

# THE BANAT JEWS DURING THE WAR DICTATORSHIP

Case studies

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## Keywords

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Anti-Semitism  
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## Abstract

*In this study, we focused on the legal and social situation of the Banat Jews after the Union from 1918, when they were not recognized the citizenship acquired even since the time of the monarchy. Firstly we sketched the citizenship legislation adopted by governments in Bucharest, and the discriminatory laws on the naturalization (obtaining the Romanian citizenship) of Jews. Further on, we briefly presented not only the way this legislation on citizenship was applied, but also the economic discriminatory legislation within inter-war Banat counties. Our investigation shows the special position of the Jews from Banat caused by their pursuit by police, being constantly accused of disloyalty towards the Romanian State. The study presents the material, human and financial effort of this ethnic group to support the Romanian front and their co-nationals deported to Transnistria. Finally, it is shown the contribution of local and national personalities to stop the deportation of the Banat Jews to concentration camps in Poland: Rabbi Alexander Safran, Metropolitan of Transylvania B lan, Radu Lecca and Franz von Neuman from Arad.*

The international endeavours exercised by the *International Israelite Association* and *Joint* in favour of naturalisation (granting of Romanian citizenship) of the Jewish population triggered, in the end, the awarding of civil and political rights to this ethnic group. The effort remained suspended in article 60 of the Peace Treaty with Austria, (*Official Gazette* no. 140, part I, of September 26th 1940) article that will consecrate, under the international legal mask, the granting of civil rights to native Jews. As a result, all Jews, inhabitants of the Old Kingdom before August 2<sup>nd</sup> 1914, as well as those coming from the territories united to Great Romania, including those from Banat, were awarded the Romanian citizenship. The 1923 Constitution, in articles 5 and 7, will confirm this right: "The Romanians, without discrimination of ethnic origin, language or religion, enjoy the freedom of the press, freedom of reunions, freedom of association and all liberties and rights set by the law" (article 5); "The differences of religious beliefs and confessions, of ethnical origin and language, does not constitute in Romania an impediment in the way of acquiring civil and political rights and exercising them" (article 7). (*The 1923 Constitution in the debate of contemporaries*, 1990, p. 191). In general, these two articles referring to the Jewish minority of Romania were forever delayed and amended by the Liberal Party and Peasants' Party government, and blocked by the authoritarian governments in the inter-war period.

In this respect, the liberal government led by Ion I. C. Brătianu adopted in 1924 the draft of the Law for the repression of certain crimes against public freedom, remained in history with the name of its author, i.e. "The Mârzescu Law". It was a law sanctioning both political excesses of extreme right ideology (Legionarism), and those of far left (Communism). For the Jewish minority, the respective law had an extremely restrictive impact from the social and legal viewpoint. The legal norm

established the conditions of the obtaining and loss of Romanian nationality and introduced the obligation to present proof difficult to obtain for some Jews, whose name was not on the lists of citizenship in the local administration. The application of this law deprived around 100,000 Jews of the right to be Romanian citizens. (Scurtu, I., Bulei, I., (1990) p. 69.) The situation was much more drastic in the Banat County from this point of view.

The influential political personalities of the two historic parties – liberals and national-peasants' – after the year 1933, along with the ascension of the Iron Guard, became supporters of anti-Semite slogans out of a dissimulated desire to "compete the far right wing on its own turf." (Iancu, C., (2001) p. 20). Thus, in the party press and public debates one could hear more and more frequently anti-Semite formulas such as: "Romanisation of Romanians", "promotion of national labour"; "numerus clausus", "numerus Wallachicus", "nationalisation of towns", "revision of citizenship", etc. (*Ibidem*, p. 21.) A consequence of this attitude toward "the Romanisation law" was adopted mostly in the period of Gheorghe Tătărescu's government. We must point out that such laws, discriminating from the economic point of view, originate in the "protectionist" legislation promoted in the periods of the National-Peasants' Party government (November 1928 - April 1933). One of these laws, restrictive and discriminating for the Jewish minority, adopted in 1930, was entitled "Law for the protection of indigenous labour", and it read in article 15 "The foreign subjects established in the country, with the permanent domicile before 1914, foreign subjects exercising a commerce or an industry, with firms inscribed at the Court and foreign professionals who, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1930, were living in the country, married to Romanian women and with children, receive by law and definitively the extension of the validity of the professional exercise permit, with the

obligation to get a visa on the permit each year.” (*Official Gazette* no. 76, part III, of September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1930, pp. 1426-1427)

Economic restrictions and discriminations on the Jewish people provoked two legal acts from the second liberal government: the “Law regarding the organisation of co-operation” (adopted on July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1934) and the “Law for the use of Romanian staff in companies” (adopted in 1935). The former established the obligation of employing Romanian staff “in a percentage of at least 80% in each of the category of personnel (...) and at least 50% of the members of the Board of Directors, Direction Committee and auditors; the chairman of the Board of Directors will be a Romanian citizen.” (*Idem*, no. 12, part III, meeting of July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1934, p. 850) The latter encouraged the government interference in the cooperatist system, especially in agriculture, reducing thus the influence of the Jewish land capital in the rural area.

The Goga-Cuza nationalist government, installed on the 30<sup>th</sup> of December 1937, after a suspension of Jewish newspapers – “Diminea a”, “Lupta” and “Adev rul” – and after the withdrawal of free circulation permit on the CFR national railway for the Jewish journalists, will move for the adoption of the “Decree-Law regarding the revision of citizenship granted to the Jews” (the 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1938). This normative act required that within 30 days a name list of the Jews inscribed in the nationality registered of communes be set up. The Mayors had, within 20 days from display, to mobilise all those inscribed on such lists, so that they file the evidence of the fulfilment of the legal conditions for the granting of the Romanian citizenship. (*Idem*, no. 21, part I, of January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1938) The decree could not be applied by that nationalist government, as the Prime Minister was dismissed, along with the installation of the authoritarian government of King Charles the Second (Carol al II-lea), because until the 15<sup>th</sup> of September 1939

one examined the personal legal situation of 617,396 Jews, of which only 63.35% preserved their Romanian citizenship, whereas 36.75% of the total lost their acquired right. (Iancu, C., (2000, p. 312)

The Carlist legislation, increasingly anti-Jewish, culminates by the Decree-Law no. 2650 of the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 1940, draft proposed by the Minister of Justice I. V. Gruia. Although the law set the settlement of the legal status of Jews, the act under discussion became “the Charter of the Romanian rights” (*Official Gazette* no. 183, part I, of August 9<sup>th</sup> 1940, p. 4086), categorically stating: “Romania is the country of Romanians only” (*Idem*.) Furthermore, the legal act set the discriminating distinction between “the notion of Romanian or of citizen of Romanian origin – legal political and legal notion– and the notion of Romanian citizen, representing a legal formal creation.” (*Ibidem*, p. 4083) The conclusion of the legislator consecrates the thesis according to which one recognised as Romanian citizens only the Jews who had acquired the citizenship before the 30<sup>th</sup> December 1918 and who got completely assimilated: “The nation in the sense of the constitutional law became less a legal community or a political community, and rather a spiritual and organic community, grounded on the law of blood from which a hierarchy of political rights originated.” (*Ibidem*, p. 4082) To conclude, we admit we assist to a replacement of the principle of law from the legal status of the persons with the barbarism of an ethnical-racial conception. All such restrictive and anti-Jewish laws had consequences upon the Jewish population of Banat, who were mostly exercising liberal professions, law that will acquire an increasingly anti-Jewish and xenophobe character in the period of the Legionary -Antonescu’s government.

In parallel with the economic and social legislation in the inter-war period, the Banat Jewish population was permanently harassed and pursued by the

Legion's members of the region, especially in the period of the Captain's last detention (It was the formula of addressing and recognition for the leader of the Legionary Movement, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, who led this Romanian extreme right movement until November 1938. On the night of 29/30 November 1938, in an operation of transfer of the heads of the Legionary Movement from the Râmnicu-S rat to the Jilava prison, they were all executed, the authorities presenting the public opinion the variant of an attempted escape of the convicts. Thus, the most famous leaders of the Iron Guard were killed, and among them their supreme leader, Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu. The Legionary Movement got radicalised from the organisational and strategic viewpoint, provoking numerous anarchist acts in a series of urban and rural localities of Banat and southern Transylvania, where the Jewish ethnic groups were significant, once the leadership of this extremist right organisation was taken over by its new leader, Horia Sima – for factual elements, see Mihai Vi an, 2003, pp. 147-148). Now that the “Core” of the Legion was annihilated, another leader started to get affirmed in Banat, namely Horia Sima. A F g ra native, with a meteoric passage through the Caransebe and Lugoj high schools as a philosophy and literature teacher, Sima will adapt the total “revolutionary” spirit. A lucid characterisation of this character, as seen at the end of 1938, was sketched by Armin Heinen: “The Captain was an idol, a personality who fascinated not only his close adepts. Sima possessed other qualities. He was dominated by the philosophy of the bomb and represented the radical terrorist wing that decided the politics of the Guard after 1938. Codreanu oscillated between different factions of the Legion, assuring thus his independence. Sima could not afford such a behaviour. There were several Guard members who could raise the claim to represent, like him, the true teaching. He could defend himself

before attacks only if he relied on the support of the far right wing.” (Heinen, A., 1998, p. 411)

The Legionary Movement was well represented numerically and organisation-wise in the county of Banat and Southern Transylvania, being joined by numerous intellectuals from the rural and urban areas (Orthodox priests, military men, teachers, medical staff), as well as many peasants, small and middle owners in the rural area. By embracing the “politics of the force”, the new Legion's leader will provoke and start systematic vandalism acts with a strong anti-Semitic character. This is how he intended to draw the attention of the King and public opinion upon the claim that the Legion had not given in yet. Thus, after a harsh campaign of anti-Carlist manifests, Sima will strike the Jewish properties and interest in Ardeal and Banat. In this zone, the Legionaries organised numerous actions of sabotage and terrorism, all directed against the Jewish properties and institutions. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 1938, the Beiu wood warehouse was set on fire, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November two bombs were detonated at the Electric Plant on the Traian Way of Timi oara (Central National Historic Archive, fund *Ministry of Justice. Judiciary Division.*, file 20/1939, vol. I, f. 63), on the 12<sup>th</sup> November a sabotage was put in practice at the Textile Factory of Lugoj, and four days later an attempted bombing was organised at the Synagogue of the same locality. In November 1938 also serious material damage is brought to a timber factory of the Pojorâta commune and a wood workshop in the Ciacova commune. In Re ia, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November, a bomb was detonated in front of the *Wiliam Deutsch* grocery shop, and in the same location, on the night of 16 / 17<sup>th</sup> of November, a bomb was detonated near the Synagogue wall, causing the destruction of the building foundation. (*Idem*, fund *Documentary (Ministry of Internal Affairs)*, file 78/1939, f. 350) In Timi oara, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 1938,

during a theatre show, two grenades were launched in the hall, their explosion provoking the death of four spectators and wounding more than seventy (*Idem.*). Still in the Banat capital city, the Legion's members intended the arson of several Jewish firms: *Sapic, Moliftul, Eugen Dornhelm, Adolf Kohl and Son*, vandalism acts provoked and co-ordinated by the Legion's members Florian Miclea, Nicolae Stanciu, Constantin Manda and Ioan Popa. (*Idem.*, fund *Ministry of Justice. Judiciary Division*, file 20/1939, vol. I, f. 115) In the Putna commune of Cara -Severin County a big disaster was planned to take place on the 16<sup>th</sup> of November 1938, an intended arson of all Jewish houses, and this terrorist act was executed by Legion's sworn members Nicolae and Gheorghe Cenu e, Dumitru Radu, Vasile Ursachi and Ioan Petrovici. (*Idem*, file 9/1939, vol. I, f. 3.) Toward the end of the month of October of the year 1938, in numerous Banat and Ardeal localities – Re i a, Oravi a, Boc a, Timi oara, Beiu , Alba-Iulia etc. – Legionary manifests are spread inciting the local population to rebel against the Carlist regime and the Banat Jewish population. (Scurtu, I., 1988, p. 461) The German propaganda in Romania of that time had become more and more pro-Legion. In this respect, we may refer to the visit of Wilhelm Fabricius, effected between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of March, in fact a political tour in Banat, who visited the localities Lugoj, Timi oara and Varia , and on that occasion he claimed that the principles of national-socialism must lie at the foundation of the action of all Germans of Romania, and implicitly of Banat. (Central National Historic Archive, *Documentary (Ministry of Internal Affairs)* fund, file 75/1939, f. 338.) The German newspaper *Volkischer Beobachter*, in the same period, published in serial fragments of the capital work of C. Z. Codreanu "For the Legion's members", announcing that it will be translated into German in its entirety (*Idem*, dossier 79/1939, f. 152.)

From Re i a, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 1939, a piece of information was conveyed to the local security organisms, mentioning that on that date the higher command centre of the Legionary Movement was made of six persons, of which four were in Romania, the fifth in German and the sixth in Italy. (*Idem*, file 79/1939, f. 159) Legionism, extremely accented in Banat, is present, from the organisational and ideological viewpoint, in Oravi a, the capital of Cara -Severin at that time. From Oravi a, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May 1939, a message was transmitted, according to which "The Legionary Labour Centre" continued to act, being conspiratively called "Cimileu", the Legion's cell meetings being held with the participation of four Legion's members each. ( *Idem*, fund *Ministry of Justice. Judiciary Division*, file 20/1939, vol. II, f. 680) After the Legionary rebellions of 21<sup>st</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1940, The Banat will still remained very well organised within the Legion, which explains also the clandestine border crossings of Horia Sima and other Legionary leaders to and from Yugoslavia, to and from Germany. All these actions provoked significant damage to the capital of the Jewish population, but especially states of uncertainty and worry about the safety of the cohabitation with the native inhabitants, especially during the Marshal Antonescu's regime of war dictatorship. All these measures aimed at raising a popular wave of revolt against the regime of King Charles the Second. The calculus was wrong however, because the King himself will command the execution of C. Z. Codreanu and of the entire "lot" of leaders from the Râmnicu S rat prison, while they were in detention (F tu, M., Sp l elu, I., 1980, p. pp. 187-189)

The Antonescu-Legionary politics (September 1940 – August 1944) as regards the historic province Banat (The analysis of this historic region of inter-war Romania refers to a social-geographic space bordered by three natural frontiers: to the north – the Mure river, to the west – the Tisa river and to the south – the

Danube river the fourth frontier delimiting this region is conventional one, crossing, to the east, the Cerna and Poiana Rusc i Mountains, continuing by a lien to the east of Or ova – east of B ile Herculane – east of Co evi a – to the Mure river. On the other hand, our analysis is focused on the situations in the counties Cara , Timi - Torontal of the proper Banat, but it also refers to Arad county in relation with the official-legal status of the native Jews) was discriminating from the legal and economic perspective, due to objective regional factors such as: hegemony of Banat inhabitants' interregional commercial relations in the fluency of the exchange of farming produce and industrial merchandise, which was in opposition with the trend of centralism of the war economy (The Timi County Service or National Archives, *Prefecture of the Timi -Torontal County* fund, file no./1940, f.20) the tendency of part of Swabs (the German ethnic group of Banat) to join the so-called National Labour Front (*National Arbeit-Front* – N.A.T), which traded brass and copper with Germany, serving thus the German war industry; the affinities and attraction of the youth for the Nazi movement (*Idem* ,f.15, 24) the restlessness created to authorities by the penetration of Jewish groups and families from the neighbouring states, refugees in Banat, situation written down in the reports of Timi oara police; the pluri-linguism practised by the Jewish ethnic groups inspired distrust and suspicion among the local and central political centres. Despite these aspects, the counter-intelligence reports often insisted to assure the official bodies that the Banat population's state of mind was relatively calm.

The legal ambiguity of the Charles and Antonescu's legislation in relation with the naturalisation of Banat Jews results from the documents kept in archives. The memorandum for the clarification of the legal situation of the Ardeal and Banat Jews (Archive of the

Jewish Communities of Timi oara, file 77/1943, f. 77-182), elaborated by the Jewish community of Timi oara addressed to the Minister of Justice in 1942, clearly expressed the tragedy of the Jewish population in this area. As it is known, The Gruia Law (the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 1940), as well as the ulterior laws which, by their nature, intended to set the legal frame for native Jews, referred only to the legal status of the Jews of the Old Kingdom, even if there, according to article 7 of Romania's Constitution of 1866, the naturalisation was not granted, not even individually. The legislator forgot to mention the Jews from Banat and Ardeal, despite the fact they have been living in these regions for three centuries. The memorandum attempted to justify by historic arguments the right to Romanian citizenship of the Jews inhabiting these regions. Thus Law no. XVII of 1867, grounded on the Austrian-Hungarian Imperial Constitution, stipulated the full equality in the exercise of political and civil rights, and the naturalisation of the Jews settled in the Empire was revised only for those who had constant trades and professions and contributed to the satisfaction of public tasks (*Idem*, f.179). Consequently, all the inhabitants of the old Austrian-Hungarian monarchy obtained their citizenship based on the decision of the administrative authority, in discordance with the system adopted in the Old Kingdom.

The full union of 1918 meant, among others, the reconfirmation of the full rights of the Banat and Ardeal Jews. Then, it was about the recognition of a long-acquired capacity and not a favour (*Idem*, f. 180; the Jews of the Old Kingdom were granted citizenship collectively, "as a group", only after 1918). The legal framing, formulated by the Charles and Antonescu's regimes, by which the Jews of Transylvania and Banat were to be treated differently compared to those living in the Kingdom, indicated a discriminating policy. The

answer to the Timi oara's Jews *Memorandum* was negative – come from the part of the National Centre of Romanisation – even if it was very thoroughly elaborated: “Following your request recorded at the Ministry of Justice under no.174730/1942, we have the honour to communicate you, according to the report of Head Reporting Officer C.Criv , that we cannot approve the equivalence of the native Jews of Ardeal and Banat with the Jews of the Old Kingdom, naturalised by individual laws, nor for the application of the same treatment as regards the extension of the renting contracts in course of the former Jewish owner in the United Principalities, as they do not fall within the category of those excepted” (*Idem*, f.201). The Banat Jewish community will enterprise another endeavours, directly to the leaders of the state, which also remained without beneficial effects.

The Jews of Banat and Southern Transylvania were subjected to a much more restrictive legislative regime compared to those in the Old Kingdom. Charles and Antonescu's political regime did not recognise the civil rights inscribed in the 1923 Constitution, the differences between the manner of acquiring Romanian citizenship and of exercising democratic liberties being made in accordance with the historic provinces where they had their domicile. In principle, we admit that the political and legal discriminations between Jews were explained by the authorities as follows: the Jews from Banat and Transylvania did not fight in the Romania's independence war in 1877-1878; the Jews of these regions did not engage in the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913; they were not involved in the unionist propaganda of 1918; they did not get integrated into the Romanian cultural space, especially considering that most of them used the Hungarian language as interregional communication language.

The psychosis of the Jews' deportation became more and more

generalised. Consequently, the Romanian population will protect them by means at their disposal. A group of Banat intellectuals, alarmed by the fact that the German press insisted on the imminent deportation of the Ardeal and Banat Jews, forwarded a protest note to the Government of Romania: “(...) no matter what conception we have about the Jews, we are Christians and humane ... and are appalled by the idea that the citizens of a state could be deprived of all their assets and banished from the country where the bones of their parents, grandparents and grand-grand parents have lain for centuries. Marshal Antonescu explained that the deportation of the Jews from Basarabia and Bucovina could be made for the criminal acts they allegedly affected against the Romanian army and population, because the reconquered provinces became a war zone, the interest of the army dictated the removal of unsure elements, in a rather important number. However, no such imputation could be brought against the Jews of Ardeal and Banat, but on the contrary we must admit that both on the occasion of the devolution of part of the Ardeal and afterwards, both the Jews in the ceded territories and those in the remaining territories had an irreproachable behaviour. Moreover, they live on the other side of the front and are in such a low number (40000 in Banat and Southern Transylvania, *our note*.) that they cannot constitute, in any case, a danger, even in times of war” (*Idem*, file no.75/1941, where we find a copy of a notification forwarded to the Romanian authorities) panic of the Jewish population was maintained by the fact that the dispositions from the capital city proved an increasingly understanding between the Germans and the Romanians related to the deportation to Poland (The Timi County Service of the National Archives, *Timi - Torontal County Prefecture* fund, files 76-78/1941; they talk about the common budgets of the Jews in the entire Timi - Torontal county, who are gathered in

Timi oara ,”probably in view of ulterior deportations”). The first operations were to start in the border towns of Romania of that time, i.e. Turda, Arad, Timi oara – towns and cities where, along Romanians, an important segment of Hungarian-speaking Jewish population was living. The local office of the Jewish Central was aware of the deportation imminent operation, especially because they were warned about the elaboration of name lists of the Jewish population by gender, ages, occupation (*Idem*). Following the repeated discussions between Ion and Mihai Antonescu, on the one hand, and representatives of the Reich’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on the other hand, a consensus was reached about the deportation plan. However, this plan was delayed, even if the Romanian-German agreements of November 1941 were favourable to immediate transports of Jews to Poland. Radu Lecca succeeded in delaying and postponing this inhumane nightmare. During a visit to Berlin, the representative of the Jewish interests in the Government of Romania was treated with arrogance by the German Minister of Foreign Affairs. Lecca counter-worked the initial plans of the agreement. The temporisation and implementation of the plan was inapplicable for other reasons also: the Nazi camps were not prepared to comprise such a numerous Jewish population in the first phase of the war, although Hitler had already designed the “final solution”.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of March 1941 Romania adopted the “Law of the expropriation of the Jews’ urban assets”, decree law offering a minimum annual annuity guaranteed by the state, and brought serious damage to a wide category of Jews. Before the adoption of this discriminating act, Ion Antonescu’s government, that had engaged Romania to the German Reich economically and militarily, considered that such a measure was taken for the purpose of establishing the historic rights of the Romanian nation,

with the intention of “returning to the national and Christian tradition in the conception of property”. It was a form of materialisation of the nationalist spirit in the domain of property, of definitive connection of Romania to the nationalist spirit haunting the Europe of that time. The leaders of the Romanian State were persuaded that by this legal act the Romanian people were not only the supporter of an artificial and superficial nationalism, but had identified the mirage of the “recovery of the most authentic Romanian past” (Benjamin, L., 1993, pp.132-133). The Romanisation of all the fields of economic and social life was the way for accomplishing the doctrine and theoretic nationalism supported since not long ago by the elite of the inter-war Romanian intellectuals. We refer here to the elites of the Romanian intellectuals who had become the ideologues of the Legionary Movement: Nae Ionescu, Nichifor Crainic, Emil Cioran, Mircea Eliade, Mircea Vulc nescu, Constantin Noica and Petre u ea.

In the entire war period, Marshal Ion Antonescu cultivated an anti-liberal legislation, which affected the Jews’ freedoms of existence and action, especially for oriented towards liberal professions. This war legislation economically restrained the Banat Jews, both from the material viewpoint, and the psychological perspective. Numerous expropriations produced in the rural area by the local authorities looted the Jewish capital, the wealth of the Jewish minority members being transferred to the property of the Romanian State, initially through custodians. Consequently, the Decree-Law no. 233, published in the Official Gazette on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October 1940, stipulated the obligation of transferring the Jewish properties to the patrimony of the state. Following the application of this legal act, huge mobile and real estate assets of the Jews from the following localities: Jimbolia, Reca , Deta, Giulv z, Lipova, Vinga, Buzia , Ciclova, Sânicolaul Mare

and Timi oara, were nationalised. This decree-law was imposed by the Ministry of National Economy, being implemented by the prefects of the counties in Banat, and the mayors and gendarmes subordinated to them. This state of things can be certified by the categorical warning of doctor Murgu, the prefect of Timi County, which clarified that in Timi oara one had to observe to the last detail the instructions comprised in the *Law of the expropriation of agricultural assets*. The Jews' farming machinery, livestock, houses and lands are to be transferred to the state possession. The same local authority warned on the fact that the liquidation of the commerce fund had to be regulated by a separate disposition. (Timi County Service of the National Archives, *Timi County Prefecture* fund, file no. 10/1940, f. 5-6) The order of the Timid prefect, transmitted to the Timisoara authorities on the 11<sup>th</sup> October 1940, regarded the expropriation of the rural assets of the Jews, order addressed to the Mayor of Timisoara, the Mayor of Lipova, as well as the Legion of Gendarmes. Another discriminating legal act was the Decree-Law no. 3.810/17 November 1940, stipulating the expropriation of the Jews' industrial assets of the rural communities. On the ground of this legal act, they were robbed of their forest sawmills, baize feeding installations, spirit factories, mills or oil factories. (*Idem*, file no. 11/1940, f. 1-30) The operation of inventorying the industrial assets of the rural area started on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January 1941. In the same stage the authorities proceeded to the expropriation of forests and factories owned by local Jews. Such properties were spoiled in the localities F get, Reca , Lugoj, Buzia , Caransebe , Ciacova, Margina, Periam, Pecica, G taia, Arad, Pesac, Sânicolaul Mare, Timi oara and Jimbolia. (*Idem*, file no. 10/1940, f. 20)

Whereas the Carlist legislation eliminated the stipulation of the democratic Constitution of 1923, the Antonescian legislation will totally serve

the reconstruction of the national economy following the Legionary looting, and then the support for the front. In this respect, we may speak of a discriminating and racial legislation as regards the Jewish minority. During the entire war period, Antonescu attempted to delay the "final solution", of the mass physical extermination of the Jews, solution proposed and fully experimented by Hitler. This "solution" came after the failure of the project of the "Jewish reservation", according to the "Madagascar plan", and after the Reich decided that, in all regions under Germany's control or influence, the Jews must be evacuated to the East. Antonescu embraced, with some reluctance and delay, the idea of deporting the Jewish population to the so-called "Bug zone".

The Banat Jews also suffered as a result of trans-Nistrean deportations. There was in the historic Banat a thin segment of Jewish population – intellectuals, a small category of traders or craftsmen – who showed support for the Marxist ideology, for the social-democracy or communist movements. This "minority" of the Banat minority group sporadically participated in the reunions of the left circles, in conference and lectures given by Marxist ideologues. They sometime discussed and exercised a sort of "salon Marxism" in the rather well-off circles of the Jews living in Timi oara, Arad and Lugoj. We may say that this "affinity" for the communist spirit in the province was due to the implementation of the anti-Jewish legislation and the coercive dispositions: expropriation of assets, elimination from service, forced labour detachments, forced requisitions of material and money means for the support of the front, the permanent menace with deportation and extermination.

The documents illustrate that the police of the Timi -Torontal County has been compiling lists with the names of communist adherents since the years 1934-1940. They were joined during the war by

those who could not pay the fiscal obligations, those incriminated by crimes of speculation, those indicted for so-called crimes of sabotage, under suspicion of false health motives and those who were excepted from the public interest labour. Among the Jews deported from Banat, as well as from other areas of Romania, we find also this segment of population with communist views. Dislodged to Transnistria, they were subjected to a scary life regime. The memoirs of Rabbi Alexandru Safran, confirmed by documents, speak about the inhumane life in the "Bug zone": many of the deported died of hunger, exhaustion, massacred by bayonet strikes, as well as the absence of medical and social assistance (Safran, Al., 1996, p. pp. 112-116.). We do not have exact figures regarding the number of these segments of Banat Jewish population who were deported to the trans-Nistrean ghettos.

Timi oara substantially grew in population after 1940, as the Jews living in the rural environment were forcibly merged in this county capital. The same thing happened in the other Banat towns. The real cause of this forced population transfer was related to supervision, and also to the possibility to rapidly solve the foreseen deportation to the Poland-based camps. The orders of the Minister of National Economy sent to the Timi oara Chamber of Commerce exactly render the institution of the state control on the legal situation of each Banat Jew. By simplifying the message of these political endeavours, the order of the Minister of National Economy can be structured along the following directions: the removal of some categories of Jews from the Boards of Directors of the firms with public and private capital, the reduction of the number of those who sold alcohol, especially in the rural area, the reduction of the Jews' role in the editorial professions (Romanian books, newspapers and magazines, copiers of Romanian printing materials). (The Timi County Service of National

Archives, *Timi-Torontal County Prefecture* fund, file 107/1940, f. 11) These details suggest the fear of Bucharest in relation with the ownership and use of the propaganda means by the Jewish minority in this area. The fear proved to be false for two reasons: first, if the Banat Jews were connected to a political ideal, it could be only Zionism (The Banat and Transylvania Jews were aware of the need for a new form of political organisation, different from the goals they had in the period of the Austrian - Hungarian dualism, forms based on different principles and purposes meant to guarantee their survival and cohabitation with the Banat Romanians, so that they could reach a unity of their movement. The constitution of their own state was conceived by the Romanian ethnic group in the inter-war period as a symbol of the idea of liberation. The process of Jews emancipation started immediately after the formation of the Romanian unitary state. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 1923, a reunion of Jews in Timi oara laid the foundation of a decided Zionist orientation, but such a policy supported by the Banat Jews did not mean a lack of loyalty to the interests of the Romanian state. In the first post-war stage, under the jurisdiction of the Romanian state, the Banat Jews felt the need to have their own representation organism, not necessarily due to multiculturalism and plurilinguism specific to this area, but for reasons of preserving their own identity. Politically, they initially joined the Romanian National Party (later become the National Peasants' Party) and the Hungarian Party, but they soon realised their interest would not be supported in the Romanian Parliament, even if in the 1927 and 1928 elections they get two seats in the supreme legislative forum. We must point out that the historian Hildrum Glass speaks about a fertile German-Jewish cohabitation in Banat during the entire period 1918-1938, cohabitation affected and damaged during the political regime of Charles the Second and of Marshal Ion

Antonescu); second, for the Banat Jews the liberal doctrine was totally appropriate, situation that justifies their material state, much more well off than the situation of the in the Old Kingdom. We believe that by their liberal activities, ranging from the banking domain to the industrial field, both in the urban and rural area, during the entire inter-war period, the Banat Jews contributed to the economic development, much more accelerated in the Banat area compared to other historic regions of Romania.

Because of the suspicion and distrust in relation with the loyalty of the Banat Jews toward the Romanian State, they were to be gradually eliminated from their positions of clerks in public office in mayor offices, prefectures and other local or county administrative-public institutions. (*Idem*, file no. 107/1940, f. 15) Consequently, the Jews are reorganised, instituting an intermediary representation between them and the county authorities. Thus, in the case of Timi oara city, several outstanding personalities of community public life formed a commission of social and political dialogue made of dr. Al. Nobel, dr. Samuel Ligeti, dr. Izidor Tenner, Victor Auscher, Al. Rosenfeld and Carol Reiter. (*Idem*, file no. 71/1940, f. 24-25) As a rule, the documents of the time exhibit references related to the philo-Hungarian or pro-Communist attitude of the Jewish population, aspects written down in numerous counterintelligence bulletins of the Timi oara Prefecture, of different localities in the Timi -Torontal and Cara -Severin county, even if most of these documents contain the adaptation of the local Jews to the Romanian state life.

During the war dictatorship, suspicion had become the labelling form of Banat Jews' condition, with a permanent mistrust toward the political-legal status of the south-western country Jews, who were evaluated as potential traitors. From Lipova, on the 27<sup>th</sup> January 1940, a counterintelligence bulletin justified the attitude of local authorities

toward this minority:"Some of them (Jews, *our note*) have deep attachments to the Hungarian people, being even members in the Hungarian party, showing their sentiments and attachment towards the Hungarians. The others have an attitude of expectation, waiting for further development of events. Despite the trend started in Hungary (The reference makes appeal to the anti-Jews laws adopted in Hungary in 1939. Thus, the Daranyi Kalman ruling eliminated the right of Jews to liberal professions (first law); the second law limited the civil and economic rights of Jews on purely racial criteria, reducing to only 6% the right of their participation in the public life; about the putting into application of these laws in the concrete case of Arad Jews, see Maria Dinescu, *Bloody decalogue*, Ara Publishing House, Bucharest, 1995) as regards their removal, both from office and from the other institutions and enterprises, their loyalty towards the Romanian State cannot be established with certainty." (The Timi County Service of National Archives, *Prefecture of Timi -Torontal County* fund, file no. 107/1940, f. 46, 231) The documents call them "propagandists" or "espionage agents" in order to underline the danger for the internal order of the Romanian state. In reality, such formulas were inventions of the Romanian authorities in order to justify the tough measures against the Jews, refugees in Banat because of persecutions suffered in Slovakia, the Ukraine, Poland and Hungary.

The solution of Jewish traders' removal, especially those from the rural area, but also of the Jews in public office, is clearly expressed in a confidential document transmitted from Reca , in January 1940: "They seem more faithful to the Romanian state (the traders, *our note*), but when it comes to sacrifice they are mean and cheap and even defy, by their conduct, any type of actions: requisitions, aid for concentrated troops etc. The trend to remark among this ethnic group is

identical with the slogan: *Ubi bene, ibi Patria*. We find among them more affinities for Hungarians and Germans than for Romanians and the Romanian State. Hitlerism or another regime is not dangerous for Jews, it would be more dangerous to let them get too rich and do no sacrifice. The existence of many Jews in the countryside is a danger for the peasants with whom they come in contact. That is why the ideal solution would be their elimination, as far as possible, from among the villagers. As regards the Jews in public office, they are not different from the Jewish traders and here the same solution should be applied.” (*Idem*, f. 40)

The discriminatory legislation issued by Antonescu’s regime maintained even more intensely the Jewish persecution in Banat. There are numerous testimonies confirming that in the period 1940-1944 the education legislation became a segregationist and inequitable instrument in this corner of the country. Consequently, the Polytechnic School of Timi oara, but also the other Banat State institutions no longer schooled Jewish ethnic students during the last two nationalist governments. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May 1941, in a report addressed to the head of the state, President of the Council of Ministries, Mihai Antonescu, detailed the name and purpose of the institution that was to materialise the decisions of the nationalist decisions in the direction of Romanisation: the National Centre of Romanisation (*Official Gazette* no.102, part I, of May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1941, pp.2328-2329).

The regime of forced labour will be subordinated here also to the process of general mobilisation and of front deployment. The order to evacuate the Jews from the rural area to the urban area with no. 4/47/21 June 1941, issued by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, aimed at gathering those ethnic citizens in urban centres in order to be more easily monitored in accordance with the needs of the front. The second point of this order mentioned: “All Jewish families, living in

the villages of the rest of the country, will be evacuated with what is necessary for their living, in the urban communes of the territory of the respective county, by the care of the prefects in the county. The evacuation of these families (...) will be made within 48 hours from the reception of the order.” (The Archive of the Ministry of National Defence, *General Staff* fund, Section I, file no. 2410, f. 270) This order was transmitted to the prefect of the Banat counties and in Southern Transylvania, and by its application brought a very serious harm of the Jewish properties in the area by their vandalisation by the locals. The Jews from Cara were “concentrated”, starting with October 1940, in Oravi a. Most of the “deported” came from Re i a, Caransebe , Boc a-Vasiova, Anina, Cara ova etc. Their real estate was requisitioned for the benefit of the army. The regime of forced labour was extended to the Cara Jews between October 1940 and August 1944. The persons mobilised for forced labour provided public utility services in Oravi a: cleaning roads and spaces in public institutions, food market, activities at the military garrison mess (especially women), snow removal in the town. They performed operations of derating and sewage repairs, forestry labour in the saw mills at Li ava and Ciclova. In the years 1942 and 1943, a significant segment of the Jewish men in the Oravi a concentration area were moved, under the regime of military jurisdiction, to labour of trenched digging in the area of the Prut and P uli –Arad front, as well as the repair of the railway network in the Predeal area (The information was provided by Novac Marta Margareta, daughter of Perlgrund Leo, residing in Boc a–Cara -Severin, pensioner of the Forestry inspectorate Cara -Severin. We admit that Marta Novac was the stepdaughter of Mrs. Sarolta Leonne Perlgrund, a survivor of the Auschwitz extermination camp, who died in Satu Mare in 2000. In an interview of March 18<sup>th</sup> 2003, she said that in 1940

she was living in Cara ova and all Jewish families of her native locality were “deported”, within 24 hours, to Oravi a, with the bare necessities. Here, the deported Jews were forbidden to go into stores, to shop, to attend the school in the locality – interdiction in vigour in Timi also, according to Mrs. Novac’s testimony. The only freedom was related to the exercise of the Mosaic cult; food was very poor, but the local Romanian proved to be very humane.)

By the Decree Law no.1003/5 November 1941, published in the “Official Gazette” no. 272/1941, the General inspectorate of the Camps and Labour Columns was established. Eliminated from offices and jobs and forcibly dislodged to the labour camps in the county capitals (Timi oara, Arad, Oravi a), the Banat Jews were then organised in detachments of forced labour (Timi County Service of National Archives, Prefecture of the Timi –Torontal County fund, file no.19/1942, f.17,19,28,30,33,97,190), where, despite all vicissitudes, they exhibited exceptional group solidarity (Archive of the Jewish Community of Timi oara, file no. 78/1944).

The Banat and Ardeal Jews were suspected of disloyalty towards the Romanian state, by the fact they could become spies, being Hungarian and German language speakers, prejudice that fed the hostility and inhumane treatment in the forced labour centres. The personal work charts of the persons concentrated in labour camps, as well as the testimonies of the Jews mobilised in these centres, speak about the treatment of officers, soldiers and doctors towards them. Within detachment no. 102 of Ghiroc, Arad county, according to the testimonies of some Jews interned there, the regime of the labour had become unbearable: skin naked beatings, mocking behaviour of the army, that ensured the guard and order of the centre, the unjustified incarceration, the so-called inquisition chambers, the perpetual menace with the deportation to

the Trans-Nistean region, application of a “correction” of 25-70 hits, inhumane accommodation conditions etc. From the evidence it also results that here also, like in other places, no law or regulation was in vigour related to the detachment of forced labour, all being arbitrary, at the latitude of commanders (*Idem*, file no.102 (additional). Diverse documents, years 1943-1944, f.115-132). Starting with 1942, the Central of Romania’s Jews was engaged in the requisitioning of food, clothes, drugs and money, means necessary to the maintenance of the life of the deported to Trans-Nistean regions, as well as the labour centres of forced labour. There were also modalities of pecuniary payments for the exemption from forced labour (Timi County Service of National Archives, Prefecture of Timi –Torontal County fund, file no.78/1944, f.147-158).

The Zionist Organisation of Romania supported the project of financial and material mutual aid of the deported. Despite this attitude, the Ministry of Internal Affairs disposed the destruction of the propaganda material, required to promote the money raisers for the support of Jews emigration to Palestine or the mutual aid for those deported to Transnistria: “Consequently, as one of the notes wrote, no propaganda will be allowed in the future for the purpose of collecting money from the part of the Jewish organisation, neither for the fund of Palestine rebuilding, nor for the preparation of heir emigration to this country.” (*Idem*, f. 162) The strengthening of the anti-Semite measures of the Antonescu regime had to fight a certain “passive” resistance to the forced labour regime – by low productiveness – but also a strong opposition in the case of the liberal bourgeoisie, and we should mention here the famous case of Baron Franz von Neumann (Francisc Neumann).

We shall insist on this endeavour, on this exceptional contribution of this man’s personality, who put his life in the service of the protection of his ethnic

group in such a coercive historical period for this Arad minority. The great Arad entrepreneur benefited from notoriety not only in his native town, but also on the regional and even national level. We must remember that this Jew with liberal views, Franz von Neumann, was, between 1938-1940, the main shareholder and manager of the Arad Textile Factory, one of the largest factories of its kind in Romania (Arad County Service of National Archives, Textile Factory fund, Inventory no.105. Documentary acts with permanent preservation time for the years 1908-1955). The company was founded in 1909 with a social capital of 2,200,000 crowns, and Adolf Neumann Jr. was among its first shareholders. In 1938, the shareholders Carol Neumann and Eduard Neumann empowered Franz Neumann as main entrepreneur of the Arad company (I.T.A.). Thus, until the decree of nationalisation of 1948, this personality remained "the head" of this factory, a skilful supporter of the concept of civil society (*Idem.*). Franz von Neumann – grace to his knowledge of the languages spoken in the area and of languages of international circulation, to excellent management and marketing plans he applied in his famous "Ar deana" warehouses (in Bucharest, Craiova, Cluj) – was recognised as a great local and national industrialist. The "Ar deana" employees were very attached to their employer for many reasons, such as: much more beneficial salary conditions than in other similar enterprises, granting of job dwellings (a premiere for the Romania of that time), the professional promotion that was not impeded by ethnic origin criteria. The Arad owner got very closely involved in the establishment of a cultural-sport association of city interest (the first soccer stadium built according to international standards, the football team "I.T.A." who would become famous in the years 1946-1947, the tennis court on the Mure river shore).

Undoubtedly, the image of this businessman's personality, artisan of the Arad town, could not be ignored and had an important say in the defence of the Jewish staff in his factory, of the Arad Jews and of the Jews in the entire Banat. Neumann was among the Jews who opposed the discriminating politics of the Antonescian regime, and one of his first attitudes was that of systematically rejecting the measures of companies' Romanisation. The documents from the Arad archive prove that the manager and the administration of "Ar deana" were in a permanent harassment with the local authorities in view of annulling the dispositions of the Central Romanisation Office (Timi County Service of National Archives, *Prefecture of Timi-Torontal County* fund, file no.12/1941,f.14, 15, 23, 24, 32, 41, 54, 66, 77). The administrative service of the Arad firm will promptly respond to the Romanisation attempts decided by the Government, for which strong arguments were brought forward: the importance of the factory in the ensemble of the regional and national economy, the significant volume of international contracts, the contribution of Jewish technicians to the flexibility of the firm management, the volume and value of the industrial output obtained in time. In order to exemplify the above, we shall quote a fragment of the correspondence addressed to the labour control inspector, on the 19<sup>th</sup> of January 1942: "We the undersigned Textile Industry Ar deana S.A., headquarters in Arad, str. Poetului nr. 1-C, belong to the 4<sup>th</sup> police precinct according to the dispositions of article 10, par. 3 of the Law for the Romanisation of the personnel employed in companies, published in the Official Gazette no. 270 of the 16th November 1940, as well as the instructions of the Central Romanisation Office no. 5 of the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 1942 and of your notification from the local newspapers, we have the honour to forward you the present application, asking you to intervene at the Central

Romanisation Office within the Ministry of Labour to approve the keeping in office of our Jewish staff, in number of 35 clerks and 35 workers” (*Idem*, file no.12/1941-1942, f.77). We must specify that there are numerous notifications, even accompanied by lists with the names of the Jewish employees, requiring the keeping of their jobs during the war. These notifications expressed arguments related to the solid preparation of the corps of Jewish clerks, engineers and workers in the factory, aspect that could not be eluded without bringing serious loss to the firm. The government had decided, as a rule, in the first stage of the Romanisation process, that each Jewish employee should be doubled in his activity by a Romanian one, but neither this stipulation could bring about the expected results. Despite the coercion, the Jewish employees continued to remain indispensable at Textila Ar deana (*Idem*, f.13). Baron von Neumann succeeded in his interventions not only to delay the exclusion of Jews from the factory, but even to be granted the right to keep them. Following numerous requests at the Council of Ministries, he will obtain the proof necessary for each employed Jew, meaning a card guaranteeing the holder the capacity of employee in the factory (*Idem*, f. 85-116). We encountered on file the provisional certificate of forced labour exemption of the Jewish personnel. On each certificate issued by the General Inspectorate of Labour Camps and Columns a photo was applied, even Neumann was forced to get such a certificate, in *Idem*, f.168-169). The issue of these certificates-cards explained the fact that the textile industry was indispensable in war times, “Ar deana” satisfying most of the demand of the Romanian army equipment. Baron Franz Neumann knew quite a few things about the corruption and bribery in the Legionary administration, and especially at the Ministry of Labour. This is what the Minister of Labour wrote in one of the

resolutions: “considering the economic interests of the country we approve the demand until the issue of the Romanisation law, on condition to be doubled (the Jews, *our note*)...A national plan of Romanisation will be presented on the date of the apparition of the Official Gazette (*Idem*, f.66). Eugen incai, the local general inspector of Romanisation, will attempt to put Neumann in difficulty, proposing his doubling with an employee of the Arad factory. The baron will exceed this impediment also, knowing the corruption of the clerks in public office of the regime, and relying on his influential role, he succeeded in annihilating the intention of the Arad inspector. Thus, a notification, dated on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May 1943 of the Central Office of Romanisation, announced engineer incai that: “the Jew Neumann Francisc” is “undoubtable” (*Idem*, file no.23/1943, f.48). The documentary information proves that the relational system of Nuemann worked perfectly, that they could not ignore the services of his factory. Moreover, his activity is courageous also as regards the fact that Arad, with his outskirts (for instance Podgoria) as well as several neighbouring localities (Lipova, Ghiroc, Rudna) were not lacking Legionary activity.

By the direct involvement of Radu Lecca and of Rabbi Safran, the more discreet interventions of Baron Neumann and of Archbishop B lan of Ardeal, they succeeded in annulling the disposition of deporting Banat and Ardeal Jews in the Poland-based camps. The Jews from Southern Transylvania and Banat will remain under pressure until August 1942, moment when the annulment of their deportation order was obtained (Safran, *Al.,op.cit.*, pp. 147-149). Rabbi Safran, in his memoirs, does not mention at all the contribution of Baron Neumann in the blocking of this order. In exchange, the same Rabbi mentioned how the idea occurred to him to contact Archbishop B lan, the head of the Orthodox Church of

Ardeal, convincing him to intervene at Marshal Antonescu in order to save the Jews of the two historic Romanian regions.

R. Hilberg considered that Franz Neumann was behind this salvation plan for the Jews. He was reported to offer to a high official of the Antonescu Cabinet the amount of 400 million lei, destined to the Romanian army (Hilberg, R., 1967, p. pp. 257 – 266 ). It is difficult to prove today if this is the way things “happened”, even if bribery and commissions are traditions among Romanians even since the period of the Fanar regime. Neumann’s contribution in stopping the deportation to the Polish camps seems to be a much more complex effort. Neumann's contribution to the stopping of deportations to Polish camps seems to have been a much more complex effort. We must take into consideration that he had serious connections with the American Jews, where his father had emigrated for a long time; on the other hand, this Arad Jew can be associated also with the activity of the Clandestine Council of Jews in Bucharest, where the chief Rabbi Safran played an equally important role, at least.

This Jewish organism, acting in “illegality” in Bucharest had already found out from accurate sources about the imminent deportation of the Jews of Southern Transylvania and Banat, as the following had been alerted: King Michael, the Mother Queen, the Ambassador of Switzerland at Bucharest, the Chairman of the High Court of Justice and the Papal Nuncio (Safran, Al., op.cit., pp152-157). It is probable that Neumann came across this piece of information, either by his direct connections with the Government representative, or through the clandestine Council. Our hypothesis – related to the role of Archbishop Nicolae Bălan – it is that he was in close relations both with Rabbi Safran, and with Neumann, and in his intervention at Antonescu he must have represented and defended the position of the two. There is also the variant that Franz von Neumann had intervened on the

line of Radu Lecca, aspect unknown or ignored by Al. Safran. Immediately after the end of the Second World War, Baron Franz von Neumann, the entrepreneur of “Ar deana”, migrated to the USA.

Anyway, the events of 1942-1943 related to the deportation of the Jews cannot be treated in a simple manner. Antonescu’s regime elaborated, adopted and applied an anti-Jewish legislation, sometimes with segregationist excess, but it was him also who stopped deportations and decided the return of the Jews to the country, allowed, despite the rigours of the time, the migration of the Jews to Palestine, although he assimilated in principle the Nazi ideology in the “Jewish issue”, organising the camps in Transnistria (the historian Raul Hilberg speaks about 101 colonies), accepting and disposing the massacre of Odessa (Stoenescu, M., A., (1998, pp. 340-445). Despite all the above we cannot ignore the fact that 57% of the Romanian Jews survived the war, which represented the most important percentage of survives in Central and Eastern Europe. Only in this respect, attenuating somehow the consequences of anti-Jew politics, the mentality, tolerance and humanity or the Romanian population played a special part in the destiny of a people, then discriminated, decimated and without country.

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