jews from Dorohoi, and 4,500 orphaned children...As a man with a European outlook, I have never tolerated...crimes against persons [and] will continue to take measures [so that they] will not happen to the Jews.⁶³

On April 22, 1944, during a Council of Ministers session, Antonescu reconsidered repatriation from Transnistria—if, perhaps, returnees were restricted to specific towns or confined to ghettos; ultimately, however, he rejected any full repatriation to Romania:

It would be a solution to transfer them...to certain towns, if they return in large numbers. To settle them, as in Buhusi, in one or two towns, to resettle all the Romanians and allow the Jews to live together. All we would have to do is to send them supplies...They will work for each other, sew, do carpentry, etc. That is one solution. Another solution is to bring them together into ghettos inside each city. We tell them: "This is where you will

⁶³ Carp, *Cartea neagra*, vol. 3: pp. 458–59; Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 8: p. 19; OSS Report no. 19533, May 22, 1944, National Archives and Records Administration (henceforth: NARA).

live; do not leave. We will bring you food, do what you wish; we will not kill you, we will not harm you.” The third solution is to bring them back to Romania. This is the most dangerous one...for the Romanian people. I cannot order their return...people would stone me to death.⁶⁴

Questioned after the war, Ion Antonescu confessed that the original 1942 decision to deport the Roma had also been his. He sought to justify himself by citing “popular” demand for protection from armed robbers who entered people’s homes at night: “After much investigation, we concluded that these were armed Roma, many with military weapons, organizing these attacks. All the Roma were moved out. Since Mr. Alexianu needed manpower in Transnistria, I said: ‘Let’s move them to Transnistria; that is my decision.’”⁶⁵

At his trial, Ion Antonescu accepted responsibility for mistakes and distortions of his orders by subordinates, though not for the violent crimes and plundering some had perpetrated.⁶⁶ While acknowledging that “bloody repression”⁶⁷ had occurred under the aegis of Romania during the war, Ion Antonescu falsely declared that there had been no massacres under his authority: “I passed many repressive laws, [but] we did not execute a single Jew....I gave orders for reprisals, not for perpetrating massacres.”⁶⁸

At the beginning of the war, Antonescu—a harsh and often violent antisemite—believed that he would be able to resolve once and for all “the Jewish question” and that of the other minorities (Ukrainians, in particular). But a comparison to Hitler, whom he admired and who admired him, shows him in a different light. Until September 1941, Antonescu received Filderman, the leader of the Jewish community, which would have been inconceivable in Germany; Hitler would have never entertained a direct or indirect dialogue with the leader of the German Jewish community. At the end of 1942 and in close connection with the reversals on the Eastern front, Antonescu tolerated—encouraged, even—contacts with the Allies through neutral countries (in Lisbon, Stockholm, Ankara, and Cairo), which suggests that he had come to a more realistic assessment of the overall chances of winning the war. After the end of 1942, he imagined, like many other Romanian politicians, that the

⁶⁴ Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 10: p. 422.

⁶⁵ *Procesul marii tradari*, p. 108.

⁶⁶ Ancel, *Documents*, vol. 8: p. 486

⁶⁷ *Procesul marii tradari*, p. 51.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 54

Romanian Jews could be used as bargaining chips to improve Romania's image in the United States and England.

But this does not mean that the decision not to deport the Jews from southern Transylvania, Moldavia, and Walachia to Nazi camps in occupied Poland was strictly opportunistic. In all likelihood, various appeals—including those from Archbishop Balan, the Romanian royal family, and the diplomatic corps—played a significant role. Nonetheless, after Stalingrad, Antonescu did grow more concerned about Romania's image abroad. Reports from the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which asserted that Romanian Jews under Nazi occupation were treated worse than Hungarian Jews, annoyed Antonescu. His position of relative equality with Hitler had commanded the respect of Nazi dignitaries and the German Embassy. At a certain point even Himmler—having lost all hope of collaboration in the destruction of Romania's Jews—gave up and intended in 1943 to order the withdrawal of his killer-bureaucrats (e.g., Gustav Richter) from Romania.

Even though he shared many ideas with the Legionnaires, Ion Antonescu was not an adventurer in the economic arena. Politically, he placed himself between Goga and Codreanu: he nurtured an obsession for a Romania purged of the minorities that represented a “danger” to the state, especially in the territories reattached to Romania after the First World War. Antonescu's antisemitism was economic, political, social, and sometimes religious, but it did not share the mystical aspects of Legionary antisemitism. His hatred was not that of a hoodlum armed with a truncheon, but that of a bureaucrat pretending to resolve a problem in a legal and systematic manner. The fate of the Jews might have been different had the Legionary government lasted longer, if for no other reason than that the Legionnaires would have certainly been more closely aligned with Germany.

Ion Antonescu was responsible not only for the devastation of Romanian Jews and Roma, but also for many of the tragic losses endured by the Romanian nation during World War II. As an Axis state and committed ally of Nazi Germany, Romania closely coordinated military matters with the Germans. For example, in June 1941 Hitler appointed General Eugen von Schobert of the German Eleventh Army to command the southern flank on the Eastern front. However, although Schobert was in command, Hitler recognized Antonescu's importance and mandated that the Conducator co-sign all of Schobert's orders.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ For Romanian-German headquarter's reports, see: Arhivele Nationale Istorice Centrale, fond Presedintia Consiliului de Ministri, Cabinet militar Ion Antonescu, dos. 126/1941, f. 3-5; 319/194, f. 28-29; 42-44; Andreas Hillgruber, *Staatsmänner und Diplomaten bei Hitler Vertrauliche Aufzeichnungen über die Unterredungen mit Vertretern des Auslandes. 1939-1941* (Deutscher Taschenhuchverlag, 1969), pp. 276-291; *DGFP*, series D, vol. 7, February, 1941, June, 1941, document no. 644.

While Antonescu's war in the East has frequently been construed merely as an attempt to regain Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina or as leverage to persuade Hitler to return Northern Transylvania to Romania, Antonescu had higher aspirations "in which—not feeling at all inferior to Hitler and Mussolini—he imagined a Dacian empire from the Balkans to the Dnieper. [Moreover], his collaboration with the military plans of the Axis was not limited to the offensive against the Soviet Union."⁷⁰ Ion Antonescu declared war on the United States on December 16, 1941. He was also at war with Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Nicaragua, and Haiti. Furthermore, he allowed German divisions to pass through Romania in their advance to attack Greece, and he permitted Germany to use Romanian territory as a launching pad for its attacks against Yugoslavia.⁷¹

As Antonescu himself declared in writing, he was at war with the Jews. By implementing the systematic deportation of the Jewish population from within Romania and occupied Ukraine, Ion Antonescu and his lieutenants became the architects of untold suffering for hundreds of thousands of innocent victims, and the death of more than a quarter of a million of them. Thus, in addition to waging war against a traditional, military enemy, from 1941 to 1944 Antonescu also targeted civilians—with the persecution ranging from plunder to murder.⁷² Ion Antonescu and his accomplices do not bear sole responsibility for this tragedy, however; in addition to the Nazi regime, "part of the Romanian political class is [also] responsible for his rise to power, due to its weakness or selfishness."⁷³

In extreme nationalist circles today, an attempt is underway to restore Antonescu to a place of honor in Romanian history as a great patriot. But whether he loved his country is irrelevant: Antonescu was a war criminal in the purest definition of the phrase. His leadership involved the Romanian government in crimes against humanity unrivaled in Romania's sometimes glorious, sometimes cruel history; perhaps more ironically, this leader's war against a defenseless and innocent civilian population was only part of the broader folly of involving the country in a conflict that promised only illusory gains, but actually wrought very definite, catastrophic consequences. A modern Romanian patriotism must not only reject the legacy of five decades of communist misrule, but years of fascist tyranny, too, if it is to be able to recount and take honest pride in Romania's history.

⁷⁰ Andrei Pippidi, *Despre statui si morminte* (Bucharest, 2003), p. 240.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., pp. 240-241.

⁷³ Ibid.