

Romanian Memory of the Persecution of Roma

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The deportation of the Roma to Transnistria was an element of the internal policy of Marshal Ion Antonescu's regime in Romania during World War II. Purportedly motivated by the authorities' concern for public order, the deportation of 25,000 to 26,000 Roma into the Soviet territory between the Dniester and the Bug, while the area was occupied by the Romanian army, was in effect a racist measure. At the same time, the deportation was related to the policy of ethnic cleansing being considered by the Antonescu government. Even if the anti-Roma measures targeted only some of this population, the deportation to Transnistria was in some respects similar to the anti-Roma policy applied in Germany and her satellite states at the same time. The studies on this topic, albeit few in number and virtually all of them published in recent years,¹ clarify the anti-Roma policy in Romania during the Antonescu regime.

The Attitude of the Population Towards the Deportation of the Roma (1942–1944)

One should begin by wondering how contemporaries viewed the deportation of the Roma to Transnistria. These deportations were widely known at the time, since the Roma were picked up in rather large numbers from all regions of the country. Also, the Romanian public, even under Ion Antonescu's dictatorial regime, still enjoyed a measure of freedom of expression. The archives house documents reflecting Romanians' opinion on the deportation of Roma. Politicians and scholars, as well as ordinary citizens, expressed their disagreement with the anti-Roma measures of the authorities, stating their views in letters, memoranda, and other communications addressed to Ion Antonescu, to the King, to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and to other government entities.

The leaderships of the two democratic parties, the National Liberal Party and the National Peasants Party, were among those who protested against the deportation of the Roma. In a letter addressed to Ion Antonescu on 16 September 1942, Constantin I. C. Brătianu, president of the National Liberal Party, wrote that the deportation of the Roma was setting the country back several centuries. He asked Antonescu, "What is the use of such cruelty? What is the guilt of these wretched people? What benefit will their expulsion bring us? Is the Romanian land, especially after the present war,

overpopulated, and does it abound in skilled craftsmen, so that the sacrificing of a large part of its citizens can be called for?" The Liberal leader also played on Ion Antonescu's feelings, seeing that the latter was concerned at the time with the fate of the Romanians living outside the borders of the country, and added: "Think what will happen in Russia once rebuilt, who would follow our example and deport the Romanians of Transnistria to Turkestan or to northern Siberia and who would send back to Romania the thousands of Romanian citizens deported during the present regime."² The foremost leaders of the National Peasants Party, including their president, Iuliu Maniu, expressed their solidarity with the protest voiced by the Liberal leader.³ The prominent musician George Enescu interceded with Ion Antonescu on behalf of the Roma musicians, stating that he would go with them should they be deported.⁴ The management of some companies, for fear that the deportations would also extend to other Roma categories, interceded on behalf of their employees of Roma origin. The management of the CFR (Romanian Railways Company) workshop in Bucharest requested that its workers of Roma origin not be evacuated.⁵

As for the attitude of average citizens towards the deportation of the Roma, villagers' protests are quite revealing. There are numerous letters and memoranda, bearing dozens of signatures, at times written in the name of all the inhabitants of a village, either requesting that the Roma be brought back to their native village or that the Roma not be deported from the villages in question. Village elders interceded for their Roma neighbors. The latter are pictured as being part of the village; they are described as honest, hardworking citizens, important to the community, especially for their skills as craftsmen.⁶ All the above indicate that the anti-Roma measures had little widespread popular support.

However, such manifestations concerned exclusively the sedentary or settled Roma. The nomadic Roma did not receive the same support. No reference to them is made in the above-mentioned statements. The requests from various Roma for repatriation or that deportation not be inflicted reveal an awareness of the stigma attached to nomadic Roma. These Roma state in their requests that they are not nomads or vagrants, that they have a stable home and are engaged in a useful activity, and decry the fact that the treatment inflicted on nomadic Roma is now being applied to them. Gheorghe Niculescu himself, president of the General Union of the Roma of Romania (UGRR), requested in September 1942 that "the measures of arresting the Roma in view of their deportation to Transnistria should not apply to the native [i.e.,

sedentary—V.A.] Roma, that is to those who have a stable situation and who carry out various trades, but only to the nomadic Roma.”⁷

Given all the above elements, I believe it reasonable to assert that the authorities’ anti-Roma measures did not enjoy much support among the Romanian public. Undoubtedly, there is an explanation for this popular attitude towards the Roma. It resides in the good relations between the majority of the population and the Roma. In interwar Romania, the Roma were not a problem, either ethically or socially, and neither were they widely perceived as being one.⁸ The turning of the Roma into a “problem” was entirely the doing of the Antonescu regime. The adopting of a special policy towards the Roma did not have its roots in the past, but rather in the nature of the Antonescu regime. Moreover, neither before nor during the war was there in Romania an anti-Gypsy propaganda—comparable with the anti-Jewish one—that could have influenced the behavior of the population.

Under these circumstances, the deportation of the Roma to Transnistria took the Romanian public by surprise. In 1942, the overwhelming majority of the Romanian society found it hard to understand why the Roma should have been perceived as a problem that required such radical measures. The General Staff were also taken aback by the deportation of the Roma. They expressed their surprise that soldiers of Roma origin, fighting for their motherland, should be rewarded in such a curious way, with their families being evicted from their homes and deported. The Army requested an explanation and reparations.⁹ The military units in Romania showed their concern for the families of Roma soldiers, who were given leave to return to their homes to inquire about the situation of their families.

The Insignificance Accorded to the Deportation of the Roma in the Postwar (1944–1948) Discussion of the Antonescu Regime

After the Transnistrian episode, the Roma survivors’ return to Romania in the summer of 1944, and the 23 August 1944 change of regime, the “Gypsy problem” ceased to exist in the eyes of the Romanian authorities. The reinstatement of the survivors was made without much noise. There were no complicated problems related to property, since the property confiscated from some of the Roma in 1942 consisted of houses and very modest households that, even if taken over by the National Center for Romanization, had not been sold.

In the eyes of the new authorities, the Roma became what they had been in the

period before the Antonescu regime: a marginal social category rather than an ethnic minority. The authorities resumed their old preoccupations with controlling nomadism and persuading certain Roma groups to take up useful occupations. The State Sub-Secretariat of the Police issued the order ending persecutions on 13 September 1944. The order required that all Roma who had returned from Transnistria be allowed “to carry on with their trades, *and that measures should be taken to orient them towards various activities* [emphasis mine].”¹⁰ The old restrictions in regard to nomadic Roma were reintroduced.

The interest of the authorities and the public in the fate of the Roma and of the Transnistrian survivors faded away. It is nonetheless true that there was a time when the topic of the deportation of the Roma was taken up, namely at the 1945–1946 trials of the war criminals. However, the fate of the Roma during the Antonescu regime appeared to be of marginal importance. In 1945, at the trial of the first group of war criminals, when thirty-eight individuals were tried, only one page of the material published at the time¹¹ refers to the Roma, namely a passage in the Prosecution’s charge against Col. Modest Isopescu, former prefect of Golta County. It is a brief presentation of the declarations by two witnesses concerning the Prefect administration’s seizure of horses and wagons belonging to deported Roma; the seized property was turned over to some kolkhoz and farms. The remaining document (115 pages) pertains to the crimes committed against the Jews in Transnistria.

At the May 1946 trial of Ion Antonescu and his main collaborators the situation was not much different. The deportation of the Roma was one of the counts of indictment against Antonescu. However, it was not dwelled on much. Among the more than 100 volumes in the file none is mainly concerned with the problem of the Roma. Only in one volume are there, among others, documents concerning the Roma deported to Transnistria.¹² In *Procesul marii trădări naționale: stenograma debaterilor de la Tribunalul Poporului asupra Guvernului Antonescu* [The Trial of the Great National Betrayal: Stenography of the Debates at the People’s Court concerning the Antonescu Government], published in 1946 and synthesizing the Court’s works in 315 pages, the Roma are mentioned on only four occasions: in the bill of indictment (p. 42), in the Public Prosecutor’s charge (p. 305), in the cross-examination of Ion Antonescu (pp. 65–6), and in the cross-examination of Gen. Constantin Vasiliu, former Secretary of State at the Ministry of Internal Affairs (pp. 104, 108). The bill of indictment briefly mentions that “thousands of wretched families were evicted from their shanties and

hovels, and relocated across the Dniester. Tens of thousands of men, women, and children perished by starvation, cold weather and disease.” (p. 42) The Prosecution speaks of 26,000 deported Roma (p. 305), and General Vasiliu of 24,000 (p. 108). Under cross-examination, Ion Antonescu justifies the deportation of the Roma by reasons of public order: The Roma, he explained, have been deported as a result of the looting and murders committed in Bucharest and in other towns during curfew (pp. 65–6). The same idea appears in the memorandum sent by Antonescu to the People’s Court on 15 May 1946.¹³ The press, who covered the evolution of the trial at length, did not dwell on these details. *Scânteia*, the Communist Party newspaper, reported about the Roma only in reference to defendant Vasiliu, when reproducing the charge of the Public Prosecutor¹⁴.

In the immediate postwar discussion concerning the Antonescu regime, the Marshal’s policy towards the Roma was not given much weight. When the subject of the deportations to Transnistria is taken up, it refers almost exclusively to the deportation of the Jews. Discussions about the Roma and the members of some religious sects, who suffered almost the same fate as the Jews, are extremely rare. No mention about the Roma is to be found in the documents of the Communist Party, or those of other parties, which list the crimes of the Antonescu regime. Even Romanian Jewish organizations’ published documents dealing with the Transnistrian episode barely mention the Roma.¹⁵

The fate of the Roma survivors from Transnistria seems to have concerned almost no one. The programs of the political parties overlooked this category of citizens. In January 1945, Ion Hudiță, Minister of Agriculture and Estates, proposed to Prime Minister General Nicolae Rădescu that “pensions be granted by the State to all the Jewish families who lost one or several members to the Hitlerian and Legionary massacres.”¹⁶ However, he makes no reference to the Roma who were in a nearly similar situation. No measures by the central or local authorities supporting the formerly deported Roma are known to have been implemented.

Obviously, the deported Roma did not count among the major problems inherited from the Antonescu regime and the war. The Roma who had lived through the Transnistrian experience were not accorded the same consideration as the masses of other Romanian citizens who suffered from such measures. I mean here not only the Jews, but also the hundreds of thousands of refugees from Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, who fled the Soviet Army and poured into Romania beginning in 1944.

Among the numerous problems facing Romanian society and the Romanian state after the war, the Roma were not deemed either a social or ethnic priority by the Romanian authorities and the general public. The political parties of the time—the Communist Party as well as all the other left-wing parties—were mainly concerned with social problems. In party documents on such problems no reference is made to the Roma, neither to Roma having suffered deportation to Transnistria, nor to Roma in general. And neither were the Roma a topic of the discussions and debates on national minorities in Romania. The fact is that the Roma were not considered a national minority: either before or after the war. The measures adopted by the Government, beginning in 1945 targeting national minorities and their rights, simply by-passed the Roma.

Support of Roma survivors of Transnistria came from Roma leaders. In early 1945, the General Union of the Roma of Romania (UGRR)—an organization founded in 1934 and that functioned until World War II—announced that it would resume its activity under the leadership of the old committee presided over by Gheorghe Niculescu. The document states “The Central Committee’s major objective is to offer material and moral support to all the Roma, especially to those who were deported to Transnistria. In addition, one of the items in the program for the future activity of this association is the granting of land to the Roma, especially to those having served in the Army.”¹⁷ The association actually resumed its activity only on 15 August 1947. However, it seems that the activities carried out after this date—such as that recorded in a report of 7 April 1948 by the *Siguranța*¹⁸—did not focus on the formerly deported. Of greater interest to the Roma, in the sense that it could help a larger number of individuals, was land reform for the soldiers in the war.

The situation could have been different if, after 1944, the Roma had managed to organize themselves better. There were a few initiatives in this direction. One of the most active Roma in these endeavors was Grigore Nucu of Timișoara. He had been the one who, in October 1942, in his position as an “inspector” of the Roma, had addressed a memorandum to Ion Antonescu concerning the deportation of the Roma.¹⁹ The postwar organization of the Roma proved to be a tedious process. The Romanian authorities, with no real interest in encouraging this particular group may well have hindered the slow pace of organization. In 1948, when Romania became a “People’s Republic,” the Roma failed to gain the status of “co-inhabiting nationality.” The UGRR was dissolved on 20 January 1949, in consequence of a Council of Ministers decision

relating to incorporated cultural associations.²⁰ In February 1949, during an audience with Prime Minister Petru Groza, the foremost Roma leaders proposed that the UGRR should be replaced by a “Popular Union of the Roma of Romania,” along the lines of the organizations of some recognized ethnic minorities. The goals of this new association did not include dealing with the Transnistrian episode. The *Securitate* report on this project states “The Popular Union of the Roma can be useful in heightening the cultural level of the Roma and eradicating begging and looting by some of the Roma, as well as leading them on a democratic path.”²¹ The proposed new organization never came to fruition.

Quite significant as to the lack of interest in the Roma in the years immediately after the war is the fact that the book of Ion Chelcea, *Țigani din România: Monografie etnografică* [The Gypsies in Romania: Ethnographical Monograph] (Bucharest: Institutul Central de Statistică, 1944) escaped censorship. This remarkable ethnographic book nevertheless bears the imprint of the Antonescu period. It contains racist ideas, taken over from Nazi “science” and practice concerning the Roma; the idea of deporting the Roma to Transnistria, or even across the Bug, or their “colonization” in some remote part of Romania appears here (pp. 100–1). Chelcea’s book is not listed among the books under interdiction by the Commission for application of article 16 of the Armistice Convention of the Intelligence Ministry.²² By mere oversight. This is because neither Antonescu’s policy towards the Roma nor the Roma themselves were of any interest after August 1944.

The Taboo in the Communist Period

In the communist years, the subject of deportation of the Roma became taboo. Not only the topic of the Roma, but also everything relating to Transnistria and Romania’s wartime racist policy were avoided both in research and in political discourse. For a long time, nothing was said about Transnistria or the Romanian occupation of this territory. All crimes committed in the USSR during the war were attributed to the Germans. By contrast, antisemitic legislation and anti-Jewish pogroms in Romania were discussed. However, the tendency was to attribute all of it to the Germans, or to the Legionaries, and therefore to clear the Romanian authorities and civilian population of any responsibility. A few books on Transnistria were published abroad. But the deportation to Transnistria would become a topic of interest in Romania only later.

In December 1948, when the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist

Party (RCP) established the guidelines of the policy of the communist state towards the “co-inhabiting nationalities,” the Roma were not mentioned in the related documents. This simply excluded them from the list of recognized minorities, who enjoyed certain rights. Until 1989, neither legislation concerning minorities nor the political, educational, cultural, or other measures taken in favor of the co-inhabiting minorities included the Roma. They were mentioned only in the census. However, in secret documents, the party bodies and state institutions showed a preoccupation with the Roma, especially in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when a program aimed at socially integrating the Roma was launched, only to be quickly abandoned. This situation, in which the Roma were not acknowledged as ethnic minority, was not only characteristic of Romania, but of other socialist countries as well.

The fact that the Roma were not counted among the national minorities significantly reduced scientific interest in this population. Ethnographical and sociological research on the Roma that was conducted in the 1930s was not resumed after the war. After 1944, this topic was avoided. Only a few studies on the Roma were published in Romania during the forty years of communist rule, these few dealing with Roma language and history. As to the past of this population, only their medieval history was explored.

The writer Zaharia Stancu published the novel *Şatra* [The Gypsy Tribe] (Bucharest, Editura pentru literatură, 1968), which tells the story of a community of nomadic Roma deported to Transnistria.²³ The novel enjoyed huge popularity owing not so much to its Gypsy topic as to its anti-totalitarian message and went through numerous printings. The author uses the term “dark people” rather than “Gypsy.” The name of Transnistria is not expressly mentioned. However, the readers and the critics did not miss the real historical basis of the novel.

Transnistria made a reappearance in Romanian publications only in 1974, in a book on Romanian history written for the general public and published in French and Spanish, where reference is timidly made to the racial persecutions during the war and the deportations to Transnistria. The book mentions that among the deported were 26,000 Roma, of whom between 6,000 to 8,000 were slaughtered and another 3,000 who died of hunger, exposure and, other inhumane conditions.²⁴ However, such a reference and a few other similar references cannot be considered as signs of a surge of interest in the issue of the deportations to Transnistria. The historiography before 1989 barely mentions that individuals were “confined” to the “occupied Soviet territories.”

Transnistria was a delicate subject. A Romanian book on the subject of the Romanian occupation of Transnistria was published only in 1994: Olivian Verenca, *Administrația civilă română în Transnistria* [The Romanian Civil Administration in Transnistria] (Chișinău: Universitas). Written by one of the higher officials of the Government of Transnistria, the book highlights only the positive aspects of the Romanian administration and avoids the deportation of the Jews and Roma.

Regarding the communist period, one must mention an episode that occurred in the 1970s, an episode that was made public only after 1989. Specifically this was the attempt to obtain reparations from the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) for the Romanian Roma deported to Transnistria. Thirty thousand personal requests for reparations were drawn up and notarized, and were sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the FRG. The applicants were—or were represented to be—Roma survivors from Transnistria. This attempt to bring hard currency into the country may be seen in the context of the policy of the Ceaușescu regime towards the minorities. The attempt to obtain compensation for the Roma deported during the war was made at a time when Ceaușescu was “selling” Romanian Germans to the FRG.

The Deportation of the Roma to Transnistria Within the Framework of the Discussion Concerning Marshal Antonescu

The subject of the deportation of the Roma to Transnistria was taken up in Romania only after the political changes of 1989. The first studies were published only in 1997.²⁵ However, various references to the deportation of the Roma appeared in some publications somewhat earlier.

The authors—first of all “patriotic” historians—who engaged themselves in rehabilitating Antonescu could hardly by-pass the episode of the Roma deportation. One may see here the same tendency as when they addressed antisemitic policy and the deportation of the Jews to Transnistria: the attempt to play down the event and find excuses for Antonescu’s policy.²⁶ While the measures against the Jews are presented as a result of the political framework of the time, and the deportation of the Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovina as a reaction to the “anti-Romanian attitude” of the Jews in 1940–1941, the deportation of the Roma is seen as motivated by the purported criminality and social problems of the population in question.

Iosif Constantin Drăgan—one of the most important proponents of the cult of Antonescu—played the part of a pioneer here. In the introductory study of a collection

of documents entitled *Antonescu, Mareșalul României și războaiele de reîntregire* [Antonescu, Romania's Marshal, and the Wars of Unification] and published in Venice in 1985, Drăgan attempts to justify the policies of the Holocaust against the Roma during World War II by reasons of strategy and public order:

Therefore, the military commanders in World War II were obliged to take defensive measures lest they should leave behind the front potentially subversive elements, with no beliefs or ideals other than those of the immediate moment. Relocation to another area became an imperative measure of safety not only for the troops but for the civilian population as well. With the introduction of terrorist night bombing, conditions were created for unprecedented looting and robbery. As a result, capital punishment was imposed for robbery and murder, the only measure capable of stopping such crime. Highly sensitive to such situations, Hitler adopted radical measures and produced a holocaust of the Gypsies and of the Mosaic Khazar Jews.²⁷

The author shows that Marshal Antonescu, called to power in defense of the interests of the country, had to face the problem of Gypsy depredations. The *Conductor*, the author says, proceeded nevertheless in a humane way, in accordance with the Romanian spirit of humanity, as Antonescu declared during his trial.²⁸

This interpretation robustly survives in Romanian historiography. A book that deals with Antonescu's trial of 1946, considers these procedures a mockery. Referring to the meeting of the Council of Ministers of 7 January 1941, when Ion Antonescu spoke for the first time of measures to be taken against the Roma, the book states, "Not even in the problem of the Gypsies, who caused him great problems and caused even greater problems to the population during curfew, the Marshal did not think of extreme solutions of the Fascist type."²⁹ The author, who gives full credit to Ion Antonescu's declarations at his trial, does not trace the subsequent course of events and does not report Antonescu's "solution" to the "Gypsy problem."

One should nevertheless note that in the discussions of the Antonescu regime—either in the apologetic approaches (such as the ones mentioned above) or in those trying to look objectively at the man and his time—his policy towards the Roma is given little if any attention. Most of the time it is not even mentioned.³⁰ The only element of the Antonescu regime's racist policy that is given weight is the deportation of the Jews. It would be hazardous to consider this a deliberate omission, especially as the literature on this topic is very new and includes very few titles. The research on deportations of Roma is still nascent. Recent published syntheses that aim to look

objectively at the period of the war and at the Antonescu regime do not avoid it.³¹

“Patriotic” historians concerned with the image of the Romanian state of the war years do not highlight the Antonescu regime’s anti-Roma policy. Ion Scurtu and Gheorghe Buzatu’s *Istoria românilor în secolul XX (1918–1948)* [The History of the Romanians in the 20th Century, 1918–1948] (Bucharest: Paideia, 1999) makes no mention of the deportation of the Roma. What happened in Transnistria is labeled as “concocted files” (p. 421).

In those books that focus on the deportation of the Roma, there are differences of opinion as to this aspect of the Antonescu regime’s policy. In some, the deportation is considered a racist measure (Radu Ioanid), or as one with racist and ethnic character (Viorel Achim). In other writings, the explanation is sought in the social policy of the Antonescu regime (Dumitru Șandru, Cristian Troncotă). Troncotă believes that the deportation of the Roma was “an attempt to solve, by the specific measures of a military regime and in time of war, a social problem still left unsolved today.”³² The ethnic and racist aspect of the problem goes unremarked. The article from which I quote “*Deși suntem țigani, vrem să plecăm liberi*” [“Even if we are Gypsies, we want to leave of our own free will”], was published in a magazine with a wide circulation. The title quotes from a letter by a number of Roma who left for Transnistria of their own free will. There were indeed such cases in which the Roma requested to be evacuated to Transnistria or who secretly joined the deportation groups. This was done in response to rumors that the Roma would be allotted pieces of land there. Such cases were isolated and do not change the essence of the Antonescu regime’s anti-Roma policy. In reflecting on historians’ past assessments of the nature of the deportation of the Roma, one should bear in mind the scarcity of documents available at the time the studies in question were published.

The deportation of the Roma recently has become a preoccupation of historical research in Romania. Given the relatively few works so far published on the issue, one cannot speak of a real historiography of this subject. Undoubtedly, future research will shed light on this episode and allow for a more rigorous assessment of this extremely controversial period in the history of Romania.

Efforts to rehabilitate Antonescu are not focused solely on historiographic pursuits. The trend is much wider and its proponents include some political types, a variety of “intelligentsia,” and members of the popular press.

Such reference to the deportation of the Roma were made on several occasions

in the journal *România Mare*. A 19 April 1991 article on a conflict that occurred between the Romanian population and the Roma in a village near Bucharest makes the following statement:

Some people criticize Marshal Antonescu for having taken the Gypsies to the banks of the Bug. To say nothing of the fact that work is no shame, but rather an honor, we are in the position to tell the whole truth about those times: the country was at war, life was difficult, and the social and political situation was critical from all points of view in 1941–1944. Therefore, Antonescu (as confirmed by him in a document) could not ignore security in the areas behind the battlefield. That rear area was the motherland, which had fallen victim to bands of Gypsy robbers and murderers. His decision was the only measure that a clear-thinking military could have adopted, one that was beneficial from two points of view: 1) it protected the life and the property of the peaceful citizens, securing at the same time the real social stability that a country at war required; 2) it protected the Gypsies themselves, for the situation had become unbearable and the population could no longer suffer such humiliation.³³

The author goes further than Antonescu in his declaration at the 1946 trial, who did not state that the deportation was meant to save the Roma from the fury of the population. But in the article, the international community is accused of pressuring Romania and permitting the “bands of Gypsies” to kill and loot at will. The author then takes issue with the alleged enemies of Romania, whom he accuses of using the violence committed against the Roma to tarnish the country’s image abroad.

The Deportation to Transnistria and Anti-Roma Attitudes

The minimization of Antonescu’s policy towards the Roma is related not only to the cult of Marshal Antonescu but also to anti-Roma attitudes and racism in Romanian society today. I do not believe there is a direct and necessary link between the two. Some such political groups in Romania carefully avoid showing any sympathy for Antonescu, and generally are not labeled as extremist. They are rather considered to be intellectual groups. Their intention is to deal with current problems of Romanian society without looking for patterns in the past. However, when it comes to the problem of the Roma, the “solutions” envisaged are sometimes very similar to Antonescu’s. Some of the texts produced by these organizations have a racist tone or undertone. In 1993, one of these organizations suggested in its journal *Noua Dreaptă* that the Roma be imprisoned in labor camps.³⁴

It is not surprising that anti-Roma manifestations in recent years should refer to Transnistria. Antonescu and Transnistria are invoked as a “solution” to the Roma “problem.” “A million crows [“crow” for “Gypsy”–V.A.], one solution: Antonescu,” read a placard that the entire country could see during a televised football match in a Bucharest stadium in 1998. The message was addressed to a football club whose headquarters are in a district with a significant Roma population. Only the Roma organizations decried the incident.³⁵ The stadiums have become places where hooligans frequently employ racist slogans.

But such beliefs are held in high quarters. In 1998 a senator, the leader of an extremist party, proposed the imprisonment of Roma in labor camps. Suggestions that the Roma be compelled to labor or that they should be isolated from the rest of the population have been expressed in a variety of circumstances. At times, the language adopted is very similar to that used during the Antonescu period, including such words as isolation, deportation, and imprisonment.

Lately, such outbursts have become rarer. But the notion of taking radical measures against the Roma still persists. A serious discussion on the modernizing of Bucharest could not avoid the Roma topic. During the campaign preceding the 4 June 2000 local elections, one of the subjects was what should be done with the Roma. One of the candidates for mayor was accused of intending to drive the Roma out of Bucharest. Although the accusation was unfounded, the episode is revealing nonetheless.

Such ideas are hardly in wide circulation in Romania; I believe that very few people share them. But neither are these notions unknown, and the Transnistrian episode is occasionally still evoked when Roma are perceived to be a problem.

The anti-Gypsy sentiment in Romanian society is complex. To understand the phenomenon and to look for solutions, one must keep in mind the social side of the Roma “problem,” particularly the difficulties of social integration of this population, an older problem aggravated lately by the current economic crisis. The Roma are rejected because of their way of life and not because of racial considerations.³⁶ It is difficult to say whether anti-Gypsy feelings in Romania are more intense than in other European countries. In many aspects, the situation of the Romanian Roma seems to be similar to that of Roma in other countries of the region. But Romania still has a long way to go in resolving this complex issue.³⁷

Romanian Collective Memory and the Roma Deportation to Transnistria

One might expect that the Romanian Roma would have a vivid memory of the deportations to Transnistria. However, to judge by publications and public events of this ethnic group, it would appear that most Roma have been little interested in this episode of their past, if at all.³⁸ Transnistria would be vivid in the memory of members of former nomadic communities, deported in their entirety. Yet few members of non-nomadic categories of Roma were deported, and so it is not entirely surprising these should demonstrate little interest in Transnistria. The disappearance and dispersion of most Roma communities in the decades after World War II would seem to be a contributing factor, as well. The attitude of contemporary Roma is beginning to change, however, and it varies considerably. Some of them consider Antonescu a “savior,” in that the Roma did not suffer the extermination measures applied to German Roma and to those of other countries.³⁹ On the other hand, leaders of some Roma organizations have begun to view the deportations as genocidal or near-genocidal acts.

The ethnic and political project recently taken up by some Roma intellectuals—the attempt to build a modern ethnic community by overcoming the distinctions among the various Roma groups—does not draw on the past. When the past is involved at all, the principal emphasis is laid on the century of Roma slavery and discrimination. Even with recent changes Transnistria remains only a secondary focus in the collective memory of Romanian Roma, but it is possible that this picture will look different in a generation or two.

The issue of compensation for the Transnistrian deportations has in recent years contributed to the Roma leaders reorientation, such as it is. However, the request for reparations was addressed not to the Romanian state, the author of the deportations, and at the time in authority in Transnistria, but to the German government.⁴⁰ Romania was asked only to grant moral reparation.

The deportations to Transnistria are not a major element in the collective memory of Romanians despite interest among scholars and politicians. For the Romanian collective memory, the population displacements to which the Romanians themselves were subjected during the war are much more important. Approximately one million people experienced deportation, expulsion, and resettlement. These events are much more present in their memory than what happened to other ethnic groups. This only confirms that one remembers what most directly affected himself.

There has yet been in Romania no public debate on the deportation of the

Roma. Neither has the “Roma problem” been touched on in recent press and television discussions of the Antonescu regime. The mass media and the Romanian public have shown no awareness of the fact that the ethnic and racial persecutions and the deportations to Transnistria are a problem for Romanian society as a whole, not only for the affected minorities. At least for the moment one cannot reasonably expect Romania to assume its guilt for wartime persecutions of the Roma. On several occasions the President of Romania has addressed the persecution of the Romanian Jews, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs has addressed the treatment meted out to ethnic Germans in Romania in the first years after the war. But Romanian Roma are hardly looked upon with particular favor, nor are amends to them likely to be seen as mandated by geo-political reality, and so any such gesture might carry with it real political risks.

Building a real picture of the Romanian past and informing the public on these issues is an imperative not only of historical research. Romania has yet to achieve the moral catharsis it, as a democratic society, sorely needs.

Notes

1. Viorel Achim, “Țigani din România în timpul celui de-al doilea război mondial” [The Gypsies in Romania during World War II], *Revista istorică* 8:1–2 (1997), pp. 53–9; Dumitru Șandru, “Deportarea Țiganilor în Transnistria 1942” [The deportation of the Gypsies to Transnistria 1942], *Arhivele Totalitarismului* 5:4(17) (1997), pp. 23–30; Radu Ioanid, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu* [The Jews under the Antonescu regime] (Bucharest: Hasefer, 1997), pp. 310–23; Viorel Achim, *Țigani în istoria României* [The Gypsies in Romanian history] (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1998), pp. 133–52; Michelle Kelso, “Gypsy Deportations from Romania to Transnistria 1942–44,” in: Donald Kenrick, ed., *In the Shadow of the Swastika*, Vol. 2 (Hartfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 1999), pp. 95–129. See also Cristian Troncotă, “Deși suntem Țigani, vrem să plecăm liberi” [“Even if we are Gypsies, we want to leave of our free will”], *Magazin istoric* 31:3 (360) (1997), pp. 29–31.
2. J. Ancel, ed., *Documents Concerning the Fate of Romanian Jewry During the Holocaust*, Vol. IV (New York, Jerusalem, 1985), p. 225.
3. Arhivele Statului București (ASB), fond Direcția Generală a Poliției (DGP), dosar nr. 190/1942, f. 124.
4. ASB, fond DGP, dosar nr. 194/1942, f. 4.
5. ASB, fond DGP, dosar nr. 190/42, f. 72.
6. Some examples of such interventions: ASB, fond DGP, dosar nr. 189/1942, f. 257; dosar nr. 190/1942, f. 65; dosar nr. 194/1942, f. 133.
7. ASB, fond DGP, dosar 189/1942, f. 96.
8. On the situation of the Roma in interwar Romania, see V. Achim, *Țigani în istoria României*, pp. 120–132.
9. Such documents proceeded from the Army Staff: ASB, fond Inspectoratul General al Jandarmeriei (IGJ), dosar nr. 130/1942, f. 5; ASB, fond Inspectorate Regionale de Jandarmi, dosar nr. 259, f. 143.
10. ASB, fond IGJ, dosar nr. 86/1944, f. 295.
11. *Actul de acuzare, rechizitoriile și replica acuzării în procesul primului lot de criminali de război* [Bill of indictment, accusations, and prosecution’s rejoinders in the trial of the first lot of war criminals] (Bucharest: Editura Apărării Patriotice, 1945).
12. Arhivele Serviciului Român de Informații, Fond Documentar, dosar nr. 40010, vol. 89.

13. *Revista Istorică* 4:7–8 (1993), p. 763.
14. *Scânteia*, No. 519, 9 May 1946, p. 4; No. 524, 16 May 1946, p. 2.
15. Matatias Carp published only one document referring to the Roma: the decision to cease any new deportation of Jews and Roma reached by the Council of Ministers in its meeting of 13 October 1942: *Cartea neagră. Suferințele evreilor din România 1940-1944* [The black book: The sufferings of the Romanian Jews 1940–1944], Vol. III: *Transnistria* (Bucharest, 1948), p. 255.
16. *Dreptatea*, 2nd Series, No. 116, 14 January 1945, p. 3.
17. Police report from 3 February 1945: ASB, fond DGP, dosar nr. 87/1943, f. 318.
18. ASB, fond Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri, dosar nr. 87/1943, ff. 352–53.
19. ASB, fond DGP, dosar nr. 202/1942, f. 289.
20. *Monitorul Oficial*, I B, No. 25, 31 January 1949, p. 936.
21. ASB, fond DGP, dosar nr. 87/1943, ff. 385–86.
22. Chelcea's book does not figure in Paul Caravia, coord. *Gândirea interzisă. Scrieri cenzurate: România, 1945–1989* [Forbidden Thinking. Censored Writings: Romania, 1945–1989] (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedica, 2000), which enlists all the publications forbidden in postwar Romania.
23. *The Gypsy Tribe*, translated by Roy MacGregor-Hastie (London; New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1973).
24. Gheorghe Zaharia, *Pages de la resistance antifasciste en Roumanie*, trans. by Maurice Florescu (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1974), p. 44; *Páginas de la resistencia antifascista en Rumanía*, trans. by Rosa Dimitriu and Luis Galan (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1974), p. 42.
25. See note 1.
26. For the Holocaust in the Romanian historiography, see, e.g., Victor Eskenasy, "The Holocaust and Romanian Historiography: Communist and Neo-Communist Revisionism," in Randolph L. Braham, ed., *The Tragedy of Romanian Jewry* (New York: Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies, Graduate Center/The City University of New York; Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 1994), pp. 173–216; idem,

“Historiographers Against the Antonescu Myth,” in Randolph L. Braham, ed., *The Destruction of Romanian and Ukrainian Jews During the Antonescu Era* (Boulder, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 271–302; Radu Ioanid, “How Romania Reacted to the Holocaust, 1945–1992”, in David Wyman, ed., *The World Reacts to the Holocaust* (Baltimore, London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 225–55.

27. Cited from the 3rd ed. (Venice: Fundația Europeană Drăgan, 1991), pp. 37

28. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

29. Ioan Dan, “Procesul” mareșalului Ion Antonescu [The “trial” of Marshal Antonescu] (Bucharest: Tempus, 1993), p. 161.

30. A book that gathers archival documents written by Marshal Ion Antonescu does not even note one referring to the Roma: Vasile Arimia and Ion Ardeleanu, ed., *Mareșalul Ion Antonescu: Secretele guvernării. Rezoluții ale Conducătorului Statului (septembrie 1940–august 1944)* [Marshal Ion Antonescu: The government’s secrets: Resolutions of the head of state (September 1940–August 1944)] (Bucharest: “Românul,” 1992).

31. See, e.g., Dinu C. Giurescu, *România 1940–1947* [Romania 1940–1947] (Bucharest: All, 1999), pp. 170–72; idem, *Romania in the Second World War (1939–1945)*, English transl. by Eugenia Elena Popescu (Boulder: East European Monographs, 2000), p. 243–46.

32. See note 1.

33. *România Mare*, II, No. 45, 19 April 1991, p. 16.

34. N. Petrescu, “Problema țigănească” [The Gypsy problem], *Noua Dreaptă* 1:4 (1993), p. 8.

35. *Evenimentul zilei*, No. 1747, 26 March 1998, p. 15; No. 1748, 27 March 1998, p. 14.

36. In a 1995 poll by the Romanian Institute for Public Opinion Research, 68% of the subjects declared their antipathy towards the Roma, 5% their sympathy, 27% were indifferent (Alina Mungiu, *România după ‘89. Istoria unei neînțelegeri* [Romania after 1989: The history of one misunderstanding] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1995), p. 187).

37. Some works concerning the present condition of the Roma in Romania: Elena Zamfir and Cătălin Zamfir, eds., *Țiganii între ignorare și îngrijorare* [Gypsies between ignorance and anxiety] ([Bucharest]: Alternative, 1993); Emannelle Pons, *Les Tsiganes de Roumanie: Des citoyens à part entière?* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1995), p.

55ff; V. Achim, *Țigani în istoria României*, p. 164ff.

38. Roma authors on the Transnistrian deportation: memories (Joan Cioaba, “Il genocidio in Romania: una testimonianza,” *Lacio Drom* 20:2–3 (1984), pp. 54–6); a novel (Gh. Păun-Ialomițeanu, “*Arzoaica*” a stat la masă cu dracul: “*E thabardi*” bes las la meselaq e la bengeça (Slobozia: “Șatra,” 1991)).

39. See Fr. Remmel, “Der lange Weg: Zur Leidengeschichte der rumänischen Roma: Die Deportation nach Transnistrien,” *Allgemeine Deutsche Zeitung aus Rumänien / Karpatenrundschau*, 5 December 1998, p. 2.

40. On 20 August 1998 a protocol was signed between the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the FRG and the Roma Convention (including several Roma organizations in Romania) on humanitarian aid to some Roma victims of persecutions in Romania in 1941–1944.