

**POST-COMMUNIST HISTORIANS ON ION ANTONESCU  
AND HIS AUTHORITARIAN REGIME IN ROMANIA 1940 – 1944**

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**General History Master Thesis  
University of Jyväskylä  
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**Abstract**

Present thesis is political history. It is a study on post-communist Romanian historical writing on the historic figure of Ion Antonescu and his dictatorial rule in Romania between September 1940 and August 1944. The thesis purpose is to find out how mainstream Romanian historians, both individually and as a group phenomenon, are addressing these topics currently due to the fact that both Antonescu and his rule have been two subjects almost entirely forbidden in Communist Romania to national historical research. Basic methodology is evaluating relativism the author interpreting the interpretations by historians. The approach is individualizing and generalizing at the same time in order to identify both interpretive differentiations and main orientation by mainstream historians. Sources used are study-articles published by them after the fall of Communism in 1989, since 1995 in particular, in specialized journals. Chapters 2 and 5 deal with Antonescu's official portrait and the current debate around his figure. Chapters 3 and 4 deal with the *Legionnaire Regime* ( September 1940 – January 1941 ) and *Antonescu Military Regime* ( January 1941 – August 1944 ). The perception of Antonescu and his regime by Romanian historians has changed in the last ten years. Antonescu was a nationalist and not a fascist dictator. He was indeed chauvinistic and anti-Semitic, but he was not a racist in the proper term. His regime was authoritarian indeed, but, between 1941 and 1944 it was about a dictatorship and not about a totalitarian state.

**Keywords**

Post-Communist Romanian historians, Wartime Romania, Ion Antonescu, Legionnaire State, Iron Guard, Military Regime, Romanian Jews, Romanian Opposition, Anti-Soviet War

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## **Tiivistelmä**

Tämä pro-gradu työ käsittelee poliittista historiaa. Tutkimuksen aiheena on kommunismin jälkeinen romanialainen historiankirjoitus, koskien Ion Antonescua ja hänen diktaattorista hallintoansa Romaniassa syyskuusta 1940 elokuuhun 1944. Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on löytää vastaus siihen, miten romanialaiset valtavirran historiijoitsijat sekä yksilöllisesti että ryhmäilmiönä käsittelevät aihetta nykypäivänä, otten huomioon sen, että Antonescu ja hänen hallintonsa ovat olleet kommunistisen Romanian historian kirjoituksessa kaksi lähes kokonaan kiellettyä aihetta. Pää tutkimusmenetelmänä on arvosteleva relativismi, tekijän tulkitessa toisten tulkintoja. Tekijän lähestymistapa samalla yksilöllistää ja yleistää aihetta, jotta valtavirran historiijoitsijoiden eri näkökulmat ja historiankirjoituksen suuntaviiva tulisi esille. Lähteinä on pääasiallisesti käytetty historiaan erikoistuneiden aikakauslehtien artikkeleita, jotka on julkaistu kommunismin jälkeisellä ajalla, voutesta 1989, ja erityisesti vouden 1995 jälkeen. Kappaleet kaksi ja viisi käsittelevät Antonescun julkista, virallista kuvaa ja hänen hahmoonsa liittyvää nykyistä keskustelua. Kappaleet kolme ja neljä käsittelevät *Rautakaartin hallintoa* ( Syyskuu 1940 – Tammikuu 1941 ) ja *Antonescun sotilashallintoa* ( Tammikuu 1941 – Elokuu 1944 ). Romanialaisten historiijoitsijoiden näkökulmat Antonescusta ja hänen hallinnostaan ovat muuttuneet viimeisen kymmenen vuoden aikana. Antonescu oli nationalistinen diktaattori, muttei fasisti. Hän oli ulkomaalais- ja juutalaisvastainen, muttei varsinainen rasisti. Hänen hallintonsa oli tammikuusta 1941 lähtien diktaattorinen, muttei totalitaarinen.

## **Avainsanat**

Kommunismin jälkeiset romanialaishistoriijoitsijat, Sota-ajan Romania, Ion Antonescu, Rautakaartin hallinto, Sotilashallinto, Romanian juutalaiset, Romanian Oppositio, Sodan Neuvostoliittoa vastaan

## CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1. Seeking for a Confiscated History.....	1-2
1.2. Research Problems.....	2-5
1.3. Sources.....	6-14
2. ION ANTONESCU – A SHORT BIOGRAPHY.....	15-19
3. ANTONESCU AND THE IRON GUARDSMEN SEPTEMBER 1940 – JANUARY 1941.....	20
3.1. Antonescu’s Seizure of Power.....	20-32
3.2. A Week of Waiting for the General.....	32-35
3.3. The Romanian Legionnaire Nation-State: A Body with Two Heads.....	35-54
3.4. The Legionnaire Rebellion, 21st – 23rd January 1941.....	54-68
4. POLITICAL LIFE DURING ANTONESCU MILITARY REGIME FEBRUARY 1941 – AUGUST 1944.....	68-69
4.1. Antonescu Administration.....	69-92
4.2. Antonescu and the Romanian Jews.....	93-107
4.3. Party Life during Antonescu Military Regime.....	108-152
4.4. Romania’s Anti-Soviet War and Antonescu’s Armistice Talks.....	153-183
4.5. The 23rd August 1944 Coup by King Michael I – Antonescu’s Fall.....	184-191
5. THE 1946 TRIAL OF ANTONESCU AND THE PRESENT DEBATE AROUND HIS CONTROVERSIAL FIGURE.....	192-199
6. CONCLUSIONS.....	200-209
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	210-217
APPENDICES	

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Seeking for a Confiscated History

The over forty-year long and tense period ideologically dividing the two halves of the European continent, commonly known as the *Cold War*, came to an end with the successive collapses of the communist states all over Eastern Europe and Soviet Union, between 1989 and 1991. The *New Democracies*, as the former socialist countries are generally named in the West, embarked on a painful process of transition from the centrally planned economy of the Party-State towards the market economy of the parliamentary democracy of the Rule of Law. It is a move back from real Socialism to market Capitalism, a process never experienced before in history. Hence, the enormous social, political, economic, cultural, and psychological problems which the former communist states, and their citizens, are still facing in their march towards the setting up of a welfare state on western standards.

Within this process, scientific research, too, started to be organized, as a *sine qua non* factor of progress, on new standards of quality, efficiency, and competence in most of these countries. Bound by the circumstances to come to terms with one's own recent past in order to better understand the present and to look to the future, an overall historiographic boom is taking place everywhere in the region. The new political changes which occurred after 1989 set post-communist historical writing the difficult task of having to almost entirely revise contemporary national history. The reinterpretation of the historical events, so distorted over forty years by the communist ideology, on objective criteria is not an easy goal to achieve, but serious efforts have been done with remarkable outcomes in all these states alike.

Romanian new historiography is no exception, dealing in its turn with these problems. One of them is constituted by the existing blind spot in national history as regards the period 1940 – 1944, the time when Romania was at war with the Soviet Union on the Axis side, and under the authoritarian rule of General Ion Antonescu. The anti-Soviet war was an official taboo under Communism, the rare studies on the issue being ideologically motivated and in conformity with Moscow's directives. Only towards the end of the *Ceausescu Era* did some better documented and more objective studies, written by military historians, see the light of day in small issues.

Thus, how Antonescu and his regime are seen by the new Romanian historiography might constitute an interesting research target for an eventual study.

## 1.2. Research Problems

As a Romanian born, a student in history, and an individual previously brainwashed by the former communist historiography, we were profoundly touched after having read, in early 1998, the large article dedicated by Dan Amedeo Lăzărescu, not only a senior lawyer and liberal politician, but also a distinguished historian and a contemporary of the Second World War events, to Ion Antonescu and his 1940 – 1944 authoritarian regime in Romania. In the introduction of his 1997 article, among other things, Lăzărescu writes as follows:

” ... Romanian People was not allowed either to write its own history, or to set up an organic political and intellectual elite capable of keeping alive the torch of national feeling. The few survivors of the old Romanian School of National History, *rari nantes in gurgite vasto*, also contemporaries to the events which are today incriminated with an excessive wrongdoing and a manifest lack of opportunity and objectivity, have the supreme duty to tell the truth. Now, at more than half a century distance from the incriminated events, our duty is to use the historical methodology called by Rafael Collingwood, the great British historian and philosopher, *reenactment*. Obviously inspired by the previous well-known exigency called *verstehen* by the great German historian and philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey, the concept of *reenactment* asks historian to set himself in the very nuanced situation of the historic figure(s) who’s biography he’s doing his best to reconstitute, *sine ira et studio*. First thing to do is, that we should scornfully eliminate the series of errors and falsifications brought in by the pseudohistorians who, at Stalin’s order, had swooped upon Romanian People’s past, present, and future, and upon the dead body of the Romanian society deprived of its elites...”<sup>1</sup>

In the end, we took the decision to see in the words above a personal challenge, after having been continuously obsessed by them for a certain time. Consequently, present thesis is the outcome of all these efforts. In other words, Lăzărescu’s article, on which we shall return on several occasions, can be seen as its original source of inspiration.

Present thesis is political history, as its title might well suggest. From the start, two major clarifications are in place before any further proceedings. First, post-communist Romanian historical writing equates in this study with post-communist historiography, new historiography, post-communist historians, or mainstream historians. Second, as a whole, the author understands by

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<sup>1</sup> Lăzărescu, O chestiune de drept: sare pe rana deschisă, Aldine, Nr. 93, 6 decembrie 1997, p. I.

post-communist historical writing the works written on sound scientific criteria, and published by: 1) Non-Marxist Romanian historians after 1990; 2) Marxist Romanian historians after 1990; 3) Romanian historians, or of Romanian origin, abroad after 1990; 4) Romanian historians, or of Romanian origin, in exile outside Romania and Communist World before 1990; 5) Western historians specialized in Romanian history before and after 1990. Thus, a quite loose notion which, although being not very strictly bound to time and space, it has, nevertheless, two common guidelines for all its components: the scientific criterion and the writing in freedom conditions.

The thesis is basically a study on post-communist Romanian historiography about Ion Antonescu and his 1940 – 1944 authoritarian regime in Romania. We should mention here, that mainstream historians haven't said yet their final word neither on the person of Antonescu, nor on his political regime, the analysis of the numerous official documents of the period being a time-consuming endeavour. Consequently, the thesis reflects the present stage of research. Therefore, our own interpretation ( i.e., economic matters ) of some aspects less commented by mainstream historians, but suggested by the very documents brought in circulation by them, should be understood rather as a research on post-communist historiography than our own independent investigation on Antonescu and his regime.

Methodologically, it means that two approaches are used by us, at the same time, throughout the thesis. Mainstream historians are seen within each chapter both as individuals, and as a group. In the first case, their singularity comes out through their own, more or less different, viewpoints on every aspect under analysis. Their spiritual, or political background is suggested by us in the critical introduction to the sources, occasionally also within the thesis, in order to understand the eventual motivations behind their writings, by having in mind here Collingwood's *reenactment* concept. In the second case, thinking more of Dilthey's *verstehen*, they are seen by us as a group phenomenon, with the emphasis on their common views on each aspect under analysis, that is, as representing the main orientation of post-communist historical writing for the time being on each particular aspect related to Antonescu and his regime, which is expressed as final conclusions in each chapter and, as a general conclusion, at the end of the thesis. Thus, our approach is both individualizing and generalizing at the same time. Moreover, we have to say that, because our study here is on post-communist historiography about Antonescu Regime and not our own investigation on it, we are bound by rather an evaluating relativism than objectivism in our approach. In other words, since we

are dealing here with interpretive judgements by other people ( mainstream historians ) on historic figures ( Ion Antonescu ), events ( coups, uprisings ), chains of events ( Second World War, Anti-Soviet War ), and phenomena ( Legionnaire Regime, Antonescu Military Regime ), the evaluation by us of their interpretations should be seen in first as representing our personal opinions and conclusions, which might be, more or less, fallible. Nevertheless, every evaluation is promoted, as far as possible, through an objective interpretation by us of their writings, with an eye to the theory ( *reenactment* and *verstehen* ), the other one to the *Geist Zeit*, and both of them to the facts.

Each chapter of the thesis is practically a research problem in itself. The research problems are best revealed through the following combined questions, formulated in conformity with the series of events formerly reconstituted by us:

- 1) What made possible Antonescu's rise to power in September 1940, and how did it happen?
- 2) What made Antonescu choose Iron Guard as governing partner on September 14th, 1940, and what did it really mean their collaboration up to January 1941?
- 3) Why did Antonescu ultimately get rid of Iron Guard on the 21st of January, 1941?
- 4) What made Antonescu ban all political parties and set up, on January 27th, 1941, a dictatorial regime, following his victory over the Guard?
- 5) Was it a legitimate one, the new military regime set up by Antonescu, and what was the socio-economic policy of the new administration?
- 6) How were they treated by Antonescu and his regime, the Romanian Jews?
- 7) What was the activity of the Opposition, both at home and abroad, during Antonescu Dictatorship?
- 8) What made Antonescu join Hitler, on June 22nd, 1941, in attacking the Soviet Union, how did the anti-Soviet war unfold, and what did it mean for the Romanians?
- 9) Which were Antonescu's contacts with the Allies, and why did he repeatedly refuse to sign the armistice?
- 10) What made King Michael I remove Antonescu on the 23rd of August, 1944, and how did it happen?
- 11) What was Antonescu charged with during his trial in May 1946, and was it a fair one?
- 12) Did Antonescu's " official portrait " of 1946 change in Post-Communist Romania and, if it did, is the change sustained by the present stage of historical research?



Thus, the reconstituted series of events is presented by us as research problems, and in conformity with the three basic questions essential to any kind of interpretation of the past by historical research: *What was it really? How did it evolve? What did, or does it mean?*

The thesis main purpose is to find out how each aspect of this reconstituted series of events is addressed by mainstream Romanian historians, that is, to identify their eventual different interpretations and, when possible, to point out the principal orientation by post-communist historical writing on each aspect under analysis.

Besides the introductive and conclusive chapters, 1 and 6, the study is divided in four parts, or main chapters. Chapter 2 and 5 deal with the historic figure of Ion Antonescu, the former critically presenting his official portrait in Post-Communist Romania, while the latter pointing out the current political and historiographical debate on his controversial person. The chronological chapters in between, 3 and 4, properly deal with his authoritarian rule in Romania, between September 1940 and August 1944, as it is seen by post-communist historians. Chapter 3 describes Antonescu's collaboration with the Romanian Far Right represented by Iron Guard, from September 1940 until January 1941, within the framework of the so called *Romanian Legionnaire Nation-State*. In its turn, Chapter 4 provides an outlook over *Antonescu Military Regime 1941 – 1944*. As in most historical studies, chronological order is also maintained within the systematically structured subchapters. The extension on the vertical of the chronology, that is the time sequences *prior* and *aprior* to a historic event or phenomenon, is observed in the beginning of Chapter 3.1. and in the end of Chapter 4.5. Both chapters present Romania's situation and Antonescu's position, the first before his rise to power, in September 1940, the second after his fall, in August 1944. The horizontal approach, that is the geographical extension of the chronology to include simultaneous events or phenomena occurred elsewhere, but having also an impact on Romania, is practically observed, more or less, throughout all chapters. In their turn, substantial footnotes and appendices come to provide additional information also in the sense above.

Notwithstanding that this is a study on post-communist historiography, the author promotes his personal viewpoints on the different aspects related to Antonescu and his regime, usually in the end of each chapter, but also within them. These opinions involve the author alone, and they should be seen as such.

### 1.3. Sources

The majority mainstream historians present within this thesis have, more or less, worked and published under the communist regime, too. Some of them are senior historians with a long scientific activity behind, some are prominent middle-aged researchers, while the rest are young, but skillful historians. They hold doctoral dissertations, and the majority of them are carrying out at the same time both teaching and scientific programmes within the Romanian universities, institutes, and research centres. Although each one is a specialist in a particular research field ( i.e., war, law, secret services, diplomatic, cultural, or political history ), all of them are, nevertheless, qualified in modern and contemporary Romanian political history. They have published historical books, studies, and articles also before, but especially after the fall of Communism in Romania, in December 1989. Because the historical interpretations on Antonescu and his regime provided by these scholars constitute the very study object of this thesis, we should briefly know, before moving on to the critical presentation of the sources, who they are.

Dan Amedeo Lăzărescu, a senior politician and liberal senator in Post-Communist Romania, is also a lawyer and historian. But, most important, Lăzărescu is a contemporary to the 1940 – 1944 events in Romania, having been by then a student in law in Bucharest. He has published especially after 1990 many studies and articles on law and political history. Lăzărescu is also an active participant to the principal political and historiographical debates in Nowadays Romania on the Antonescu Regime and, respectively, on the former communist regime. Senator Lăzărescu is a serious bourgeois historian with liberal views.

Gheorghe Buzatu is an independent senior historian rather with a marxist approach in his works. He is one of the key figures of post-communist historiography and, according to many colleagues, the most prolific political historian alive. Buzatu is also seen as the best Romanian specialist on the Second World War, writing lots of books and studies on this topic both before, and after 1990 ( i.e., *Din istoria secretă a celui de-al doilea război mondial*, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, Vol. I-II 1988, 1995; *România și războiul mondial din 1939 – 1945*, Centrul de Istorie și Civilizație Europeană Iași, Iași, 1995; *O istorie a petrolului românesc*, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1998 ). Buzatu is also correspondent member of the Romanian Academy, and the director of its Center For History And European Civilization at the University of Jassy.

Academician Dan Berindei is a senior historian specialized in modern Romanian political history, who has especially analyzed the 1848 – 1878 period certifying the birth of Modern Romania, from the 1848 bourgeois revolutions in the two Romanian Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, to their union in 1859, and to the independence of Romania in 1878 ( i.e., the revised and supplemented edition of his classical work: *Epoca Unirii*, Editura Corint, București, 2000 ). Berindei is the dean of the researchers at The "Nicolae Iorga" Institute of History in Bucharest, and a member of its leadership after 1990. Under the former communist regime, particularly during the stalinist period of the 1950s, he was often obstructed to publish freely because of his bourgeois origin. Among his last scientific contributions of the 1990s one can find the arrangement and coordination of the political diary belonging to his father-in-law: Ioan Hudiță, *Jurnal Politic ( 7 septembrie 1940 – 8 februarie 1941 )*, Vol. III, Institutul de Istorie și Civilizație Europeană Iași, Iași, 2000 ). Berindei is a bourgeois and Christian historian close to the Romanian political right center represented by the National Christian-Democratic Peasant Party.

Academician Constantin C. ( Dinu ) Giurescu, the dean of all Romanian historians, is one of the best specialists in modern and contemporary Romanian political history. He worked and published, more or less freely, under Communism, too, as a scholar at the University of Bucharest and main researcher at The "Nicolae Iorga" Institute, in the same town. His textbooks and courses of history did replace in the Romanian schools and universities, during the cultural " liberalization " period of the 1960s and early 1970s, those of the stalinist historian Mihail Roller. Giurescu has published lots of studies also after 1990. One of his major works of the 1990s, dealing with Romania's situation during the Second World War, is the monograph: *România în al doilea război mondial, 1939 – 1947*, Editura ALL, București, 1998. Giurescu can be seen as an independent Romanian historian, rather close to the political left center represented by the social-democratic parties of Post-Communist Romania.

Prof. Ioan Scurtu is a middle-aged historian specialized in contemporary Romanian political history, who's both teaching and researching at the University of Bucharest and, respectively, at The National Archives of Romania, in the same town. He has coordinated the publishing of lots of official Romanian documents of the interwar, wartime, and post-war period. Among the last ones published: " *România. Viața politică în documente. 1946* ", Arhivele Statului din România, București, 1996. Scurtu is a scholar with rather liberal views in his approaches.

Professor Cristian Troncotă, working at the National Intelligence Institute in Bucharest, is a middle-aged researcher specialized in the history of the Romanian secret services. He has published, especially after 1990, many studies and books on this topic ( i.e., *Mihail Moruzov și Serviciul Secret de Informații al Armatei Române*, Editura Evenimentul Românesc, București, 1997; *Istoria serviciilor secrete românești. De la Cuza la Ceaușescu*, Editura "Ion Cristoiu", București, 1999 ). Troncotă is an independent and skillful analyst of the intelligence services who has no particular political orientation.

Professor Valeriu-Florin Dobrinescu , former head researcher at The European Institute in Jassy, is the acting Director of The International Relations Research Centre within the University of Craiova. Dobrinescu, who's in his early middle-age, is a prolific political historian. He's seen by many as the best Romanian analyst of Romania's diplomatic relations before, during, and after the two major wars of the last century. Since 1986 he has published alone, or in collaboration with other authors, almost every year studies and books of diplomatic history ( i.e., *Relații româno-engleze ( 1914 – 1933 )*, Editura Universității " A. C. Cuza", Iași, 1986; *Plata și răsplata istoriei. Ion Antonescu militar și diplomat. 1914 – 1940* , Institutul European, Iași, 1994; *Relații politico-diplomatice și militare româno-italiene ( 1914 – 1947 )*, Editura Intact, România, 1999 ). Dobrinescu is a respected scholar with rather a bourgeois orientation close to the Christian-democratic values.

Marcel-Dumitru Ciucă is still a young political historian. He works as principal researcher at The National Archives of Romania in Bucharest. Ciucă is a skillful specialist of the Second World War period. In this capacity Ciucă has published many studies after 1990, and he has also edited and coordinated alone, or together with other researchers, the publishing of lots of official documents issued by both Antonescu and his administration ( i.e., *Stenogramele ședințelor Consiliului de Miniștri. Guvernarea Ion Antonescu ( septembrie – decembrie 1940 ) Vol. I*, Arhivele Naționale ale României, București, 1997 ). Ciucă is a researcher with rather liberal views.

Ioan Chiper is a senior and experienced historian qualified in contemporary Romanian history. He's researcher at The "Nicolae Iorga" Institute in Bucharest, being one of the best experts on the history of the former Communist Party. Since 1990 he has published alone, or in collaboration, many studies and official documents on this topic ( i.e., *Cazul Ștefan Foriș. Lupta pentru putere în P.C.R.*

*de la Gheorghiu-Dej la Ceaușescu. Documente 1940 – 1968*, Editura Vremea, București, 1999 ). Chiper is a senior historian who's rather close to the political center of Nowadays Romania.

Grigore Traian Pop is a young political historian in Bucharest. He's a skillful researcher over the history of the Romanian Far Right, especially of the Legionnaire Movement, on which he has written much in the last years ( i.e., *Mișcarea Legionară. Idealul izbăvirii și realitatea dezastrului*, Editura "Ion Cristoiu", București, 1999 ). Pop is an independent historian with no particular political orientation.

Colonel Petre Otu is a middle-aged Romanian officer. Professor Otu is also a military historian and a member of the teaching staff of the Military Academy in Bucharest. Otu is a skillful researcher on the Second World War and one of the best analysts over Romanian Army's situation under Antonescu and on the Eastern Front. He has published alone, or in collaboration with other military and civilian reseachers, lots of studies on this topic in the last ten years ( i.e., *Înfrânți și uitati. Românii în bătălia de la Stalingrad*, Editura "Ion Cristoiu", București, 1999 ). Otu is an independent military historian with no specific political orientation in his approaches.

Maria Georgescu is a young female researcher. She's a political historian qualified in modern and contemporary Romanian history. Georgescu has published in the last years many studies and articles on the political crises of Modern Romania, all of them based on a careful investigation of the official documents preserved by the Romanian military archives ( i.e., *Oștirea Română și situațiile de criză din timpul domniei lui Alexandru Ioan Cuza*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr.1(41), 2000, p. 5-8, București ). Georgescu is rather a researcher with bourgeois liberal views.

Alina Tudor is a young female and a political historian, too, but rather of a marxist approach. She's qualified in contemporary Romanian history. Tudor's specialization is the study of both Romanian and foreign political extremes of the last century. She has published several studies and articles on this topic in recent years ( i.e., *Salazar și "dictatura profesorilor"*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 11(27), 1998, p. 33-36, București ).

Mioara Anton is also a rather young female researcher. She's a political historian specialized in the cultural and political ideas of the interwar Romanian Far Right. She has publised many studies and

articles on Romanian and European contemporary political history, especially on the revolutionary movements of the last century ( i.e., ” *O interminabilă hemoragie* ”, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 4(44), 2000, p. 9-11, București ). Anton is one of the three acting editors of the Romanian historical publication *Dosarele Istoriei*, and she’s rather an independent researcher with no specific political orientation.

Marian Ștefan is a middle-aged political historian and one of the four acting editors of the historical publication *Magazin Istoric*. Ștefan is a specialist of the contemporary period, and he’s particularly interested in Romania’s international relations during and after the Second World War. Ștefan has published, especially since 1990, lots of studies and articles on this topic alone, or in collaboration with other researchers ( i.e., in collaboration with Liviu-Daniel Grigorescu, *Patriotism contra internaționalism – Când Pătrășcanu n-a uitat că e român*, *Magazin Istoric*, Nr. 6(399), 2000, p. 18-23, București ). Ștefan is a skillful researcher rather close to the political right center of Post-Communist Romania.

Leon Volovici, a middle-aged Romanian born Jew, is a Israeli researcher trained in the history of ideas of Modern and Contemporary Romania. Volovici has published, in both Romania and abroad, several books and many studies on the Romanian intellectuals ( i.e., *Apariția scriitorului în cultura română*, Iași, 1976; ” *Romanian Intellectuals – Jewish intellectuals during the Dictatorship of Antonescu* ”, in *Romanian Jewish Studies 1*, Spring, 1987 ). Volovici is one of the best analysts of the Romanian Nationalism, and in particular of the interwar political and cultural ideas of the Romanian Far Right. Volovici is rather oriented to the Israeli Left represented by the Labour Party.

General Platon Chirnoagă was a contemporary to the Second World War events, and also a direct participant to the military operations by the Romanian Army both against Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. In late October 1944, due to the deliberate lack of support to his unit from the Soviet commanders, he fell prisoner together with some of his officers to the Germans on the River Tisza, near Szolnok, after the total crushing of his 4th Romanian Infantry Division. He joined later, as War Minister, on December 10th, 1944, the so called ” Romanian National Government ” set up by Horia Sima in Vienna. He moved to Spain after the war, where he wrote a book and many articles on the anti-Soviet war. He was a Romanian war historian in exile close to the Right.

Under the former communist regime, for Romanian historians the historic figure of Ion Antonescu and his 1940 – 1944 governing period have constituted two research subjects most difficult to deal with. It doesn't mean that nothing was written on them. During the stalinist period of 1946 - 1965, indeed, any research on these topics was banned, Antonescu and his regime being shortly presented by the school textbooks and academic publications as: reactionary, fascist, racist, and criminal. The " liberalization " period that followed, until early 1970s, did allow Romanian historians to do some researches in domestic and foreign archives, but only some articles were published. Some serious studies on these topics, mainly written by military researchers but also by political historians, started to be published only since late 1970s, that is, ten years previously to the collapse of Ceaușescu Communist Regime, in 1989. Nevertheless, we should mention here, that the white spots left by the stalinist historiography on these topics were filled by both Romanian historians in exile and foreign researchers ( see Appendix 3 ).

The sources used within the present thesis are almost all primary ones. They range from printed documents and diaries, to monographs and articles. However, the bulk of them are the articles published after 1995 by mainstream Romanian historians in different issues of the two monthly Romanian magazines specialized in the popularization of history: *Magazin Istoric* [ Historical Magazine ], printed since 1967; *Dosarele Istoriei* [ The Files of History ], issuing since 1996. Some of the articles used are published in the weekly supplements of Saturday, entirely dedicated to Contemporary Romanian and World History, of two major Romanian daily newspapers: *Aldine* [ Capital Characters ] of the daily paper *România Liberă* [ Free Romania ], printed since 1996; *Dosare Ultrasecrete* [ Top Secret Files ] of the paper *Ziua* [ The Day ], issuing since 1998.

Let's see which are the principal sources of the thesis and their main use. The collection of documents edited by Vasile Arimia, Ion Ardeleanu and Alexandru Cebuc, *Istoria Partidului Național Țărănesc. Documente 1926 – 1947* ( București, 1994 ), is used on the activity of the National Peasant Party and Communist Party. A smaller collection of documents, *Mișcarea Legionară în documente inedite* ( *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 4, p. 46-61, București, 1997 ), edited by Eftimie Ardeleanu, Dana Beldiman, Mircea Chirițoiu and Suci Maria, is checked on the activity of Iron Guard. Marcel-Dumitru Ciucă's two prefaced and edited volumes of documents, *Procesul Mareșalului Ion Antonescu. Documente I; II* ( București, 1996 ), are used on Antonescu's own statements and on his trial.

Ioan Hudiță's diary pages, *Pagini de jurnal* ( *Magazin Istoric*, Nr. 5, p. 21-25, București, 1998; Nr. 5, 12-17, București, 1999; Nr. 7, p. 36-39, București, 1999 ), presented and commented by Dan Berindei, are used on Antonescu's coup against King Charles II and on his first administration. On the Legionnaire Rebellion are checked pages from an unpublished autobiography by Vasile I. Ionescu, " *Răspunzi cu capul* " ( *Magazin Istoric*, Nr. 1, p. 48-51, București, 1999 ), presented and interpreted by Marian Ștefan. The memoirs of King Charles II, *In zodia Satanei. Reflexiuni asupra politicii internaționale* ( București, 1994 ), is checked on Antonescu's seizure of power.

General Platon Chirnoagă's monograph, *Istoria politică și militară a războiului României contra Rusiei Sovietice, 22 iunie 1941 – 23 august 1944* ( Madrid, 1986 ), is skimmed on the Legionnaire Rebellion. On the wartime contacts between Antonescu Regime and the Allied Powers is used the monograph by Valeriu-Florin Dobrinescu and Ion Constantin, *Basarabia în anii celui de al doilea război mondial ( 1939 – 1947 )* ( Iași, 1995 ). Leon Volovici's work, *Ideologia naționalistă și " problema evreiască." Eseu despre formele antisemitismului intelectual în România anilor '30* ( București, 1995 ), is checked on Antonescu's stand towards Romanian Jews. Seen by the thesis author as representing western historians' viewpoints, the book of the American Keith Hitchins, *România 1866 – 1947* ( București, 1996 ), is used on the backgrounds of Antonescu's rise to power.

On the collaboration Antonescu – Iron Guard within the Romanian Legionnaire Nation-State are used several articles: Mioara Anton, " *Un dictator nu se alege, ci se impune singur* " ( *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 11, p. 56-58, București, 1998 ); Dan Amedeo Lăzărescu, *O chestiune de drept: sare pe rana deschisă* ( *Aldine*, Nr. 93, p. I-III, București, 1997 ); Petre Otu, *Septembrie 1940 – ianuarie 1941. Armata română în " statul național legionar " – preliminarii* ( *Magazin Istoric*, Nr. 6, p.37-41, and Nr. 7, p. 28-32, București, 1997 ); Alina Tudor, *Rebeliune sau lovitură de stat?* ( *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 1, p. 28-31, București, 1999 ).

On the Legionnaire Rebellion, besides Alina Tudor's article mentioned above, they are also checked: Ioan Chiper, *Mișcarea Legionară și acoliții lui Hitler* ( *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 4, p. 17-19, București, 1997 ); Ioan Chiper, *Englezii, petrolul românesc și loviturile de stat*, ( *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 1, p. 32-34, București, 1999 ); Ștefan Marian, *Rebeliunea Legionară în documente inedite din arhivele germane* ( *Magazin Istoric*, Nr. 1, p. 9-10, București, 1995 ); Klaus Schönherr, *Wehrmachtul în marș demonstrativ pe străzile Bucureștilor* ( *Magazin Istoric*, Nr. 1, p. 11-14, 19, București, 1995 ).



On Antonescu's wartime military administration are also used, besides Dan Amedeo Lăzărescu's already mentioned article: Marcel-Dumitru Ciucă, " *Am construit un sistem de dictatură în Țara Românească, trebuie să ne folosim de toate avantajele pe care acest sistem ni le oferă* " ( *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 11, p. 59-65, București, 1998 ); Marian Ștefan, *Ion Antonescu: " De când eram în închisoare am discutat cu nemții tot programul de guvernământ "* ( *Magazin Istoric*, Nr. 9, p. 12-15, București, 1998 ); Marian Ștefan, *În culisele plebiscitului din 2 – 5 martie 1941* ( *Magazin Istoric*, Nr. 4, p. 19-22, București, 1998 ).

Several articles are checked on the Romanian Jews under Antonescu Regime: Dinu C. Giurescu, *Evreii din România ( 1939 – 1944 )* ( *Magazin Istoric*, Nr. 10, p. 47-51; Nr. 11, p. 72-76, București, 1997 ); Grigore Traian Pop, *Holocaust al evreilor în România?* ( *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 11, p. 12-14, București, 1999 ); Aurel Sergiu Marinescu, *Mareșalul Ion Antonescu – Controverse și adevăruri. De ce atâta nedreptate?* ( *Aldine*, Nr. 221, p. II-III, București, 2000 ); Alex Mihai Stoenescu, *Antonescu și evreii* ( *Aldine*, Nr. 221, p. IV, București, 2000 ).

On the activity of the Opposition under Antonescu Dictatorship are used: Cristian Troncotă, *SSI versus Mișcarea Legionară* ( *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 4, p. 20-25, București, 1997 ); Maria Georgescu, *În vizorul organelor de informații: Opoziția* ( *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, p. 40-46, București, 1999 ).

On Antonescu's 1941 – 1944 anti-Soviet war are checked: Gheorghe Buzatu, *Mareșalul Ion Antonescu și războiul din Est* ( *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, p. 53-55, București, 1999 ); Vasile Bărboi, *Eliberarea Basarabiei, a Bucovinei de Nord și a Ținutului Herța* ( *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, p. 20-25, București, 1999 ); Petre Otu, " *Ostași vă ordon: treceți Prutul!* " ( *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, p. 16-20, București, 1999 ).

Gheorghe Buzatu's article, *23 august 1944: Metamorfozele unei lovituri de stat* ( *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 1, p. 35-40, București, 1999 ), is checked on King Michael's coup of 23rd August 1944 against Antonescu.

On the current debate in Nowadays Romania, among both politicians and historians, over the controversial person of Ion Antonescu and his 1940 – 1944 authoritarian regime, besides Dan Amedeo Lăzărescu's already mentioned article, is used: Gheorghe Buzatu, *Mareșalul Ion Antonescu* ( *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 3, p. 30-34, București, 1999 ).

Ioan Scurtu's article, *Războiul, momentul adevărului* ( *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, p. 1-5, București, 1999 ), is used on Romania's situation and Antonescu's activity previously to his rise to power.

Many of the primary sources above are also secondary ones, but mainly used in the footnotes for additional information and clarifications. Several others, too, are used as secondary ones in footnotes, or appendices: Florin Constantiniu, " *Singura mișcare românească contra căreia Caragiale nu poate nimic* " ( *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 4, p. 4-7, București, 1997 ); Cristian Sandache, *Cronologie* ( *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 4, p. 46-59, București, 1997 ).

Since 1990, they have been written thousands of studies, books, and articles on the 1940 – 1944 period of Romanian Contemporary History, filling, thus, the space left empty by the former communist historiography. Unfortunately, the scientific value of a great many, usually of those written by amateurs, can be quite easily set under the question mark. There is no source of such kind used within this thesis. It is, nevertheless, understandable the enormous desire to write, and to remember, by people who were denied for over forty years the right of doing it.

More important is, that in recent years also professional historians seem to have localized the golden vein, and have started to dig it up scientifically. The most skillful of these historians constitute themselves, together with their studies, the very subject matter of the present thesis. Due to their continuous efforts, the historic figure of Ion Antonescu, on the one hand, and the nature of his 1940 – 1944 regime, on the other, become every year less foggy. The studies used within this thesis are just a small part of the existing hundreds, but, nevertheless, they are written by mainstream Romanian historians. That means, that the thesis findings should reveal at the same time both the disputes among mainstream historians and the main orientation by the new Romanian historiography on Antonescu and his regime.

Present thesis difficulty stands not on a lack of sources, but it consists in the attempt by its author to get the right balance between the sources used on each topic under analysis.

## **2. ION ANTONESCU – A SHORT BIOGRAPHY**

Among the first post-war measures taken by the new communist authorities in Romania in order to strengthen their power position were those related to the discreditation of the old regime in the public eyes. The measures were directed both against Antonescu's wartime regime and the previous Romanian bourgeois governments. The pro-Soviet officials in Bucharest tackled this matter on two main grounds, political and ideological, roughly between 1945 and 1950. First, they were the 1946 political trials fabricated against those seen guilty of pushing Romania into the Second World War on the Axis side, that is Antonescu and his close collaborators. They were followed, in 1947, by the trials against the outstanding members of the former interwar bourgeois governments and parties, seen guilty of having made possible by their policy Antonescu's rise to power and the anti-Soviet war. In the first case, capital punishments and long-term sentences for war crimes were decided by the so called "People's Tribunal" of Bucharest under the combined pressure of the Allied Powers, but especially at Moscow's order. One can suggest that the trials belong to the wide spread post-war European phenomenon of punishing the national political leaders, in the countries previously occupied or allied with Nazi Germany, found responsible for their country's disaster. Such local "Nuremberg tribunals" were set up all over in Europe, from Finland in the north, to France and Romania, in the west and east. As a result, many wartime political leaders were executed, or sent to prison for many years as collaborators and war criminals.

In the second case, the political trials had rather domestic features, being initiated by the new communist regime against the leadership of the bourgeois parties, with the purpose not only of discrediting but of totally eliminating them from the Romanian political map. They were blamed, in addition to the war disaster, for all the ills within the Romanian society. In fact, the trials were directed against the bourgeois classes as a whole. Thus, the 1947 political trials against the former bourgeois leaders were soon followed by those initiated against the social categories seen as representatives of the old regime: army officers, clergy, industrial and banking entrepreneurs, academic personalities, representatives of the liberal professions, wealthy peasantry, rank-and-file members of the bourgeois parties and many others. In nowadays Romania, the researches undertaken in the last decade suggest a figure around 200,000 individuals who were tried and sentenced on ideological grounds between 1945 and 1955. Tens of thousands from those sent to jail and labor camps never returned. They were shot dead by the guardians, or killed by diseases.

Communist authorities in Post-War Romania didn't limit their discredit of the old regime to the political trials. Once the prominent members of the Antonescu Regime and Opposition had been executed, interned in camps, or had succeeded to exile themselves, and after the proclamation of the *People's Republic*, in December 1947, Romanian mass media and educational system were transformed into efficient communist and pro-Soviet propagandistic tools, which were to brainwash Romanian society for the next forty years. The communists were not content with the mere political annihilation and physical elimination of their rivals. For the stalinists in power in Bucharest, the bourgeois liberal ideology was by far more dangerous. Therefore, and well aware of the fact that ideas don't disappear as easy as men do, they banned thousands of interwar and wartime intellectual works, which were seen as reactionary and representing the bourgeois values. Some authors were totally banned, while others, mostly with leftist approaches, more or less. Even the works of the Romanian classics were forbidden by the communist censorship. The writings of Antonescu and those of his collaborators were in head within the banning lists.<sup>2</sup>

After gathering "the evidences" to incriminate Marshal Antonescu and his advocates through the state official documents, communist authorities asked the archives preserving these one to deny their further study. Very few researchers had access to these documents, and this only towards the last years of the Communist Regime in Romania, a thoroughgoing investigation and open publication of the results being almost impossible in those circumstances. A work dealing with the trial of was published in the same year.<sup>3</sup> In its turn, this work was soon set on the red lists in libraries for both the large public and most researchers. However, for many decades, both during the *Cold War* period and after the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe, the official international and domestic viewpoints on Antonescu's person and his regime were shaped in those early years following the end of the war, and in conformity with the will of the victorious powers. As a Romanian historian well suggests within an article, encyclopedic works in Moscow, London, Washington, Paris, or Bucharest until 1989, present both Antonescu and his regime as "fascist" and "racist", while Romania's war against Soviet Union as having been a premeditated act of aggression.<sup>4</sup> In other countries too, even in those defeated in war, the viewpoints don't differ much.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, *Publicațiile scoase din circulație până la 1 iunie 1946*, 1994; Ministerul Informațiilor, *Publicațiile interzise până la 1 mai 1948*, 1948, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Procesul marelui trădător național. Stenograma dezbaterilor de la Tribunalul Poporului asupra guvernului Antonescu*, 1946.

<sup>4</sup> Buzatu, *Conducătorul statului și disputa politico-istoriografică în jurul personalității sale – Mareșalul Ion Antonescu*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 3, 1999, p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Kuparinen, 1999, p. 243-246.

The 1989 collapse of Ceaușescu Dictatorship and Communist Regime in Romania did suddenly arouse the interest of the Romanian ordinary citizens and academic community alike as regards to Antonescu's person and his wartime regime. Soon, it became manifest and steadily grew during the last decade. The disappearance of censorship, the opening of domestic archives and the possibility to check the foreign ones, the research freedom and many other factors, all of them have added speed to the historical writing in general, but in particular to the investigation concerning Antonescu Regime. One can suggest that, after reading many of the studies and articles published on this issue in the last years by mainstream historians, their common goal is that of setting Antonescu and his regime in the right place within the national history of Romania. It means a thoroughgoing research of all aspects related to the matter. As we shall see throughout the thesis, they have advanced on some aspects, while still facing difficulties to surmount on other particular ones. It is hard enough to perform new insights on a matter which official version was shaped in the aftermath of the Second World War, and which became then after a taboo for both ordinary people and researchers. Moreover, it is unlikely that Romanian historians' new perspectives on Antonescu Regime would radically change its inherited perception in both the West and Eastern Europe.

The topic of this chapter, an introductory one, is to briefly present the historical debate around the official portrait of Ion Antonescu as it comes out through major encyclopedic works. Romanian senior historian Gheorghe Buzatu tackles within an article, among other things, this issue.<sup>6</sup> We shall return to his article in the ending chapter. Because Buzatu's viewpoints on the issue are shared by many other historians, as we shall see on several occasions within this thesis, to his commented article is granted exclusive space here. Thus, how the person of Antonescu was it depicted for the Romanian public under Communism, and which is his official portrait in Nowadays Romania? And, what can we say about the official perceptions on him abroad?

Buzatu was quite surprised after the checking of several important foreign encyclopedic works of the last decades by their striking similitude in depicting Antonescu's person.<sup>7</sup> His "robot portrait", as Buzatu calls it, didn't change, being diffused by all these encyclopedias throughout the post-war decades in its initial form of the late 1940s. As already mentioned before, Antonescu is presented as

<sup>6</sup> Buzatu, *Conducătorul statului și disputa politico-istoriografică în jurul personalității sale – Mareșalul Ion Antonescu*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 3, 1999, p. 30-34.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example: *Chamber's Encyclopedia*; *Bolșaiia Sovetskaia Ențiklopediia*; *Grand Larousse Encyclopédique en dix volumes*; *The Encyclopedia Americana*; *Meyer Enzyklopädisches Lexicon*; *Encyclopedia Judaica*; *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*; *The Hutchinson Dictionary of World History* ( different editions ).

a fascist and racist Romanian military and political leader who did premeditate Romania's anti-Soviet war. This is a typical example, in our opinion, of the widespread assumption that, after major events as wars, the history is usually written by the victors also for the defeated countries. The Romanian case is no exception. According to Buzatu, the most categorical in depicting Antonescu in this way are all post-war Soviet and Russian encyclopedic works. He suggests that, during the period of the communist rule in Romania, Soviet encyclopedias served as model for the Romanian ones, especially as regards to the perception of the events of World War Two. Romanian historical writing was entirely subordinated to the directives came from Moscow, Roller's textbooks constituting, at least in the 1950s, the official tools of instruction in schools.<sup>8</sup> Buzatu pays special attention to the description of Antonescu's person within the *Dicționarul enciclopedic român* ( 1962 ), seeing it as a staunch copy of the *Bołsaia Sovetskaia Entiklopediia*. Romanian historian points out that Antonescu is seen as: " General, fascist military dictator, who actively participated to the suppression of the 1907 peasant uprising, and who was brought to power by the most reactionary circles of the bourgeoisie and landed gentry."<sup>9</sup> Buzatu emphasizes that, according to the same encyclopedic work, " he subordinated the country to Hitler's Germany and, against Romanian People's national interest, he pushed the country into the criminal war against Soviet Union."<sup>10</sup> For him, just at the opposite pole stands the text on Antonescu within the first volume of the *Dicționarul enciclopedic* ( 1993 ).

Paying credit to the suggestions expressed by this authority in Romanian historiography, let us find out how the large public is informed in Post-Communist Romania through this academic publication. The text on Antonescu can be seen, at the same time, as his abridged official biography:

" Antonescu, Ion ( 1882 – 1946, born in Pitești ), Romanian Marshal and Statesman. He traversed all the stages of military hierarchy, from Second-Lieutenant ( 1904 ) to Brigadier General ( 1931 ), and to Marshal ( 1941 ). He was one of the main collaborators of General Prezan during First World War, bringing his contribution to the elaboration of the military operational plans. Commander of the Sibiu Military School and High School of War ( 1927 – 1929, 1931 – 1933 ). Military Attaché of Romania in Paris ( 1922 ), London and Brussels ( 1923 ). Head of the High General Staff of the Army ( 1933 – 1934 ), National Defence Minister ( 1937 – 1938 ), and ad-interim Minister of Air and Navy ( February – March, 1938 ). He did strongly protest against the ultimative notes of 26 and 27 June 1940 by the Soviet Government,

<sup>8</sup> Mihail Roller, a Romanian Jew, was the official stalinist Romanian historian in the 1950s and early 1960s.

<sup>9</sup> Buzatu, *Conducătorul statului și disputa politico-istoriografică în jurul personalității sale – Maresalul Ion Antonescu, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 3, 1999, p. 33; Citation by Buzatu from: Dicționarul enciclopedic român, 1962, p. 146.*

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

by asking for the defense of the national territory; confined by Charles II at the Bistrița Monastery [ a.n., situated in Oltenia region ]. In the aftermath of the Vienna Dictate [ a.n., known in the Anglo-Saxon literature as *Vienna Arbitration* ], on September 4th, 1940, Antonescu was given the task of setting up the new government, being granted with full powers as well. Antonescu forced Charles II to abdicate ( 6 September 1940 ), the Throne inheritance being granted to Michael I. Antonescu stifled a legionnaire rebellion in January 1941. He ruled the country by decree-laws. He promoted a foreign policy close to Germany and Italy. By June 1941 he decided Romania's warfare in order to regain Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine, and went on with the military operations across the Dniester as well. After the defeat at Stalingrad, he allowed and initiated secret talks in order to pull the country out of war. He was removed from power through a coup on August 23rd, 1940; taken by the Red Army ( September 1940 ), he was kept in custody on the Soviet soil until April 1946; brought home, he was trialed, in May 1946, by the ' People's Tribunal ' of Bucharest; he was condemned to death penalty and executed in the Jilava prison ( 1 June 1946 )."<sup>11</sup>

The text above is considered by Buzatu as " a model as regards to its conciseness, to the abundance and accuracy of the recorded facts, to the observed objectivity, and to the absolutely needed nuances." <sup>12</sup> In our opinion Buzatu's assertion is a sound one, although there is room for some remarks here. First, a mention of Antonescu's attempts to reform the military institution, as head of the Romanian High General Staff ( 1933 – 1934 ) and Defense Minister ( 1937 – 1938 ), would have been welcome. Second, during the war Antonescu ordered deportations, especially of a large part of the Jewish population. Whatever the reasons behind Antonescu's acts, a proper mention of such historical facts would have been in place within the dictionary in case. These additions within the encyclopedia would have made the official portrait of Antonescu more nuanced and, at the same time, more credible in the eyes of the outside world. One can suggest that, by the time *Dictionarul enciclopedic* was published ( 1993 ), the research on Antonescu and his regime was at its beginnings. Further editions will probably be more nuanced and in conformity with the advancement of the research work on the issue. Strange enough that an experienced historian as Buzatu doesn't acknowledge these things in his article, which was written in 1999!

If we take a look at the contents of this thesis, that is at its structure, one can easily observe that it matches quite well the text of the encyclopedia cited above, especially from 1933 onwards. The landmarks of the encyclopedic text are roughly the topics of the thesis, but extended to cover both the person of Antonescu and his regime. On the other hand, the available sources used within the thesis suggest that post-communist historical writing is concerned with similar research topics.

<sup>11</sup> *Dictionarul enciclopedic*, Vol. I, 1993, p. 85. In *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 3, 1999, p. 33.

<sup>12</sup> Buzatu, *Conducătorul statului și disputa politico-istoriografică în jurul personalității sale – Maresalul Ion Antonescu*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 3, 1999, p. 33.

### 3. ANTONESCU AND THE IRON GUARDISTS, SEPTEMBER 1940 – JANUARY 1941

#### 3.1. Antonescu's Seizure of Power

Romanian Unitary Nation-State was born in the aftermath of the First World War. Commonly known during the interwar period as *Greater Romania*, the new unitary state was realized by the national will of all Romanians, and was sanctioned by the international peace treaties in Paris. Romania's national defense strategy was based on foreign policy rather on the strengthening of the defense capacity of her army. The alliances concluded with Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, France and Italy were meant to keep her aloof of all revisionist claims, while the League of Nations was to maintain the postwar *status quo* in Europe. A post-communist historian quotes, within an article, some official sources according to which "Romanian political leaders, animated by such ideas, didn't pay a special attention to army supply and instruction", by the end of 1920s Romanian Army being in possession "of the same fighting equipment with which it ended the war, but in an advanced state of physical and moral degradation".<sup>13</sup> After the *Great Depression*, in 1930s, an armament industry was set up with great difficulties. However, this one didn't meet the real necessities of the national army, being instead a channel of personal enrichment for politicians and entrepreneurs, the same historian suggests<sup>14</sup>. By his article, Scurtu succeeds to demonstrate that the interwar Romanian decisional factors had a negligible attitude towards the needs of the national army with disastrous repercussions, by 1940, for *Greater Romania*. At the same time, Scurtu's point of view is a new insight within Romanian new historiography on the factors contributing to the territorial losses in the summer of 1940. Until recently, the whole blame for the territorial disintegration of the Romanian State was usually set on external factors.

Scurtu's article has also the merit of revealing a less-known aspect, still insufficiently dealt with by post-communist historical writing, concerning the life and activity of Ion Antonescu. That is his activity as a reformist military commander and political leader, especially as Chief of the Romanian High General Staff and Defense Minister for short periods in the 1930s. Antonescu unceasingly pleaded for the reorganization of the army on modern principles, stressing that the very existence of the Romanian State was depending on the defense capacity of the national army. When assigned in top positions he did attempt to introduce reforms, but he was sabotaged from the start by his fellows

<sup>13</sup> Scurtu, Războiul, momentul adevărului, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> *Idem*, p. 1-3.



in arms. As the High General Staff's new Chief, in June 1934, Antonescu wrote: "Whether attacked, our country finds today in a total impossibility to defend itself, while its army is completely disarmed, pseudo-instructed, and demoralized."<sup>15</sup> Antonescu's plan for the reorganization of military institution, approved by both King Charles II and the Government of the time, couldn't be implemented because, as Antonescu put it: "The day after, all occult forces, all incorrect beneficiaries through their positions within the Establishment, all envious persons, all those giving their proof of slandering, incompetence, and impotence in the recovering action of the State and Army did unite their forces against me."<sup>16</sup> Moreover, as Antonescu made clear through his letter addressed to the Prime Minister of the time, Gheorghe Tătărescu, he had to resign, in December 1934, because: "The rottenness is so spread, that to keep standing in its middle would mean to bind myself, and my name, to a disaster, which will be obvious if we're going on with the current system and working methods. Those who have brought the Army into this miserable condition cannot improve its existence, and they're setting obstructions in the way of those willing to do it."<sup>17</sup> Appointed Defence Minister in late 1937, Antonescu tried again to introduce reforms within the army, but he faced anew the indifference and obstructionism of the political and military circles. Antonescu was dismissed in early 1938 by King Charles II, who introduced his personal rule in Romania, in February – March the same year, after having dissolved all political parties.<sup>18</sup>

Antonescu's prophetic words turned real in the summer of 1940, when *Greater Romania* became the victim of the surrounding revisionist states. The immediate consequences on Romania of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of August 23rd, 1939, were tragical. First, she lost the provinces of Bessarabia, Northern Bukovine, and Hertza County.<sup>19</sup> They were followed by the loss of Northern Transylvania.<sup>20</sup> The loss of Southern Dobrougea (Cadrilater) followed soon after.<sup>21</sup> According to

<sup>15</sup> Scurtu, Războiul, momentul adevărului, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> See in this sense: "Monitorul Oficial" partea I, Nr. 75 din 31 martie 1938; C. Hamangiu, *Codul General al Romaniei*, 1938, vol. I, p. 373-374. In Arimia, Ardeleanu, Cebuc, 1994, p. 174-176.

<sup>19</sup> On the 26th and 27th of June, 1940, Soviet Government sent to Romanian Government two ultimative notes asking for the withdrawal of Romanian administration from the provinces of Bessarabia, Northern Bukovine and Hertza Region. First of them was seen as having been illegally occupied by Romania by the end of WWI, while the other two were new claims based on their multi-ethnic composition. Advised by Nazi Government, Romanian authorities yielded to the Soviet claims on June 27th, 1940. See in this sense: Dobrinescu and Constantin, 1995, p. 154-158.

<sup>20</sup> Hitler decided to directly intervene in the solving of the Romanian-Hungarian territorial differendum on August 27th, 1940, by fixing the new border between the two states. Northern Transylvania was thus assigned, in Vienna, to Hungary. The Crown Council, held during the night of 30/31 August 1940, agreed with the terms of the German-Italian "arbitration." See Dobrinescu and Constantin, 1995, p. 162-166; Șerbănescu, in Carol al II-lea, 1994, p. 184.

<sup>21</sup> Romanian authorities agreed, at the beginning of September 1940, in Craiova, under German pressure, on the new border between Romania and Bulgaria as it was by 1912. See Șerbănescu, in Carol al II-lea, 1994, p. 184.

Scurtu, the territorial losses were made possible, in addition to the external factors, also by the irresponsible attitude of the military leadership ( see the map in Appendix 5 ). Thus, military members of the government, though assuring about Romanian Army's readiness to defend the territorial integrity of the state by arms if necessary, were unanimous in asking the King and Government, during all Crown Councils held to decide on the matter, to concede to the territorial claims. The main reason invoked by them for the yielding solution was the unfavorable " balance of power " in the region, while an eventual armed resistance would have led, in their eyes, to the disappearance of Romania as state.<sup>22</sup> They were few outstanding Romanian personalities who rose their voices against the territorial cessions, and who asked for armed resistance. One of them was Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga who, according to Victor Slavescu's diary ( he was a member of the government ), said on the occasion of the Soviet ultimatums: " Let's fight as Finland did it."<sup>23</sup> Slavescu wrote that Iorga was " amazed " by hearing Gen. Tenescu's words ( by then the Chief of the High General Staff ), because " he believed the Army as being a strong one..."<sup>24</sup> Moreover, according to Slavescu, the great historian added: " If we are not able to defend ourselves, then let's stop troubling the World with our Romanian State; let's allow to the Government and Army the task of liquidating the Romanian State."<sup>25</sup> Antonescu, too, was among those few who had strongly protested against the territorial yieldings. According to Scurtu, he addressed the King with a strong letter on the 1st of July, 1940, making known that: " The People and the Army have been disarmed without fighting. Their demoralization is unlimited. Their lack of trust towards their leaders is total. Their hate against the guilty people, against the guilty ones from yesterday until today, is increasing. The Crown Council advised You to concede. That decision created chaos. Its consequences, the anarchy and the anarchic process within society are still at their beginnings."<sup>26</sup> Charles II replied by interning Antonescu at the Bistrita Monastery in Oltenia.<sup>27</sup> Strange enough,

<sup>22</sup> Scurtu, Războiul, momentul adevărului, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 4-5.

<sup>23</sup> Idem, p. 3. Finland is often present within the Romanian historiography on WWII as term of comparison on two grounds. First, for her contrasting stand *vis-à-vis* the Soviet territorial claims. Second, for her own anti-Soviet war, a parallel war, and one differing in its purposes from the German ones, as in the Romanian case; An interesting exhibition dedicated to the 80th anniversary of the Finnish-Romanian diplomatic relationships was recently organized ( in late 2000 ) in the hall of the National Archives of Finland. Wartime Finnish and Romanian official documents were also included. See exhibition catalog: Romanian Suurlähetystö & Kansallisarkisto & Suomi-Romania Seura, 80 vuotta Suomen ja Romanian välisiä diplomaatti-suhteita, published with the support of PATMOS Foundation Finland, Printed by Oy Nord Print Ab, Helsinki Finland, 2000, p. 8-11; 25-27.

<sup>24</sup> Scurtu, Războiul, momentul adevărului, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Scurtu, Războiul, momentul adevărului, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Carol de Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen ( 1893 – 1953 ), on the Throne as Regele Carol al II-lea al României ( 1930 – 1940 ). He is one of the most controversial figures within Romanian national history. He renounced several times the title as Crown Prince. His minor son became King of Romania in 1927, as Michael I. He returned from " exile ", and replaced Michael in 1930. See, for example: Scurtu, Carol al II-lea, conducător politic, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 3, 1999, p. 24-29.

that the same King charged Antonescu to set up, three months later, a new government, on the 4th of September 1940. Charles II misjudged on that occasion, in our opinion, both his personal strength and Antonescu's determination, by taking into consideration that he was aware about latter's antipathy toward him. He had to pay with his throne his own misjudgement, as we shall see in the next pages.

Now, we can promote some assertions in the end of this introductory chapter. First, post-communist historical writing is directing its inquiring drive to include also Antonescu's person and deeds previously to his rise to power. Foreign historians, too, seem to be interested by these aspects.<sup>28</sup> Second, Antonescu is seen as a reformist military and political leader who, when in top positions, really tried to reorganize the military institution on modern standards, but who was actually obstructed by the military and political circles in power. Third, he was among those few personalities who openly protested against the territorial cessions in the summer of 1940. Fourth, his deep mistrust toward Romanian political class, accumulated through the many unpleasant experiences of the 1930s, might serve as an explanation for his option to introduce reforms, once in power, as an authoritarian leader.

General Ion Antonescu became *Conducătorul Statului Român* on September 6th, 1940.<sup>29</sup> Having been granted with full powers, he ruled Romania in an authoritarian manner until the 23rd of August, 1944, when he was deposed through a coup. What was the broader context in which Antonescu's rise to power did occur, and how? What made King Charles II charge Antonescu with the setting up of the new government? How did it really happen, Antonescu's seizure of power? What about Nazi Germany's role in the events? Which are the answers given by post-communist historians to the questions above?

Historian Ion Constantin points out, that " Antonescu came to power, on 6th September 1940, as a consequence of the serious domestic and international crises, which were menacing with the very collapse of the Romanian State, while General Antonescu was still committed to his manifest unwillingness of recognizing the territorial cessions imposed by force on his country."<sup>30</sup> Ioan Scurtu

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<sup>28</sup> See, for example: Larry Watts, *Romanian Cassandra. Ion Antonescu and The Struggle for Reform 1916 – 1941*, Boulder, 1993.

<sup>29</sup> *The Ruler of the Romanian State*

<sup>30</sup> Dobrinescu & Constantin, 1995, p. 224.

emphasizes, in his turn, rather the negative impact of external factors on Romania. The collapse of the Romanian borders had as immediate consequence the end of Charles' rule, the King being considered by all Romanians as the principal culprit for the national disaster. However, in Scurtu's point of view, " he cannot be charged with the territorial losses in the summer of 1940, since they were the result of the policy of force and dictate carried out by the Great Powers of the time ( Soviet Union, Germany, and Italy )."<sup>31</sup> Charles II had to bear the consequences because " he had assumed the whole responsibility within the State."<sup>32</sup> That is the reason why, Scurtu points out, Charles II " entrusted the power to General Antonescu on September 5th, 1940, and signed up an appeal to Romanians the next day, through which he was announcing his decision to pass ` the difficult tasks of the rule ` on Michael's shoulders, his son, which was in fact a genuine abdication act though it wasn't formulated as such."<sup>33</sup> We can interpret Scurtu's suggestions above in the sense, that both Romania and her king, Charles II, were the victims of the international big policy. Charles was also the victim of his own personal regime, set up in Romania in February – March 1938. As regards to Antonescu's rise to power, it seems that Charles had no other choice but to allow it to take place in the given situation.

Keith Hitchins, an American historian specialized in Romanian and South-East European history, has a similar interpretation of the context in which Antonescu came to power. He writes: " Antonescu's rise to power was a consequence of the political crisis initiated by Charles' acceptance, on August the 30th, of the decision taken by Hitler regarding Transylvania, the so called Vienna Dictate."<sup>34</sup> According to Hitchins, local public opinion was deeply shocked by Hitler's terms on Romania once they became known. All political parties, the army, and Iron Guard <sup>35</sup> did strongly react, Romania being on the brink of total anarchy. The Guard went on the streets of Bucharest and

<sup>31</sup> Scurtu, Carol al II-lea, conducător politic, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 3, 1999, p. 24.

<sup>32</sup> *Idem*, p. 29.

<sup>33</sup> *Idem*, p. 28.

<sup>34</sup> Hitchins, 1996, p. 483.

<sup>35</sup> Iron Guard was the main political party of the Romanian Far Right in the 1930s. It originates ( its rebirth took place in the 1990s, illegally, but it has minor influence among Romanians ) in a meeting, in the Dobrina Woods ( in north of Moldova ) in the spring of 1919, of some college boys led by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, who were committed to fight against the eventual spreading of Communism from the neighboring Soviet Russia and Hungary into Romania. They called themselves the Legionnaire Movement. Codreanu and his advocates were influenced by Fascist Italy in the 1920s, and acted for a short time as Romanian National Fascia. In 1925 it merged for some time into the National Christian Defense League led by A. C. Cuza. From 1927 onwards it acted under different names on the interwar Romanian political scene: The Legion of Archangel Michael; Iron Guard; The Grouping Corneliu Zelea Codreanu; All For The Homeland Party. In late 1938 its undisputed leader, the *Căpitan* C. Z. Codreanu, and some of his main collaborators were arrested and assassinated at the order of Charles II. In 1939 Horia Sima took the leadership. See for details: Constantiniu, " Singura mișcare românească contra căreia Caragiale nu poate nimic ", *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 4., 1997, p. 4-7; Zamfirescu, *Mișcarea Legionară: apariție și evoluție*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 4, 1997, p. 7-12.

other major towns, in an attempt to seize power, but the uprising was violently stifled by the Police and Gendarmerie. The outcome was the increasing of tension and public insecurity, Hitchins suggests. According to him, public opinion's indignation caused by the territorial losses was first directed toward the Axis Powers, but it rapidly turned against Charles, seen guilty of having been unable to resist them. For the American historian, Gigurtu Government appointed by Charles ( in July 1940 ) had shown a total incapacity in coping with the situation. Aware of the German support to both Iron Guard and Antonescu, Charles had to charge Antonescu, on the 4th of September, with the setting up of a new government, " by giving him at the same time free hands to choose the ministers."<sup>36</sup> Thus, we can suggest that Hitchins sees as immediate cause of Antonescu's rise to power the loss of Northern Transylvania by Romania at Hitler's will. Blamed for the disaster, Charles II tried to save his throne by appointing Antonescu as Prime Minister, nonetheless because he thought him as enjoying the German support.

Antonescu's rise to power was made possible, in our opinion, by both the international and the domestic crisis, within the broad context in which the former had launched the latter. One can assert that the interpretation of this aspect by post-communist Romanian historians, and not only, goes in a similar vein, the emphasis being set by them either on the domestic factors, or, quite often, on the external ones.

One can suggest, by relying on the authors quoted above, that Charles II had to appoint Antonescu to form a new government because he knew that the General was trusted by Hitler. It seems to be a sound assumption, if we are taking into consideration the 1992 comments of Mihai de Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen <sup>37</sup> on this matter: " As far as I know, my father was not a nazi. He tried to fix the things, but they turned worse. So, he was compelled to appoint Antonescu as Prime Minister. He took over almost all my father's prerogatives. This was the situation inherited by me in 1940."<sup>38</sup> The words of former King Michael I could be interpreted in the sense, that Charles II, by not being himself a nazi supporter, had to appoint as Prime Minister the person whom he thought as being such one, that is General Ion Antonescu. Mihai de Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen also suggests, implicitly, that Charles II granted Antonescu with full powers under pressure.

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<sup>36</sup> Hitchins, 1996, p. 483.

<sup>37</sup> The son of Charles II. As Regele Mihai I al României, twice on the Romanian Throne ( 1927 – 1930; 1940 – 1947 ). Deposed by the communists, in December 1947, he went in exile to Switzerland. He has often visited Romania after 1989. His properties and civil rights were returned in 1997. Since 2001 he's officially treated as a former chief of state.

<sup>38</sup> Mihai I al României, Cuvinte către români, 1992, p. 39. In *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 3, 1999, p. 27.

As *Conducător*, Antonescu declared within the Session of the Cabinet Council of 7 February 1941: " ... During my internment, I did discuss with the Germans the entire governing plan and all the basic principles of the future Romanian State, especially in the economic field. They were accepted by then, the talks being conducted through Mr. Minister [ a.n., Mihai ] Antonescu, who was visiting me, at Bistritza, every Sunday... "39 One can assume that Charles II was informed by his intelligence services, known for their efficiency, about Antonescu's connection with the Germans. When the things turned worse for him, Charles appointed Antonescu as Prime-Minister, probably thinking to secure own's rule by pleasing Hitler. But, who did ultimately persuade King Charles II to assign Antonescu with the setting up of a new government? The answer is provided by the historian Horia Șerbănescu: Valer Pop.<sup>40</sup> After the territorial losses of 1940 this one turned into a critic of the King, after having been initially one of his main supporters. According to Șerbănescu, it was Pop who, as a last resort, " persuaded Charles II to bring at the head of the government a tough man: General Ion Antonescu, and who, shortly then after, did suggest the King to abdicate on behalf of his son, Michael."<sup>41</sup> That is the reason why Charles II uses " the strongest terms " as regards to Pop's person within his memoirs ( published posthumous ).<sup>42</sup> Charles II writes on this: " ... Within this work of pan-Germanism it is sad to say, that they [ a.n., the Germans ] found acolytes within the country. I have a strong reluctance in writing their names: the Iron Guard, the traitor Ion Antonescu, and politicians of the lowest kind, as Valer Pop, all of them individuals deprived of patriotism, and sold to the enemy."<sup>43</sup> It's easy to understand Charles' bitterness when thinking his fate.

We can say, by taking into consideration Charles' strong words on him, that Valer Pop was the one who did, ultimately, persuade the King to bring Antonescu to power. Charles was aware about Antonescu's animosity towards him, and obviously knew about the former's connection with the Germans. Thus, he was well aware about the potential danger for his rule represented by Antonescu. Instead, he trusted Pop and took the risk of appointing General Antonescu as Prime-Minister. Perhaps, Charles II thought himself as being able to play Antonescu on but, as we shall see, he misjudged this one's determination. The main interpretation of the new historiography is, that Charles II had no other choice but to bring to power the only man wanted by Hitler: Antonescu.

<sup>39</sup> Ștefan, Ion Antonescu: "De când eram în închisoare am discutat cu nemții tot programul de guvernământ", *Magazin Istoric*, Nr. 9, 1998, p. 14.

<sup>40</sup> Valer Pop ( 1892 – 1958 ) was a member of the leadership of the National Liberal Party.

<sup>41</sup> Șerbănescu, in *Regele Carol al II-lea*, 1994, p. 184.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Regele Carol al II-lea*, 1994, p. 135.

There is no doubt, that the main role in the unfolding of the events leading to Antonescu's rise to power was played by Nazi Germany. As mentioned before, Antonescu admitted on February 7th, 1941, his connections with the Germans previously to his rise to power. He was in direct contact with them, particularly in the crucial days of September 4th and 5th, 1940. It is this aspect which is most emphasized by Hitchins in his narration of the events. For him, it was Wilhelm Fabricius with whom Antonescu had been in permanent touch during those crucial days.<sup>44</sup> Fabricius had a strong influence on Antonescu, and he was the one who had actually persuaded him to seek for dictatorial powers as the only way to avoid anarchy. Hitchins suggests that "this one linked the German support to the recognition and implementation of the Vienna Arbitration's terms, to the presence of a German military mission within the country, and to tight economic relations with The Reich."<sup>45</sup> According to Hitchins, Antonescu accepted the conditions set by Germany. Being informed by Fabricius that "he found the right man able to set up a powerful and efficient government ready to comply with German wishes", Hitler told him to give Antonescu full assistance.<sup>46</sup> Having the German support on his side, Antonescu asked Charles II on September 4th, 1940, to grant him full powers in governing the country. Advised by his counselors, the next morning "Charles signed up the decrees suspending the Constitution, dissolving the Parliament, and granting Antonescu full powers."<sup>47</sup> One can interpret Hitchins' suggestions in the sense, that Antonescu's rise to power was orchestrated from behind the scenes by Nazi Germany through her official representative in Bucharest, W. Fabricius. Antonescu had to agree to bind himself and his rule to The Reich's interests, before receiving the indispensable German support on his road to power. Antonescu didn't act independently, but in conformity with the advices provided by Hitler's representatives in Romania. His demand for full powers was also suggested by the Germans.

Antonescu's permanent contact with Fabricius during those days is also confirmed by Ioan Hudiță in his *Jurnal politic*.<sup>48</sup> Hudiță suggests that, after having forced Charles II to abdicate and grant him discretionary powers on September 6th, at 2 a.m., Antonescu, "soon after a short phone conversation

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<sup>44</sup> Wilhelm Fabricius was the Chief of the German Legation in Bucharest. Disappointed by the manner in which this one was managing German interests in Romania Hitler dismissed him, on 13th December 1940, and appointed the SA officer Manfred von Killinger in his place. See, for example, Hitchins, 1996, p. 495-496.

<sup>45</sup> Hitchins, 1996, p. 483.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Professor Ioan Hudiță was a senior member of the leadership of the National Peasant Party. As an envoy of his party, he was received by Antonescu in audience on September 22nd, 1940. He recorded the conversation with Antonescu within his political diary.

with Fabricius, left Charles arrested... and went to the General Staff Headquarters where he found the group of conspirators..."<sup>49</sup> Thus, also Hudîţǎ suggests a clear German involvement in the events.

We can say that both foreign and mainstream Romanian historians suggest, through their presentation and interpretation of the primary sources discovered in the last years, that without the involvement in the events of Hitler's representatives, and without the direct support provided by the Germans, Antonescu's rise to power would have been highly improbable due to the prevailing mutual mistrust between him and King Charles II. In our point of view the Germans both supported, and planned in advance Antonescu's steps on his road to supreme power in Romania. In exchange, he had to bind both his rule and Romania's future policy to the interests of the Third Reich.

How did it happen, the seizure of power by Antonescu? Historian Dan Berindei identifies within a preface the version which seems to be the closest to the truth.<sup>50</sup> According to Berindei, this version was provided by Antonescu himself through his meeting with Hudîţǎ, on September 22nd, 1940. For Berindei, "this is an unknown version, completely different from what was known until today, about the way in which King Charles' abdication took place, and historians shouldn't overlook it when writing about this dramatic moment."<sup>51</sup> Berindei emphasizes its importance for the new historiography through his own seven short interpretive points on Hudîţǎ's diary pages. Subsequently, they are included by us within the proper context as suggested by Hudîţǎ. First, for two weeks Antonescu kept quiet on the circumstances in which his rise to power had occurred because he wanted "to spare the Dynasty."<sup>52</sup> Second, on September 5th, 1940, Charles II and Antonescu disagreed on the replacement of some generals in top positions, "the bone of contention being General Mihail" whom the latter wanted to replace with Gen. Ioanitoiu at the head of the High General Staff, whilst the King categorically refusing his demand.<sup>53</sup> Third, aware of the fact that Antonescu was seeking to promote his own men to the army leadership, Charles II commanded as "mission for the Guard Division" to arrive at the capital city by "6 a.m., on September 6th."<sup>54</sup> Fourth, Gen. Şova's (Commander of the Guard Division) phone call on the same September 6th,

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<sup>49</sup> Hudîţǎ, Pagini de jurnal, Magazin Istoric, Nr. 5, 1999, p. 14. Under Acad. Dan Berindei's title and preface, the diary pages are taken as such for Magazin Istoric from: Ioan Hudîţǎ, Jurnal politic, Vol. III, Institutul European Iasi (unpublished yet by May 1999).

<sup>50</sup> Berindei, preface to: Ioan Hudîţǎ, Pagini de jurnal, Magazin Istoric, Nr. 5, 1999, p. 12.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.



at around 1 a.m., through which this one, unaware of the created situation, was reporting to the appointed Prime-Minister about the impossibility to execute the order to arrive in the capital by 6 a.m., made ” Antonescu to promptly react.”<sup>55</sup> Fifth, Antonescu, understanding within a second that the King and the leadership of the High General Staff were preparing a plot against him, rushed first to the Royal Palace and forced ” Charles to write own’s abdication under the pistol threat.”<sup>56</sup> Sixth, ” the plot ultimately failed ” when Antonescu took by surprise the plotting generals at the Headquarters of the High General Staff and arrested them all.<sup>57</sup> Seventh, when meeting Hudită, on 27 September 1940, ” General Coroamă [ a.n., appointed by Antonescu, on 5 September 1940, as new Commander of the Bucharest Garrison ] confirmed the version ” as an eyewitness to the events.<sup>58</sup> One can say that Berindei’s interpretive landmarks, on Hudită’s text presenting Antonescu’s own version of the events, are sound. They are confirmed by the integral reading of the diary pages recording Hudită’s own conversation with Antonescu.<sup>59</sup>

One can suggest that the most probable circumstances in which Antonescu’s seizure of power took place are known by now, this aspect having been clarified by post-communist historical writing through one of its outstanding figure, historian Dan Berindei. In our opinion, both Antonescu and Charles II threw their cards on the table on 5 September 1940. On the one hand, Antonescu tried to obtain King’s approval to replace Gen. Mihail, seen as an incapable individual, with his trusted man, Gen. Ioanițoiu, as Chief of the Romanian High General Staff. Antonescu felt himself mistrusted by the King when facing this one’s refusal. On the other hand, Charles II interpreted Antonescu’s proposal as an attempt by this one to increase own power, by appropriating the military institution. He asked Antonescu two days of reflection before taking any decision. Aware of the fact that his power was at stake, Charles II proceeded, later in the same day, to the preparation of a plot against the appointed Prime-Minister. General Șova’s phone conversation with Antonescu changed the course of history. Antonescu found out about the plot, and resolutely stifled it by deposing Charles II, and by arresting the plotting generals. Later on, Antonescu did also use this event as a tool for legitimizing his supreme power in state. There is only two possible explanations why Șova didn’t know about the plot. One is the simple omission by the plotting generals, at the High General Staff, to inform him on this. The second, and most probable one, is that Antonescu was enjoying a

<sup>55</sup> Berindei, preface to Ioan Hudită: *Pagini de jurnal*, Magazin Istoric, Nr. 5, 1999, p. 12.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> See, Ioan Hudită, *Pagini de Jurnal*, Magazin Istoric, Nr. 5, 1999, p. 12-17.

real popularity among the commanders of the territorial big military units, this fact restraining the plotting leadership of the High General Staff to communicate Gen. Șova the actual meaning of the order to move his division towards Bucharest.

Had Șova failed to contact Antonescu, who knows what should have followed then after. A successful plot against Antonescu would have probably led to civil war, German occupation, and, ultimately, to Romania's disappearance from the map as an independent state. Though it might sound rather as a pure speculation, when thinking afterwards the fate of other European countries during the war, one can suggest that Gen. Șova, by his phone call to Antonescu, did actually spare Romania from the worst possible troubles. Under Antonescu, despite the initial anarchy, the civil war didn't occur, the country wasn't occupied by Germany, and the Romanian State, embodied by Antonescu himself, maintained its independence though within a reduced shape. The price to pay for all this was the alliance with the Axis Powers and the linking of Romanian economy to the Nazi war-machine.<sup>60</sup> In a continental Europe under the German yoke, Antonescu had no other alternative but to follow Hitler's policy by trying, at the same time, to protect the national interests of his country. As regards to Antonescu's anti-Soviet war, this was, first of all, the war of the Romanian People as a whole, having different goals to the German ones. Șova's phone call could be seen as a milestone which changed the course of history in Romania in the way it developed until today. However, it is more than certain, that Romania wouldn't have been in any circumstances spared by the turmoil of the Second World War because, on the one hand, Germany's pressure on her was too strong, and, on the other hand, the desire of the Romanians to regain the lost territories was too high to be suppressed by anyone.

Which are, then, the main approaches of the post-communist historical writing over the period of time preceding and witnessing Antonescu's rise to power in Romania, in September 1940? First, mainstream historians have begun, in the recent years, to inquire and interpret Antonescu's person and deeds also previously to 1940. Antonescu is seen as a political and military reformist leader trying his best on behalf of his country, but being blocked in his reforming attempts by the establishment. He's also perceived as a western oriented personality, towards France in particular, until the former's fall, early in the summer of 1940.<sup>61</sup> Second, the origins of Romania's territorial disaster in the summer of 1940 are identified by post-communist historians in the Great Powers'

<sup>60</sup> In November 1940 Antonescu's Romania adhered to the Tripartite Pact.

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, Ioan Hudiță, Pagini de jurnal, Magazin Istoric, Nr. 5, 1999, p. 15.

contest for spheres of influence in Eastern Europe. The appeasement policy of France and Britain toward Hitler in late 1930s made possible the partition of Eastern Europe by Nazi Germany and Soviet Union, between 1939 and 1940, which finally led to a general war. Third, Romania's domestic political crisis and social anarchy, following the territorial losses of 1940, are seen by mainstream historians rather as the outcome of the international crisis. Nonetheless, Romanian political and military leaders of the time are seen as having contributed, by their irresponsible policy toward the needs of the national army, to the 1940 tragical events in Romania. Fourth, post-communist Romanian historians suggest that the climate of political and social anarchy in Romania, and the German pressure on her, made possible Antonescu's rise to power in September 1940. The general lack of responsibility, prevailing in Romania in the summer of 1940, is well depicted by the new historiography through the analysis of lots of primary sources of the period. Thus, in early September 1940, everybody was keeping responsible for the national disaster the other ones. King Charles II and his supporters bamed for this: Western Democracies, that is France and Britain, which had allowed Hitler's expansionist pan-Germanism; traditional parties, National Liberal <sup>62</sup> and National Peasant <sup>63</sup>, for their long irresponsible parliamentary and governing impotence; Iron Guard for the climate of anarchy and violence created within the country, and for its pro-German orientation; Antonescu for his power thirst and pro-Geram policy. Traditional parties set the guilt on: Charles II and his acolytes, but especially on his dictatorial system introduced in 1938, which had generated abuses and spread corruption; the lack of support by Western Democracies before and during the war; Iron Guard with its huliganic, violent, and pro-German policy. Iron Guard cast the stones on everybody except itself: on King Charles II and his

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<sup>62</sup> National Liberal Party is the oldest political party in Romania. It has its origins in the very birth of the modern Romanian State, in 1859. It has been since the principal promoter of Romania's modernization on western standards, but mainly through own efforts. Its founding chairman, and one of the greatest figures in Romanian history, was Ion C. Brătianu. His family has belonged to the leadership of the party from the beginning. As the principal bourgeois governing party, it promoted the interests of Romanian industrial and financial circles and the industrialization of the country until the eve of the Second World War. Liberal personalities did belong to Antonescu's wartime administration, too. The party was banned by the Communist Regime between 1947 and 1989. Since the fall of Communism, it has been one of the main opposition parties in Romania, having also governmental responsibilities. Liberal Party has been shaken by internal fractionist forces since its birth, fact leading to the inefficiency of its official policy every time in power position.

<sup>63</sup> National Peasant Party saw the light of the day on October 10th, 1926, through the merging of the Romanian National Party of Transylvania into the Romanian Peasant Party of the Old Kingdom. During interwar period the party took the place left empty by the former Conservative Party ( dissolved in the turmoil of WWI ) on the political arena, alternating at Romania's governing with the Liberal Party. Until 1947 the party was led in turn, first by Ion Mihalache ( the leader of the former Peasant Party ), then by Iuliu Maniu ( the leader of the former National Party ). Both in the past and nowadays the party has promoted the land owners' interests, in particular those of the rural smallholders. Between the wars, Peasant leaders followed " the third way " principle in developing Romania, that is a political and socio-economic doctrine adjusting the western standards to the local agrarian traditions. National Party, too, was banned by the communists between 1947 and 1989. Since 1990 it has been the main opposition party under the name of National Christian Democratic Peasant Party, holding also the power between 1996 and 2000.

regime, for murdering its leaders, and for being corrupt and sold to the Jewish capital; on peasant and liberal politicians, for allowing all this to happen through their policy of cosmopolitanism and economic meanness; on communists and Jews alike, with their international connections, seen as being the main initiators of the economic, social, and political disaster that had stifled Romania. Antonescu, though a personality with a western orientation, blamed for the created situation everything and everybody: western blindness, as having led to the ongoing war in Europe, with tragic repercussions for Romania; Charles II, for his irresponsible policy; whole political class, for his impotence and corruption; Iron Guard, for its violent excesses on civilians. Post-communist historians suggest that the predominant frame of mind among the majority of Romanians, including that of Charles II, had acquired, by September 1940, mystic features. Within the general context in which everybody was blaming everybody for the national catastrophe, the "providential man" was wanted and expected by every Romanian.<sup>64</sup> All, bourgeois leaders, the Germans, and ultimately Charles II himself, not to speak about ordinary Romanians, turned their looks towards the person seen as the only one capable of restoring law and order in Romania, General Ion Antonescu.

Our very intimate belief is that, had Antonescu, by chance, been appointed as Prime-Minister in the "normal" time previously to 1938, his time in office should have remained, without doubts, as one of the most progressive time period in the twentieth-century Romania. Another intimate belief is, that Antonescu decided from the start to rule Romania in an authoritarian way not because he desired it personally, neither because the Germans wanted it so, but rather because he was deeply convinced as being the only way to introduce social, economic, and military reforms in Romania. The paradox is that the same reformist and western oriented leader, supplanted by the interwar establishment, ruled Romania during the Second World War in an authoritarian way, mostly at the request, and with the tacit support of the same establishment.

### 3.2. A Week of Waiting for the General

After Antonescu's appointment in office, on 6 September 1940, by the new King, Michael I, as the *Ruler of the State* with exceptional powers, there followed a week when the *Conducător* had to choose with whom he should govern the country. His final option actually meant the deadly blow to the remaining democracy in Romania, for years to come.

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<sup>64</sup> See, in this sense, I. Scurtu, Carol al II-lea, conducător politic, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 3, 1999, p. 29.

What did the *Conducător* first, once in power? Why did he finally choose, after several days of reflection, the Iron Guard as governing partner? How the questions above are they addressed by new historiography?

Antonescu made, during his trial in 1946, the following statement:

” When I was appointed to set up the new government, I intended to set up a national unity one, but I didn’t succeed. I did it only partially, this National Unity Government... I gave the legionnaires [ a.n., generic term used as regards to Iron Guard’s members ] the possible minimum which I could give, after violent talks with Horia Sima. I formed the government with the people who set themselves at my disposal, and with soldiers.”<sup>65</sup>

Historian Dan Amedeo Lăzărescu suggests, within a long article on Antonescu and his regime, that Antonesscu’s words ” should be analyzed by taking into consideration the different time periods – very short – to which they make reference.”<sup>66</sup> Obviously, Lăzărescu means by this, first, the period 4 – 5 September 1940, time when Antonescu sought to gather a ministerial team as the newly appointed Prime-Minister, whilst King Charles II was still on the throne.<sup>67</sup> Second, he means the period 6 – 14 September, time when Antonescu, appointed to office both as chief of state and government by the new King, Michael I, had to choose with whom he should govern. In Lăzărescu’s point of view, Antonescu couldn’t set up a national unity government ” neither before the abdication of King Charles II ”, due to the refusal of the majority political leaders to join such a one with the King still in power, ” nor after abdication ”, because that would have also meant collaboration with Iron Guard and Nazi Germany, and the recognition of the Vienna Dictate.<sup>68</sup> Dan Berindei reaches similar conclusions through the informations provided by Hudiță’s diary pages. For Berindei, the main condition set by the peasant and liberal party leaders for their eventual official participation in a government under Antonescu’s premiership, that is Charles’ dismissal from power, turned real on 6 September 1940. Thus, the ground for an agreement between the *Conducător* and traditional parties was open, Romanian historian emphasizes. He suggests that this didn’t happen because of the different attitudes over the Transylvanian issue. On the one hand, Maniu wanted Antonescu to resist the German pressure and to call off the withdrawal of the Romanian authorities from Northern Transylvania, whilst, on the other hand, Antonescu took a

<sup>65</sup> Lăzărescu, O chestiune de drept: sare pe rana deschisă, Aldine, Nr. 93, 6 decembrie, 1997, p. II; Citation by Lăzărescu from: Procesul lui Ion Antonescu, Ed. Eminescu, 1995, p. 58.

<sup>66</sup> Lăzărescu, O chestiune de drept: sare pe rana deschisă, Aldine, Nr. 93, 6 decembrie, 1997, p. II.

<sup>67</sup> See, in this sense, Ioan Hudiță, Pagini de jurnal, Magazin Istoric, Nr. 5, 1999, p. 13.

<sup>68</sup> Lăzărescu, O chestiune de drept: sare pe rana deschisă, Aldine, Nr. 93, 6 decembrie, 1997, p. II.

precautious stand and assumed its consequences as the *Conducător*.<sup>69</sup> That is the reason why, Berindei points out, during the week after the 6th of September, 1940, ” General Antonescu did eliminate from his agenda consultations with the historical parties.”<sup>70</sup> According to Lăzărescu, the first thing done by Antonescu, as the *Conducător*, was the maintaining in office of the majority ministers of Charles’ last government. He replaced only the Prime Minister, Ion Gigurtu, the War Minister, Gen. Constantin Niculescu, and some Subsecretaries of State. Lăzărescu suggests that Antonescu did it because ” he wanted for himself a break ”, before setting up a new government.<sup>71</sup>

In our opinion, the moves undertaken by Antonescu within the period 4 – 14 September 1940 could be seen in relation to his commitment to the Germans only. He actually tried to set up a true government of national unity previously to September 6th, by having called upon traditional parties to participate. Although not disagreeing that Antonescu should have full powers, party leaders linked, however, their participation to Charles’ dismissal, and to the change by Antonescu of his pro-German policy. Appointed as *Conducător* after Charles’ fall, on September 6th, Antonescu knew that he couldn’t change his German orientation because of his previously given assurances to Fabricius. Moreover, because he was almost certain that peasant and liberal leaders were not willing to join a pro-German government, he didn’t even trouble himself to contact them. He probably knew that he would govern with Iron Guard, and therefore he thought that a break of several days was welcome.

Finally, the *Conducător* set up his government after eight days of delay, on 15th September 1940, that is one day after the Kingdom of Romania had been proclaimed a *Legionnaire Nation-State*. It included Iron Guard, some liberal members as specialists of the economic offices, and army senior officers. Lăzărescu suggests that, in the new government, Iron Guard was holding essential ministerial posts, such as the Interior, Foreign, Education, and Press and Propaganda ones.<sup>72</sup>

Thus, for post-communist historians, Ion Antonescu couldn’t set up a national unity government

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<sup>69</sup> Iuliu Maniu ( 1873 – 1952 ), a Romanian from Transylvania and Chairman of the National Peasant Party ( 1926 – 1933; 1937 – 1947 ), was one of the most influential politicians in Interwar Romania, also holding the office of Prime Minister. He was against the territorial cessions in the summer of 1940, and did initiate contacts with the Allied Powers in order to draw Romania out of the war on the Axis side. He was trialed and condemned in 1947, together with other peasant leaders, as class enemy and sent to prison, where he died very sick in 1952.

<sup>70</sup> Berindei, preface to: Ioan Hudită, Pagini de jurnal, Magazin Istoric, Nr. 5, 1998, p. 20.

<sup>71</sup> Lăzărescu, O chestiune de drept: sare pe rana deschisă, Aldine, Nr. 93, 6 decembrie, 1997, p. II.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

because of the existing irreconcilable contradiction between his pro-German views on foreign policy, and the western oriented ones of the traditional parties. Instead, Antonescu set up a less representative government, by relying on the sole pro-German political organization of the time, the Iron Guard.

In our opinion, there was a third way that the *Conducător*, as a career officer, might have followed in those circumstances. That is, to introduce, on 6 September 1940, a genuine military dictatorship in Romania. Hitler, despite his whole sympathy towards the Guard, would have probably accepted that, by the end. By thinking afterwards the unfolding of the events in Legionnaire Romania, however strange it might sound, Antonescu would have done it better by setting up a military dictatorship. To our mind, that would have spared the country from anarchy and violence. Anyway, the *Conducător* had had the freedom to choose the political pattern he wanted, if only in conformity with Nazi Germany's interests. In the end, and after a week-long leisure, Antonescu decided to give Iron Guard the chance to prove its political maturity, on September 14th, 1940.

### 3.3. The Romanian Legionnaire Nation-State: A Body with Two Heads

Under the *Conducător's* will, King Michael I proclaimed the Kingdom of Romania a *Legionnaire Nation-State*, on 14 September 1940. The next day, Antonescu set up his government with the *All for the Homeland Party*, the sole lawful party left by then.<sup>73</sup> There followed over four months of tense collaboration, characterized by a deep mutual mistrust, and leading in the end to a violent clash ( 21 – 23 January 1941 ) between Iron Guard and Antonescu. Enjoying the support of the Germans, the *Conducător* stifled the Guard's uprising against him. This period of time is one of the most complex and controversial chapters in Romania's political history.

What was it, the *legionnaire state*? In which circumstances, and why, was it possible its setting up? How did it work, Antonescu's collaboration with Iron Guard? Which are the answers given by post-communist historical writing to these questions?

The new political regime introduced in Romania by Antonescu, as the *Conducător*, had as judicial basis the Royal Decree No. 3151, signed up by King Michael I on 14 September 1940.<sup>74</sup> In Article

<sup>73</sup> Starting from 1934, Iron Guard was known as such as a political organization.

<sup>74</sup> Tudor, *Rebeliune sau lovitura de stat? Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 1, 1999, p. 28.

1 Romania was declared a *Legionnaire Nation -State*. Article 2 was recognizing the *Legionnaire Movement* as the sole political organization within the State. By Article 3 General Ion Antonescu became the *Ruler* of the Legionnaire Nation-State, whilst Article 4 was recognizing Horia Sima as the *Leader* of the Legion. According to historian Alina Tudor, "at least in principle, political power was balanced between Ion Antonescu, invested as the *Ruler* of the State, and Horia Sima, who was leading to sole governing party."<sup>75</sup> For Tudor, the new leadership intended to copy the political organization of the European totalitarian states, namely of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. She suggests that, however, the practical reality was different: "Hitler and Mussolini had distinguished themselves first as leaders of the totalitarian parties, which, through their leaders' actions, became then after the sole governing parties, whilst the link between Legionnaire Movement and Antonescu had been established somehow *ad-hoc*, in September 1940."<sup>76</sup> As a consequence, Tudor points out, the different conceptions and ambitions of the two leaders, Antonescu and Sima, did manifest themselves from the start, "an early breaking of their collaboration being, in those circumstances, easy to anticipate."<sup>77</sup> We can interpret Tudor's suggestions above in the sense that Romania, indeed, became a totalitarian state by 14 September 1940. However, the fact that the chief of state was not at the same time the chief of the sole governing party did sow from the start the seeds of confrontation within the new form of government. Historian Petre Otu's viewpoints on the matter, expressed within a large article, are rather similar to Tudor's ones. For him, the new political arrangement, with Antonescu as the "Ruler of the State" and Horia Sima as the "Leader of the Legionnaire Movement", that is of the governing political force," did encroach upon a basic principle of every totalitarian system – that which stands on the unity of conception and action embodied by the concentration of power in the hands of a single individual."<sup>78</sup> Otu emphasizes that the arrangement "led to a duality of power generating a growing conflict", which did culminate with the uprising of the Guard against the *Conducător*.<sup>79</sup> Thus, Otu sees the proclamation of the Legionnaire Nation-State as an introduction of the totalitarian system in Romania. However, in the Romanian case, the system was to show its inefficiency from the start because of the existing duality of power at the top.

<sup>75</sup> Tudor, *Rebeliune sau lovitură de stat? Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 1, 1999, p. 28.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Otu, *Septembrie 1940 – ianuarie 1941. Armata în "Statul Național Legionar"* : preliminarii, *Magazin Istoric*, Nr. 6, 1997, p. 38.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*



To our mind, a dictatorial ruling system was already introduced in Romania, in 1938, by King Charles II. The proclamation of the Legionnaire Nation-State, on 14 September 1940, actually meant its strengthening, though with other actors on the scene and within a different governing arrangement. For us, the birth of the legionnaire state meant the shift from personal authoritarianism to state totalitarianism. In September 1940 the country became *de jure* and *de facto* a totalitarian state, the eastern equivalent of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. However, as "a body with two heads", the existence of Legionnaire Romania was to be a short one.

Why did Antonescu ultimately decide to set up the new regime with the Iron Guard? The answer was provided by Antonescu himself during his trial:

"I ultimately decided to form the government with Horia Sima, because Horia Sima was representing by that time [ a.n., September 1940 ] the political basis of the country. The whole country was manifesting in favor of a legionnaire regime."<sup>80</sup>

Historian D. A. Lăzărescu, himself a contemporary to the events, suggests that Antonescu's statement is inconsistent with the historical truth. Lăzărescu thinks that Antonescu probably made that assertion in order to cover up the role played by the German Minister in Bucharest, W. Fabricius. For him, Iron Guard, once an intellectual and patriotic elite, became after the death of its *Căpitan*, in 1938, the puppet of German secret services. By 1940, Iron Guard was still shaken by a deep internal crisis. According to Romanian historian, there was only a small part of the orthodox clergy, students, and aristocracy who didn't cut off their links with the Guard, because of their conservatism and anti-Semitism. Lăzărescu emphasizes, that "neither Romanian political class, nor the bourgeoisie, and not even the army had a sympathy for a movement which had introduced in Romania... political murder and the paramilitary organization of the political realm."<sup>81</sup> Lăzărescu's interpretation on the events can be seen as a liberal viewpoint. In our turn, we can interpret Lăzărescu's words in the sense that, Antonescu deliberately chose Iron Guard as governing partner, by taking into consideration Guard's pro-German orientation, and not its real political representation among Romanians.

<sup>80</sup> Lăzărescu, O chestiune de drept: sare pe rana deschisă, Aldine, Nr. 93, 6 decembrie, 1997, p. II; Citation by Lăzărescu from: Procesul lui Ion Antonescu, Ed. Eminescu, 1995, p. 57.

<sup>81</sup> Lăzărescu, O chestiune de drept: sare pe rana deschisă, Aldine, Nr. 93, 6 decembrie, 1997, p. II.

Historian Petre Otu suggests that the reasons behind Antonescu's decision to bring Iron Guard to power were made public by the General himself, on 24 October 1940, through a speech addressed to the commanders of big military units:

" Domestically, I had no relation with any political party, but I've been strongly supported from the start by the public opinion who felt the danger... That's why I sought to set up the government by relying externally on the Axis and domestically on the legionnaires, with whom, once again, I had no political connection but just a spiritual one. I had to rely on a movement which I didn't create, nor lead. I didn't use the army, although I'm sure it would have followed me, because I didn't want it to get involved into the turmoil of the political struggle."<sup>82</sup>

For historian Petre Otu, Antonescu's mistrust towards Iron Guard was obvious from the start. Strong clashes between Antonescu and Sima took place during the very negotiations for the setting up of the new government. In Otu's point of view, Antonescu's skepticism as regards to Sima and his Iron Guard's ability to govern is revealed by the fact that the former did appoint in high economic offices liberal technocrats. Moreover, Otu emphasizes, " in order to avoid all surprises, Antonescu kept for himself the National Defense Ministry..."<sup>83</sup> According to the Romanian historian, Antonescu, nevertheless, had to make great concessions, the majority of ministerial posts being granted by him, in the end, to Iron Guard. For Otu, " the army remained outside the legionnaire control, and army officers didn't have a significant representation within the government."<sup>84</sup> Thus, one can interpret Otu's suggestions above in the sense that Antonescu knew from the beginning that his political arrangement with Iron Guard would last for a short time. Therefore, in order to avoid an eventual economic chaos and social anarchy, he appointed in high economic and financial posts specialists belonging to the National Liberal Party and kept the army under his control, whilst investing the Iron Guard with the main governing responsibility.

In our point of view, Antonescu, due to the impossibility to govern with the anti-German traditional parties, and lacking a party of his own, or a political affiliation, had to set up the government by relying on the only pro-German political organization of the time. In his *memorandum* of 15 May 1946 addressed to The People's Tribunal of Bucharest, among other things, Antonescu wrote:

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<sup>82</sup> Otu, Septembrie 1940 – ianuarie 1941. Armata în " Statul Național Legionar " : preliminarii, Magazin Istoric, Nr. 6, 1997, p. 38.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

” I’m accused of setting up the first government with a legionnaire basis: I’ve already explained during the instruction and public sessions that, by then, there wasn’t any other political basis within the country. I had to choose between anarchy with all its consequences – the protectorate and the definitive collapse of our borders – and the attempt to calm down, channel, dominate, and stifle a movement which terrorist character would have led to the total destruction of the Romanian People. I did opt for ‘ the attempt ’ and, during the following five months of legionnaire governing, I treated the country as a patient, leaving to the people the possibility that by own conviction do extract the virus that had contaminated them, and which was threatening their existence.”<sup>85</sup>

The text above clearly reveals the circumstances in which Iron Guard’s rise to power did actually occur. For us, it is obvious that Antonescu gave Iron Guard the chance to govern in order to avoid the spreading of anarchy within the country, which would have probably led in the end to the definitive collapse of the Romanian State. The *Conducător* was skeptical from the start about Iron Guard’s ability to govern, but for him there was no other political force, obviously a pro-German one in the given circumstances, on which he could rely. As we know, he was bound by a previous agreement with the Germans, and it is almost certain that he brought Iron Guard to power in order to please Hitler. There is no reason to suspect the words expressed by Antonescu during his trial. As an army officer, he was well-known for his honesty and his open critique of the Establishment. Thus, we can assert as a general conclusion, that Antonescu brought Iron Guard to the governing act in order to compromise it in both Romanian and German eyes, since he intimately felt that their collaboration would be a short one. Post-communist historians, through Lăzărescu and Otu, interpret this aspect broadly in the same sense, although in a more nuanced manner.

How did it work, the collaboration Antonescu – Iron Guard in Legionnaire Romania? How is it seen by mainstream Romanian historians? This aspect is dealt with, within the next pages, on two grounds: the nature of the relationships between Iron Guard and Romanian Army, and the relation between Antonescu’s spiritual and socio-political conceptions and those of Iron Guard.

A new government was set up by Antonescu on September 15th, 1940. The *Conducător* did appoint Horia Sima as Vice President of the Council of Ministers and Iron Guard politicians in all ministerial posts, with the exception of the economic and military ones. Antonescu kept for himself within the government, besides the premiership, also the Ministry of Defense. Under his direct subordination were all military Subsecretaries of State, ” the generals Constantin Pantazi ( Land ),

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<sup>85</sup> Antonescu, Memoriu depus onor. Tribunalului Poporului la 15.V.1946 de Ion Antonescu, Arhivele Statului, București, fond personal Ion Antonescu. Here, from Ciuca, 1996, vol. II, p. 163 ( whole document, p. 162-187 ).

Gheorghe Dobre ( Army Supply ), Gheorghe Jienescu ( Air ), and Gheorghe Koslinski ( Navy ).”<sup>86</sup>  
 Thus, Antonescu made clear from the start to Iron Guard that it had no say, and that it should restrain itself of getting involved into the military matters. How did Iron Guard respond to Antonescu’s warning?

But first, a short outlook back in time could be in place here. In the aftermath of the *Munich Agreement*, in late 1938, *Serviciul Special de Informații Român* ( SSI ) informed the leadership of the state about a type written manifesto spread by Iron Guard members among superior army officers and generals in Bucharest.<sup>87</sup> According to the note, the Guard was strongly criticizing within the manifesto the difficult domestic situation in which both Romania and her army were by then. Antonescu was seen as the only person capable of bringing about a change of the situation. The manifesto was entirely transcribed within the note. It is useful to see, in connection to our topic here, how did Iron Guard urge the army commanders to action:

” ... The war is waiting outside our doors. The Army is demoralized, and its Headquarters meaningless; it would resolutely fight, as the stupid Mărdărescu [ a.n., high military official ] said before. But, its vigorous recovery, and that of the country alike, can be achieved by a miraculous man only: Antonescu. That one who estranges from this providential man, would pursue nothing but the worse for his country and army! Fight for country and army preservation! The most awful catastrophe for our People is on the way. Ready to sacrifice our lives, we’re asking You to do the same. Be careful! You’ll have Your place of honor for rescuing Romania. Join the Grouping ” d ”, Section 14, Group 28. Long live Romania!”<sup>88</sup>

Thus, Iron Guard’s propagandist activity among the rank and file of the army was obvious as earlier as by 1938. However, when thinking the subsequent unfolding of the events, as already depicted, we have to agree that Iron Guard was right in 1938. The war broke out in Europe in 1939.

<sup>86</sup> Otu, Septembrie 1940 – ianuarie 1941. Armata în ” Statul Național Legionar ” : preliminarii, Magazin Istoric, Nr. 6, 1997, p. 38.

<sup>87</sup> The Romanian Intelligence Services. Under Communism it functioned as the Departamentul Securității Statului ( DSS ) of the Ministry of Interior, commonly known as the ” Securitate ”. Its Direcția de Informații Externe ( DIE ) did spy abroad. In nowadays Romania, its official name is Serviciul Român de Informații ( SRI ). Since its birth, in early 20th century, it has functioned as the main provider of both domestic and external secret informations for the Romanian chiefs of state. Nowadays, its activity is supervised by the Romanian Parliament. Between the wars it was led by the Ukrainian born Mihail Moruzov, who efficiently reorganized its activity. Under Antonescu, the chief of the Romanian Intelligence Services was Eugen Cristescu. Besides the SSI, the principal secret informations were gathered and displayed, before and during the war, also by The Detective Corps of the General Security Department, The 2nd Section of The High General Staff, The Intelligence Services of CFR ( Romanian Railways ), and by the specialized units of the Romanian Gendarmerie. As the *Conducător*, Antonescu fully used all these secret services.

<sup>88</sup> Serviciul Special de Informații, Notă, 20 octombrie 1938, Arhivele Statului Major General Român, București. In Ardeleanu & Beldiman & Chirițoiu & Suci ( ed. ), Mișcarea Legionară în documente inedite, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 4, 1997, p. 48.

Moreover, its immediate consequences didn't spare Romania. The pressures of the totalitarian powers, the ambiguous foreign policy of King Charles II, and the lack of organization on all plans of the Romanian Army, incapable of providing armed resistance, all of them did actually contribute to the territorial losses of 1940. The situation changed, in September 1940, for both Antonescu and Iron Guard. By then, they were both in top positions within the new legionnaire state. One expected, giving the Guard's previous support to the General, that their collaboration would be a successful one. Instead, it turned the other way, and that almost from the very beginning. Why?

Historian Petre Otu addresses this problem from a military point of view within two large articles. According to him, Iron Guard had, on the whole, an ambiguous attitude towards the army, mixing real problems with conceptions attacking the very values of the military institution, as hierarchy and order. Iron Guard began to use, besides the written and oral propaganda among soldiers, all means allowed by its new power position in order to increase the sympathy and interest of the military strata towards its ideas and actions. A first step in this sense was the passing of the pre-military instruction of young men under Iron Guard's control. In Otu's point of view, the final goal for the Guard was "to bring the entire military institution under own control."<sup>89</sup> He cites, in this sense, from the military programme envisaged by the Guard, which was categorical :

"The Army should be the People's Army. The officer shouldn't be anymore a chief imposed by order and regulations. He should be elected, or considered as being elected by the soldiers under his command. That would be the moment of reconciliation between the chief and his soldiers... This is precisely what the legionnaire state will do. It will have good soldiers if it has good legionnaires."<sup>90</sup>

For us, too, it is obvious that the Guard intended, once in power, to appropriate the army. As a brief remark, the same goal was pursued later by the communists. Contrary to Iron Guard, Romanian Communist Party didn't fail in transforming the national army into a genuine People's Army under its political control, whilst the pre-military instruction of young people, age 15 to 19, moved under the control of the same party's youth organization.

In reality, the first reactions of the governing Iron Guard were acts of revenge towards the military personnel formerly engaged in repressions against guardist members, Otu points out. At the same

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<sup>89</sup> Otu, Septembrie 1940 – ianuarie 1941. Armata în "Statul Național Legionar" : preliminarii, Magazin Istoric, Nr. 6, 1997, p. 38.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

time, the Guard began to steadily interfere in both the administration and the prerogatives of the military. Moreover, Otu emphasizes, local commanders were frequently complaining to the central Headquarters about acts of insubordination from the part of the guardist members under arms. Antonescu had first a conciliatory stand, advising the officer corps to be indulgent with them. On a telegram addressed to him by the 7th Army Corps he put, on 20 September 1940, the following resolution: " There was a transitory romantic period. What was done illegally, during the first idealistic explosive moments by young people so oppressed before, should be forgotten and forgiven. That one who, from now on, makes grave mistakes will face the law rigors."<sup>91</sup> However, Iron Guard didn't stop its propagandist and subversive activity within the rank and file of the army, Otu suggests. In October 1940, a *Legionnaire Calender* and several manifestos were edited and spread among the soldiers. In addition to that, the acts of insubordination increased in number ( i.e., the refusal to be present at the Appeal, by invoking as excuses the activity within the Legionnaire Movement; the sabotage of the intelligence missions of the General Staff; the arbitrary vehicle requisitions ), making the military commanders to ask Antonescu to intervene and to establish, once for all, the relation between the army and Iron Guard. The *Conducător* responded by issuing a series of orders, in October 1940, banning the Guard's interference in the activity of the military units and big units. According to Otu, the problem was tackled by Antonescu also within a speech addressed by him to the military big units commanders on the 24th of October, 1940. Among other things, he said to military commanders: " Don't judge them to harsh even if they did small mistakes, because they have suffered enormously."<sup>92</sup> Thus, in October 1940, as Otu puts it, " Ion Antonescu was still conciliatory in his attitude."<sup>93</sup> Antonescu changed his sympathetic stand toward Iron Guard in late November 1940, after the latter's members had indulged in street violences and murdered both civilians and former military officers.<sup>94</sup> Romanian historian suggests that Antonescu proceeded to directly menace the Guard. On 28 November 1940, he addressed

<sup>91</sup> Otu, Septembrie 1940 – ianuarie 1941. *Armata în " Statul Național Legionar "* : preliminarii, Magazin Istoric, Nr. 6, 1997, p. 40.

<sup>92</sup> Idem, p. 41.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Besides the street violences of 26 – 28 November 1940, Iron Guard members murdered at the Jilava Prison , during the night of 26/27 November, 64 political inmates, both civilian and military, and guardians. During the following night, 27/28 November, they murdered both economist Virgil Madgearu and historian Nicolae Iorga, doubtless the most outstanding academic and political Romanian personalities of the time. See, in this sense, the official document: *Romania/Comand. Militar al Capitalei/parchetul Trib. Militar/București/Nr.30.378/1940, luna XII, ziua 12/Parchetul Trib. Militar al Comand. Militar al capitalei/către/Ministerul Apărării Naționale/Subsecret. de Stat al Armatei de Uscat/Cabinetul D-lui Ministru/La ord. nr. 11.773/1940, Arhivele Statului Major General Român, București. In Ardeleanu & Beldiman & Chiritoiu & Suciu, Mișcarea Legionară în documente inedite, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 4, 1997, p. 53-54; Cristian Sandache, în Buzatu & Ciucanu & Sandache, Radiografia dreptei românești 1927 – 1941, Ed. FF Press, București, 1996, p. 51–63. In Cronologie, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 4, 1997, p. 57.*

again the commanders of the big military units:

” I’ll introduce severe sanctions against the Movement if it doesn’t stop its blameworthy activity... I’ll execute within 24 hours everyone who’s found guilty of murdering with premeditation whatsoever citizen. Tough sentences will be set for all those attacking the rights and freedoms of the citizens. I’m warning you, if for this time again I find no understanding among legionnaires, then I’ll set up a military government without legionnaires and, if necessary, against the legionnaires.”<sup>95</sup>

We can say that the *Conducător* was ready to do in late November what he should have done in early September 1940, that is to set up a military government. He also asked, on that occasion, military commanders to stop with the complaints and to present him only reports with the sanctions and measures taken against those proved guilty of acts of insubordination. Nevertheless, Antonescu advised the generals : ” ... You have to understand that you shouldn’t have a negative stand toward the legionnaires because, besides the bad things, they also did much good.”<sup>96</sup> Thus, a last hand was held out by Antonescu to Iron Guard. The leadership of the Guard, aware of the created critical situation, urged its acolytes to stop the killings. Revealing in this sense is, in our opinion, the official state document signed up a day before, on 27 November 1940, by the Iron Guard leader and Vice-President of the Government, Horia Sima, calling Iron Guard members to law and order:

” ... General Antonescu, the Government, and the Legionnaire Movement disapprove of this act [ a.n., the assassinations at Jilava Prison ]. Antonescu Government set from the beginning at the basis of the new regime the concepts of legality and justice, Legionnaire Movement setting itself within the same framework of law and order. Severe punishments will be introduced. Legionnaire Movement has decided to strictly and rigorously frame all its members within the state order and to exemplarily punish all those straying from the legal order...”<sup>97</sup>

Otu suggests that local Iron Guard leaders, too, asked their men to pay respect to military officers and to obey army regulations. According to the same historian, a series of military orders were introduced in November and December 1940 by Romanian High General Staff, establishing the relation between the military institution and Iron Guard. Thus, the General Order No. 166 of 29 November 1940 was stipulating that ” Officers, non-commissioned officers, and civilian personnel

<sup>95</sup> Otu, Septembrie 1940 – ianuarie 1941. Armata în ” Statul Național Legionar ” : preliminarii, Magazin Istoric, Nr. 6, 1997, p. 41.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Presedenția Consiliului de Miniștri / Secretariatul General / Nr. 3.080 / Comunicat /Horia Sima / 27 noiembrie 1940, Arhivele Statului Major General Român, București. In Ardeleanu & Beldiman & Chiritoiu & Suciu ( editors ), Mișcarea Legionară în documente inedite, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 4, 1997, p. 52–53.

are forbidden to profess any kind of policy”, giving the willing ones 10 days to leave the active ranks of the army.<sup>98</sup> The Order No. 173 of 12 December 1940, though acknowledging the existing bad relations between the army and Iron Guard in spite of their commonly shared values, as nationalism and order, and though maintaining the previous decisions banning political activity in the army, was rather conciliatory toward the Guard: ” The Headquarters should use all means in their pursuit of good relations with the local legionnaire organizations, but this without deserting the military rights and duties, with tact, sympathy, goodwill, and with the conviction that the good thing could be generated only by an active and effective collaboration with the political organization in power today.”<sup>99</sup> Otu emphasizes that Antonescu, as Defence Minister, was more categorical in his General Order No. 1936 of 18 December 1940: ” The Legionnaire Nation-State stands in its organizing and rebuilding work on both the Legionnaire Movement and the Army... Thus, no legionnaire interference in the Army, and no military interference in the Legionnaire Movement... The legionnaires are also citizens of the State, and once joining the Army they should leave out all politics. They should fully and unconditionally comply with the laws and regulations of the military.”<sup>100</sup> Thus, Antonescu sent Iron Guard a last warning, by asking both its leadership and ordinary members to prove their civic spirit.

However, on the ground the situation was quite different. Iron Guard didn't stop its propagandist activity within the army. Moreover, the military commanders' complaints increased during the first half of December 1940. They were especially complaining about the seizure of arms and ammunition by local legionnaire authorities from the military units. According to Otu, Antonescu ordered, on the same day of 18 December, ” the gathering of all fire and hand guns from the civilian population and their preservation at the Târgoviște Garison.”<sup>101</sup> Iron Guard members didn't obey the order. As Otu puts it, ” Iron Guard also rejected Antonescu's order of 31 December through the General Staff, asking it to communicate the number of fire arms held by the institutions under its subordination, to tell their place of preservation and the persons in charge, and to send a table with the legionnaire personnel having arm-licence.”<sup>102</sup> On the other hand, in early January 1941, the lack of respect shown by Iron Guard members toward Romanian officers was general. That was too

<sup>98</sup> Otu, Septembrie 1940 – ianuarie 1941. Armata în ” Statul Național Legionar ” : preliminarii, Magazin Istoric, Nr. 6, 1997, p. 41.

<sup>99</sup> Idem, p. 47.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Otu, Septembrie 1940 – ianuarie 1941. Armata în ” Statul Național Legionar ” : preliminarii, Magazin Istoric, Nr. 7, 1997, p. 29.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.



much for Antonescu, Otu suggests. By mid-January 1941, the *Conducător* was determined to get rid of Iron Guard once for all.

Historian Petre Otu reaches some general conclusions in the end of his second article. For him, Iron Guard had no coherent programme toward the military institution. The Guard's propagandist activity was addressing only particular categories as: young officers, students of superior and inferior military schools, reserve officers, ordinary troops, young conscripts. Superior officers and the command staff were seen as hostile in general, being considered as representatives of the old regime and potential enemies. In Otu's point of view, official documents of the time clearly reveal the fact that Iron Guard had a certain influence within the military even before its rise to power. The interference of the Guard in the military administration and prerogatives ever grew during its first two months in power. However, Otu suggests that this fact shouldn't be overrated. Nevertheless, he disagrees with the two extreme theses in Romanian historiography on this matter: the one asserting that the army was "completely immune" to Iron Guard's ideology and actions, and the one suggesting the contrary, that Romanian Army adhered "in a large measure" to the doctrine and activity of the Guard.<sup>103</sup> For Otu, "both theses are simplistic, and they don't reflect the real situation."<sup>104</sup> According to him, three reasons made Antonescu change his attitude, in November 1940, toward Iron Guard. First, as a soldier he couldn't assist at the destruction of hierarchy and order within the institution to which he was so intimately linked. Second, the army support was essential for the *Conducător* in the evolving conflict with the Guard, the loss of control over the army meaning the loss of power in state. Third, the maintenance of cohesion and fight capacity of the national army was essential for the preservation of Romania's statehood, which was still under Soviet pressure at her borders.<sup>105</sup> For Otu, it was the national interest which ultimately made Antonescu remain faithful to the army and get rid of Iron Guard, because the latter "was jeopardizing by its actions the modernization and restructuring plans of the army started by Ion Antonescu soon after taking power."<sup>106</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Otu, Septembrie 1940 – ianuarie 1941. *Armata în "Statul Național Legionar"* : preliminarii, Magazin Istoric, Nr. 7, 1997, p. 30.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> By November 1940, there was no definitive border line between Romania and Soviet Union, and many problems caused by the territorial changes of June 1940 were still unsolved. Within the framework of the so called Moscow Commission ( September 7th – December 16th, 1940 ) the representatives of the two states were working for solutions. The most disputed issue was the establishment of the final border line on the Danube. See, in this sense, Dobrinescu & Constantin, *Basarabia în anii celui de-al doilea război mondial ( 1939 – 1947 )*, Institutul European, Iași, 1995, p. 194-204.

<sup>106</sup> Otu, Septembrie 1940 – ianuarie 1941. *Armata în "Statul Național Legionar"* : preliminarii, Magazin Istoric, Nr. 7, p. 32; See details on these plans in: Otu, "Ostași, vă ordon: treceți Prutul!", *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr.7, 1999, p. 17-19.

Otu concludes by suggesting that army trust toward Antonescu, together with Hitler's support, enabled the *Conducător* to stifle the legionnaire uprising, "removing in this way the Legionnaire Movement from the Romanian political map."<sup>107</sup> We can interpret the viewpoints expressed by Otu within his two articles in the sense, that the main obstacle in the way of a successful governing collaboration Antonescu – Iron Guard was set by the latter, through its direct interference, once in power, in the military affairs. Local military commanders often complained about this, but Antonescu had proved to be conciliatory toward the guardist members for quite a long time. Antonescu changed his conciliatory stand toward Iron Guard following the murders committed by guardist members in late November 1940, which had deeply shocked both Romanian society and the army. The *Conducător* banned by a series of orders, in November and December 1940, the interference of the Guard in the military. Iron Guard leadership did officially comply with Antonescu's orders, but, on the field, the guardist propaganda and interference in the army administration and prerogatives continued. This made Antonescu get rid of Iron Guard in January 1941, when, having the German support on his side, he crushed the legionnaire uprising against him.

Historian Cristian Troncotă confirms within an article that guardist interference in the military institution was largely present and had a negative impact on the collaboration Antonescu – Iron Guard within the legionnaire state.<sup>108</sup> In contrast to Otu's viewpoint, Troncotă suggests that Iron Guard had a greater influence within the army than one had thought before. Contrary to Otu, who used as sources for his articles mainly military official documents, Troncotă bases his assumptions on the SSI official reports of the period, gathered in the aftermath of the legionnaire uprising within five volumes under the title: *Cartea alba a rebeliunii* [ The White Book of the Rebellion ]. The documents were used by Antonescu in his book *Pe marginea prăpastiei* [ At the Ravine's Edge ], "its actual authors being Colonel Marin Alexandru, and a group of military analysts from the 2nd Section of the High General Staff and SSI who coordinated it."<sup>109</sup> Troncotă suggests that Horia Sima's assertions, in his memoirs called *Era liberății* [ The Freedom Era ], that "a third part of the supreme military chiefs were sympathizing, directly or indirectly, with the Legion", and that "the troops were overwhelmingly formed by legionnaires or legionnaire sympathizers, whilst lieutenants

<sup>107</sup> Otu, Septembrie 1940 – ianuarie 1941. *Armata în "Statul Național Legionar"* : preliminarii, *Magazin Istoric*, Nr. 7, 1997, p. 32.

<sup>108</sup> Troncotă, *SSI versus Mișcarea Legionară*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 4, 1997, p. 20-25.

<sup>109</sup> *Idem*, p. 21-22.

and second lieutenants were, in their vast majority, spiritually linked to Legionnaire Movement, and the elites of the military schools were incorporated in the Cross Brotherhoods [ a.n., Iron Guard's youth organization ] ”, weren't denied by the chief of the Romanian SSI, Eugen Cristescu.<sup>110</sup> On the occasion of his trial, in 1946, the SSI chief said: ” The legionnaire psychosis did contaminate many people, from opportunism, cowardice, or naiveté, and even found sympathizers within the army.”<sup>111</sup> In Troncotă's opinion, Cristescu must have known the SSI's top secret analysis, ” *Referatul privind rebeliunea legionară* ” [ Report on the Legionnaire Rebellion ], which for security reasons hadn't been classified within the *Cartea alba a rebeliunii*.

The means through which Iron Guard was recruiting its sympathizers among the rank and file of the army were clearly identified within the report:

” The Army hasn't been spared yet. They [ a.n., iron guardists ] have recruited sympathizers whether directly, or indirectly ( wife, children, relatives ), by skillfully using the purity of the national feelings. The action has been mostly directed toward young officers and students of the military schools. The presence of the legionnaires within the Army, as reserve officers and troops, has eased the conversion and adhesion of many active officers and non-commissioned officers to Legionnaire Movement. There has been disarrays also among superior officers. Some of them went as far as to ask the exclusion of military personnel from the Army, on the ground that by preserving the neutral line of the military education the latter wouldn't sympathize with the legionnaire action.”<sup>112</sup>

For Troncotă, SSI did properly inform the chief of state about the real situation within the army, making in the end Antonescu ” to elaborate the Order No. 1936 of 18 December 1940, which banned all legionnaire interference in the army and all military interference in the Legionnaire Movement.”<sup>113</sup> Nevertheless, Horia Sima's *pro domo* assertion, according to which Iron Guard was still enjoying a widespread support among both Romanian army and society even following the events of late November 1940, is in contradiction with the SSI's reports of the time, Romanian historian suggests. As he puts it, ” SSI informative documents promote the thesis, hardly to contest and in disagreement with Sima's assertions, that Romanian ` honest public opinion ´ and the army were, before the January 1941 events, on General Ion Antonescu's side.”<sup>114</sup> Thus, we can see Troncotă's viewpoints in the sense that Iron Guard's interference in the army was greater than it had

<sup>110</sup> Troncotă, *SSI versus Mișcarea Legionară*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 4, 1997, p. 22.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> *Idem*, p. 23.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

been thought before by other historians. The Guard had its own members and sympathizers, more or less, among all military strata. Antonescu was all the time well informed on the real situation by the SSI. The reports of the Romanian Intelligence Services made the *Conducător* introduce, in November and December 1940, a series of measures banning Iron Guard's interference, on all plans, in the military institution.

Thus, it can be concluded, that post-communist Romanian historians see Iron Guard's propagandist activity among Romanian soldiers and officers, its interference in the military administration and prerogatives, and its influence on the whole over the military institution as historical truths. Mainstream historians have, however, rather different approaches on the degree to which the army was contaminated by the Guard's actions. Nevertheless, they're all agreeing that the interference of the Guard in the military had a negative impact on the collaboration within the legionnaire state. Antonescu knew the real situation and faced many complaints from the local military commanders, but he didn't change his conciliatory attitude toward Iron Guard until late November 1940. He had for long time a sympathetic stand toward the Guard because, in his mind, the latter's members had suffered under the rule of Charles II, many of them being killed or interned. The *Conducător* met Hitler in Berlin, on 22 November 1940, and obtained the Fuhrer's promise of assistance in an eventual open conflict with the Guard.<sup>115</sup> However, for Romanian historians, they were the guardists' criminal acts of 26 – 28 November 1940, shocking the entire Romanian society, and the rejection by Horia Sima and the guardist leadership of Antonescu's request to appropriate the Legionnaire Movement by becoming himself its leader, which made the *Conducător* seriously think of getting rid of Iron Guard as soon as possible. According to mainstream Romanian historians, there has been a continuous struggle over the army control between Antonescu and Iron Guard during the entire period of existence of the Legionnaire Nation-State. The attempts undertaken by Horia Sima and his Guard in order to appropriate the military institution constituted the very obstacles in the way of a successful collaboration with Antonescu in Legionnaire Romania.

In our opinion, Antonescu had, for some time, a conciliatory attitude toward Iron Guard for several reasons. First, the Guard gave him own's moral support in the past. Second, he was sympathetic to

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<sup>115</sup> Antonescu and the legionnaire Foreign Minister, Prince Mihail Sturdza, paid a visit to Hitler and Ribbentrop in Berlin, between 21 and 24 November 1940. The Germans warned Iron Guard, through Prince Sturdza, not to enter into conflict with the Romanian Army. Antonescu was assured by the Fuhrer, in particular, of his support in an eventual conflict with Iron Guard. See, for example, Chirnoagă, 1986, p. 76–78.

Iron Guard for having suffered under the royal dictatorship of Charles II. Third, Antonescu wanted to give Sima and Iron Guard the chance to govern, and that despite his suspicion over their political ability. Fourth, the Guard having the full German support until November 1940, the *Conducător* had to carry on the collaboration with the former. Fifth, both Antonescu and Iron Guard were spiritually linked, being both animated by nationalist feelings. Nevertheless, the main reason for a conciliatory attitude toward the Guard was, in our point of view, Antonescu's will to provide the latter the necessary time to compromise itself in the eyes of both Romanians and Germans. To our mind, that explains the real reason why, for a while, Antonescu didn't resolutely stop Iron Guard's interference in the military affairs. In which concerns Antonescu's expressed desire to take over the leadership of the Guard, in late November 1940, we intimately believe that it was just a strategy by the *Conducător*, aiming to increase tension before a final separation could take place.

What was the impact of spiritual and political conceptions on the collaboration Antonescu – Iron Guard in Legionnaire Romania?

According to historian Mioara Anton, Iron Guard ideologists, gathered around Nichifor Crainic at the magazine *Axa*, had as main target of their criticism, in 1930s, the bourgeois state with its western institutions: Parliament, Constitution, political parties. On the one hand, Romanian Bourgeois State was seen as " a foreign import, democratic and individualist " and, on the other hand, as " an ill organism, corrupted by vices and Nepotism."<sup>116</sup> Guardist ideologists were promoting the concept of a " nation-state ", characterized by Nationalism, Orthodoxism, anti-Communism, anti-Semitism and anti-Democratism.<sup>117</sup> In their mind, such a " nation-state ", having as pillars " the Church, the Army, and the School ", was to replace the bourgeois state, by shifting the emphasis from the individual to the community and nation through its structure based on " the primacy of national culture, and on the primacy of family and workers' corporations."<sup>118</sup> As we already know, Antonescu, although a western oriented man, he was nevertheless a critic of the Romanian establishment in 1930s, sharing many values in common with the Guard. When, in September 1940, the envisaged " nation-state " had turned into reality, with Iron Guard and Antonescu at its top, it was expected that a successful collaboration between them would occur. Why did it happen the other way?

<sup>116</sup> Anton, " Un dictator nu se alege, ci se impune singur ", *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 11, 1998, p. 57.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *Idem*, p. 58.

Historian Alina Tudor tackles the problem and provides some explanations within an article on the causes of the legionnaire uprising in January 1941.<sup>119</sup> According to Tudor, the first dispute between the two sides was one of perception, each one considering oneself as the real initiator of the coup against Charles II. Antonescu saw himself as Charles' deposer, as a key-figure of the *new regime*<sup>120</sup>, and as "the main guarantor of order and of the functioning of the Romanian State."<sup>121</sup> Antonescu did also assume the merit of bringing Sima's guardists to power and, thus, he was expecting their respect, "as young inexperienced people."<sup>122</sup> Tudor suggests that, on the contrary, Sima and his acolytes were in full disagreement with Antonescu's views. Iron Guard members felt own power position strong enough, and they were sure of enjoying "the total and unconditional support of Nazi Germany."<sup>123</sup> They were sure of enjoying the sympathy of the army, as well. Moreover, Tudor emphasizes, the guardists thought about themselves as being an indispensable political support for Antonescu, "who was lacking a party of his own."<sup>124</sup> We can promote our interpretation based on the suggestions above. For us, it was about a struggle for own power legitimacy between Antonescu and Iron Guard, which had actually started with the very setting up of the legionnaire state.

For Tudor, diverging ideological opinions weren't obvious at the beginning of Antonescu's collaboration with the Guard, both sides commonly sharing values as: "work, order, justice, morality, sacrifice, and honesty."<sup>125</sup> Romanian historian emphasizes the fact, that the real obstacles in the way of a successful collaboration between the two partners were set by the political realities within the framework of the *new regime*. In other words, the practical aspect of the "political marriage" between Antonescu and Iron Guard was that which had, soon, brought about a strong clash of opinions.<sup>126</sup> On the one hand, for Antonescu, as a career soldier able to see priorities in bellicose times, the most important thing was "to preserve the social, economic, and political stability of the Romanian State", his repeated appeals at national reconciliation and non-violence having been done in that sense.<sup>127</sup> On the other hand, Iron Guard was facing an internal crisis after the assassination, in 1938, of its *Căpitan*, C. Z. Codreanu. Horia Sima was a contested leader within

<sup>119</sup> Tudor, *Rebeliune sau lovitură de stat?*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 1, 1999, p. 28-31.

<sup>120</sup> Antonescu's favorite term about the Romanian Legionnaire Nation-State.

<sup>121</sup> Tudor, *Rebeliune sau lovitură de stat?*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 1, 1999, p. 28.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Idem*, p. 29

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

his own party. In its turn, the Guard was in full process of internal purges, whilst newcomers were joining it with a manifest opportunism. This serves as an explanation for the chaos prevailing among the rank and file of the Guard by the time of its rise to power occurred, Tudor suggests. Moreover, once in power, "Iron Guard didn't hide its intentions to radically purge the old elites, to remove the Jews from economy, and to punish the persons seen guilty of having previously oppressed its members."<sup>128</sup> Tudor's suggestions above can be interpreted in the sense that, from the very beginning they were signs of a tense collaboration between Antonescu and the Guard within the legionnaire state. The *Conducător* was seeking for order, whilst Iron Guard was ready to provide social anarchy.

According to Tudor, the collaboration Antonescu – Iron Guard turned into a struggle for power in October 1940. The Guard set up its own police force and launched a countrywide campaign of illegal arrests and searchings, culminating with the violences and crimes of 26 – 28 November 1940. Tudor emphasizes that the Guard also began to interfere in the economic life, by accusing Antonescu for the preservation of old methods and elites. In a letter addressed to Antonescu, on 16 October 1940, among other things, Horia Sima wrote: "Politics should come first in economy, too, because a legionnaire regime cannot last for ever with a liberal economic structure."<sup>129</sup> Antonescu replied, by blaming the Guard of political sabotage: "It is to my responsibility to build up a strong regime only if I'm listened, but I don't agree to be either its prisoner, or to fall with it in the case it doesn't follow me... With two heads, a single body could be pushed into disaster only."<sup>130</sup> For Tudor, Sima was ready to undermine the continuity of the economic system essential for the stability and efficiency of Romanian economy. Moreover, Sima's intentions were a threat not only to the interests of the Romanian State but also to those of Nazi Germany, "who was interested in using at maximum Romania's economic potential."<sup>131</sup> In Tudor's point of view, the very economic reasons were those which mattered most in Hitler's eyes, when he had to decide between Antonescu and the Guard. According to Romanian historian, in a meeting at Obersalzberg, on 14 January 1941, Hitler assured the *Conducător*: "The German – Romanian collaboration doesn't depend on the existence of a Romanian organization identical to the National Socialist Party."<sup>132</sup> We can give the suggestions above our interpretation. Iron Guard proved its total inability to govern Romania in

<sup>128</sup> Tudor, *Rebeliune sau lovitură de stat?*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 1, 1999, p. 29.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Idem*, p. 30.

November 1940. The murdering of political adversaries, its created widespread social anarchy, and the attempts to change the economic system by the Guard, all convinced both Antonescu and Hitler that the only way to ensure the social and economic stability of Romania was the removal from power of Iron Guard. In January 1941 the Germans did indirectly suggest the *Conducător* to immediately get rid of the guardists.

Thus, mainstream historians suggest that Iron Guard, once in power, tried to implement its nationalist ideology not through legal means, neither by a peaceful persuasion of the population, but through the use of brutal force and political crimes. In their opinion, the realities on the political and economic ground were those which turned to be insurmountable for a political organization facing a strong internal crisis by its rise to power. Iron Guard had attempted to take the whole power in state by playing on Antonescu, fact which transformed the already tense collaboration Antonescu – Iron Guard into a mere struggle for power, by November 1940. Sharing some values in common with the Guard, Antonescu had toward the former a conciliatory attitude for a couple of months, but the guardist excesses threatening the security of the Romanian State made, in the end, the *Conducător* get rid of this political organization, in full agreement with Hitler.

Now, we can line up the main findings of the post-communist historical research over the legionnaire state, and over the collaboration Antonescu – Iron Guard within it. First, the setting up of the Legionnaire Nation-State meant the transformation of Romania into a genuine totalitarian state. Second, its setting up was made possible by the refusal of Romanian traditional parties to participate in a pro-German government and by Antonescu's unwillingness to introduce a military dictatorship, the latter choosing as governing partner the only pro-German political organization of the time, the Iron Guard. Third, the duality of power at the top is seen to have been the main obstacle in the way of a successful collaboration between Antonescu and the Guard, and the principal cause of the short existence of the legionnaire state. Fourth, despite the official statements of both governing partners, their collaboration proved to be a tense one from the very beginning, especially because of the continuing attempts by the Guard to appropriate the Romanian Army. Fifth, the Guard tried to seize the whole power in state, by creating social anarchy through street violence and murders and by sabotaging the liberal economic system, fact which made Antonescu change his conciliatory attitude toward Iron Guard in late November 1940. Sixth, for mainstream Romanian historians, one cannot anylonger speak about a collaboration Antonescu – Iron Guard between November 1940 and January 1941, but just about a mere struggle for power with Hitler as



a mediator between the two sides. For Hitler, what ultimately mattered most was not the ideological compatibility of the Romanian State, but the social, economic, and military stability of a state seen by him as Nazi Germany's main ally in the already planned war against Soviet Union. The German support to Antonescu was essential when the latter had decided to get rid of Iron Guard in January 1941. Thus, Troncotă's assertion, according to which the setting up of the Romanian Legionnaire Nation-State by Antonescu and Iron Guard was " a political act which can be evaluated as a conjectural and insincere agreement for both sides ", seems to be the main interpretation of mainstream post-communist historians over that period of time, as well.<sup>133</sup>

To our mind, we also have to agree with historian Petre Otu who suggests, after welcoming the new insights on the matter elaborated in recent years through the checking of the new documentary sources and memoirs, that " the obstacles in the way of a balanced and objective research haven't entirely disappeared yet, the problematique still being unexhausted."<sup>134</sup> In our opinion, mainstream historians must curb first, on scientific criteria, the still existing communist and legionnaire interpretations over Legionnaire Romania, one simplifying and full of charges, whilst the other one giving the Iron Guard's governing period eulogic features. They should investigate, then after, all the aspects of this complex period in Romania's political history, in such a way that within the school textbooks will be written the closest synthesis to the historical truth on this period of time. In our point of view progress has been made, but mainstream historians still has a lot of doing on this matter.

For us, the transformation of Romania into a genuine totalitarian state was a direct consequence of the territorial losses in the summer of 1940, and of the subsequent refusal by Romanian traditional parties to join an obvious pro-German government. The irony of history is that, in similar situation, the Finns chose to preserve their parliamentary system, with the governing democratic parties turning pro-German at least in some extent, avoiding in this way both a far right and a military dictatorship, and the eventual social anarchy. Nevertheless, it was about a wartime regime, but in its essence it was a democratic and not a totalitarian one. The Romanians chose to do the other way and paid a hard price for it. Had Romanian traditional parties turned pro-German ( such a " guilt " being understandable in an Europe dominated by Germany ), we can only speculate what would

<sup>133</sup> Troncotă, SSI *versus* Mișcarea Legionară, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 4, 1997, p. 21.

<sup>134</sup> Otu, Septembrie 1940 – ianuarie 1941. Armata în " Statul Național Legionar " : preliminarii, *Magazin Istoric*, Nr. 6, 1997, p. 37.

have happened . Eventual attempts by Iron Guard to create anarchy would have been probably suppressed from the start by whether the police, or by the army. For sure, Romania would have joined Nazi Germany in the anti-Bolshevik crusade, but she would have stopped her military operations on the Dniester line. Bessarabia would have remained lost, but Romania would have probably preserved her political and social system, Romanian People being immune to communist ideology. Postwar Romania would have obviously paid war reparations as a neutral bourgeois state, one probably bound by a special treaty to Soviet Union. The country industrialization, remained halfway because of the outbreak of the Second World War, would have been accomplished by the capitalist economy. In other words, Romania would have probably had, with some local particularities, a fate similar to that of Finland during the post-war period, one by far more human and prosperous. But, let's not speculate or anticipate further. Whatever the reasons invoked, then and now, by the representatives of the traditional parties and bourgeois historians, our personal belief is that, one cannot totally absolve Romanian historical parties from the blame of having made possible by their irresponsible policy the rise to power of the Far Right in Romania in September 1940, with all negative consequences in time upon the Romanian society as a whole. A dangerous historic precedent was allowed to happen, when thinking the rebirth of the Far Right in nowadays Romania. However, for us, Antonescu could be, first of all, " charged " of not having installed a military regime from the start, rather than of having brought Iron Guard to power. That would have spared Romania from many troubles, even through authoritarian methods. In our opinion, the entire period of time of almost five months when Antonescu and Iron Guard governed together Romania could be seen rather as a permanent struggle for absolute power , than a genuine collaboration between the two sides.

#### **3.4. The Legionnaire Rebellion, 21st – 23rd January 1941**

The difficult collaboration Antonescu – Iron Guard turned worse in late November 1940. By mid January, 1941, it was obvious for everyone in Romania that the divorce process on the way between the two political partners was to come to an end within days. That actually happened between the 21st and 23rd of January, the same year, through an open conflict launched by Iron Guard against the *Conducător*. Within Romanian historiography those days events are commonly referred as *The Legionnaire Rebellion*.

We already know the reasons why Antonescu's collaboration with Iron Guard did actually fail. But, which were the immediate causes leading to an open conflict between the two sides, and what was the unfolding of the events in those days? What about the role played by Germany by then? Which are the interpretations provided by mainstream historians on this chapter of Romanian history?

Historian Alina Tudor suggests that the open conflict between Iron Guard and Antonescu broke out on January 19th, 1941. The pretext was provided by the assassination of a German officer, Major Doering, by a Greek entered in Romania with a Turkish passport and suspected by Nazi officials in Bucharest as a British spy. Antonescu took advantage of the created situation by ordering the removal from office of the Minister of the Interior, Gen. C. Petrovicescu, and of other guardist officials. According to Tudor, Iron Guard used the same incident by attacking Antonescu's closest collaborators through a countrywide propaganda. Eugen Cristescu ( the chief of SSI ) and Col. Alexandru Rioșanu ( Subsecretary of State at the Interior ) were the main targets, being labeled by the leader of the guardist students, Viorel Trifa, as " Jewish masons " and " sold to the Englishmen."<sup>135</sup> The dismissed guardist officials refused to leave their posts and, on 21 January 1941, they barricaded themselves within the public buildings in both province and Bucharest. Tudor suggests that Iron Guard members also took over the Bod Broadcasting Station near the town of Brașov, in Central Romania, and used it for the coordination of their actions countrywide.

In his preface to some pages from the unpublished autobiography of Vasile I. Ionescu ( 1898 – 1978 ), the Chairman of the Romanian Broadcasting Corporation during the war, historian Marian Ștefan has rather a similar approach on those days events. Ștefan suggests that " the confrontation between the two sides reached the climax on 21 – 22 January 1941, when the legionnaires had succeeded to occupy the Headquarters of some important central institutions in Capital and province, as the Broadcasting Company, which they were efficiently using in destabilizing the country."<sup>136</sup> According to Ștefan, Antonescu took rapid measures to get back the Broadcasting Company, an objective of maximum importance for the *Conducător*, from the hands of the rebels, by charging with this mission V. I. Ionescu who was well familiarized with the institution as its former director. Ionescu succeeded in persuading the guardist leaders and members to lay down their arms and to evacuate the buildings on January the 23rd.

<sup>135</sup> Tudor, *Rebeliune sau lovitură de stat?*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 1, 1999, p. 31.

<sup>136</sup> Ștefan, preface in Vasile I. Ionescu, " *Răspunzi cu capul!* ", *Magazin Istoric*, Nr. 1, 1999, p. 48.

According to Tudor, on the 21st of January Sima's envoys asked Antonescu "to step down from the effective leadership and to renounce the control over the state affairs, which he's holding as Prime-Minister, on behalf of Horia Sima."<sup>137</sup> Moreover, they asked for a full Iron Guard government and for the reappointment of the removed officials. For Romanian historian, the fact that the guardist leader Horia Sima had isolated himself from even his closest comrades did finally compromise the rebels' unity of action in the province, "the confusion which followed driving the legionnaires from trust to despair."<sup>138</sup> In Tudor's opinion, Antonescu didn't intervene from the start because he wanted "to allow the rebels to compromise themselves for good and all" before taking any action against them.<sup>139</sup> With Berlin's support on his side, the *Conducător* ordered the army to liquidate the uprising, on 22 January 1941. In contrast to the peaceful attitude manifested by the guardist members holding the Romanian Broadcasting Company, their fellows in other occupied buildings responded with fire, during the whole night of 22 / 23 January 1941, to the assaults of the army. Despite the repeated appeals of both Antonescu and German officials, Iron Guard didn't consent to give up the fight and lay down the arms until the noon of January the 23rd, when Sima ordered "the total cease-fire" through a communiqué in the official guardist newspaper *Curentul* [The Stream].<sup>140</sup> According to Tudor, the communiqué was made known to the guardist members in province by the officers of the German Military Mission.

Thus, we can interpret Tudor's suggestions in the sense that the struggle for power within the Romanian Legionnaire State between Antonescu and Iron Guard reached its climax in the second half of January 1941, both sides being aware of the fact that at the top there was room for one of them only. The pretext for a final clash between the two sides was provided by the assassination of a German officer by a British spy in Bucharest, on 19 January 1941. Antonescu ordered the removal of some high guardist officials seen as incapable. These one refused to leave their posts and barricaded themselves within the official buildings, being ready to oppose armed resistance. Meanwhile, Iron Guard leadership was urging Antonescu to step down. Already assured of the German support, the *Conducător* granted the rebels the necessary time to definitely compromise themselves, before ordering the army to stifle the uprising on January 22nd, 1941. Because of Hitler's personal ultimatum to Sima to give up the fight, Iron Guard's armed resistance ceased the

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<sup>137</sup> Tudor, *Rebeliune sau lovitură de stat?*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 1, 1999, p. 31.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

following day, on 23 January. We can compare the events of January 1941 in Romania with those in Sarajevo in the summer of 1914. The shots in Sarajevo had provided the sparkle which turned the latent conflict between the European big powers of the time into an open one, their economic conflicting interests in both Europe and colonies being actually the real reasons which led to the outbreak of the First World War. The support granted to the Entente by the United States ultimately led to the defeat of the Central Powers by the former. The same could be said on the events in Romania. The murdering of a German officer in Bucharest had only provided the pretext for an open clash between Antonescu and Iron Guard, the real reason behind this being the obvious conflict of interests manifested by the continuous struggle for power between the two sides. In the end, the moral German support proved to be essential for Antonescu in getting rid of Iron Guard.

Indeed, other mainstream Romanian historians and foreign specialists alike suggest that Nazi Germany did play the main role in the events.

Thus, American historian Keith Hitchins suggests that "Antonescu did enjoy the support of the whole Romanian Army, and had no doubts over the favorable outcome of the final clash between him and the Guard."<sup>141</sup> According to Hitchins, Antonescu first waited for Iron Guard to compromise itself in both Romanian and German eyes. Then after, being assured once again of the German support, "he decided to crush the rebellion, on 22 January."<sup>142</sup>

According to Marian Stefan, German historian Klaus Schönherr has brought "new insights" into the debate over the role played by Nazi Germany in the events through his analysis based on the official documents of the German Military Mission in Romania, preserved in Germany at Greiburg.<sup>143</sup> In his preface to the Romanian version of some parts of the study, Stefan quotes Schönherr, who's conclusions are, in his opinion, revealing: "Hitler preferred Antonescu because, from a German point of view, he was representing the exclusive guarantee for the maintenance of

<sup>141</sup> Hitchins, 1996, p. 497.

<sup>142</sup> Idem, p. 498.

<sup>143</sup> Ștefan, preface in Schönherr, *Wehrmachtul în marș demonstrativ pe străzile Bucureștilor*, Magazin Istoric, Nr. 1, 1996, p.10; See Schönherr's original study ( *The Big Instruction Unit R-1 and the Legionnaire Putsch in Romania in 1941* ) in: *Militär geschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 53 ( 1994 ), Heft II, Oldenbourg. Antonescu had talks with OKW's Lt.Gen. Kurt Tippelskirch in mid-September 1941 and agreed on the sending in Romania of a German Military Mission. Hitler decided, on 19 September 1941, to send besides a military mission also instruction troops. They started to arrive in Romania at the beginning of October 1941. See for more details: K. Schönherr, *Wehrmachtul in mars demonstrativ pe strazile Bucurestilor*, Magazin Istoric, Nr. 1, 1996, p. 11; P. Otu, "Ostași, vă ordon: treceți Prutul!", *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 18-19.

law and order in Romania. Antonescu's rule, one based on the force of the Romanian Army, had an essential importance, economically, politically, and military for Hitler's war plans."<sup>144</sup> Ștefan also emphasizes another major conclusion provided by Schönherr in his study: "Hitler got involved in the conflict opposing Antonescu to the legionnaires and, with the assistance of the German military units stationing in Romania, he consolidated his supremacy in this country."<sup>145</sup> For Ștefan, the most important finding of the study is best revealed through Schönherr's final words:

"The Big Instruction Unit R-1 did actually appropriate the mediator role between the two sides by giving the impression that it was to the advantage of the Romanian authorities but, in fact, all had been done for the strengthening of German supremacy. As a consequence of the legionnaire putsch Romania became much more dependent on Nazi Germany because, what isn't written in the documents but it is implied, it would have been difficult for Antonescu to get rid of his unpleasant coalition partner without the presence within this country of the Wehrmacht troops."<sup>146</sup>

Ștefan suggests that Romanian historians are unanimous in seeing the Romanian-German relations during the Second World War as having been complex in character and marked, despite all official statements, by "a deep mutual mistrust."<sup>147</sup> Ștefan salutes Schönherr's study, based on the investigation of the military archives of the Third Reich, which confirms the main interpretation of the mainstream Romanian historians over the real nature of the wartime relationship between Romania and Nazi Germany. In his opinion, "German historians could bring a major contribution to the clarification of many aspects, still unknown, of the wartime relations between the two countries."<sup>148</sup> Thus, we can interpret Schönherr's approach on role played by Nazi Germany in the January 1941 events in Romania, as it is suggested by Marian Ștefan, as one not differing much from the main viewpoints expressed by mainstream Romanian historians. Hitler got involved in the power conflict in Romania and gave his support to Antonescu because he felt that the *Conducător* was the only guarantor of Germany's economic, political, and military interests in Romania, all of them of maximum importance for his already planned anti-Soviet war. The Führer's aim was to link Romania, through Antonescu, even closer to Nazi war-machine, and thus he ordered the German troops stationing there to proceed in consequence, that is to persuade gardist rebels to lay down the arms and surrender to the Romanian military authorities.

<sup>144</sup> Schönherr, cited by Ștefan in his preface to Schönherr, *Wehrmachtul în marș demonstrativ pe străzile Bucureștilor*, *Magazin Istoric*, Nr. 1, 1996, p. 10.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> Ștefan, preface in Schönherr, *Wehrmachtul în marș demonstrativ pe străzile Bucureștilor*, *Magazin Istoric*, Nr. 1, 1996, p. 9.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

Romanian historian Cristian Troncotă suggests that Hitler's decision to support General Antonescu through his so called crucial intervention of 23 January 1941, when he ordered German Military Mission in Romania to take action so that the guardists lay down their arms, " must have taken into consideration the Romanian realities."<sup>149</sup> Troncotă's assumption is that Antonescu, well informed by the SSI, must have brought to Hitler's knowledge, during his visit to Berlin a week before the uprising, the fact that the guardists were representing by then just a small minority among the Romanians. According to Troncotă, by his intervention Hitler pursued first to limit the extent of the repression. Nevertheless, the Fuhrer did save the leaders of the Guard and interned them in a camp near Berlin," as tools for an eventual blackmail on Antonescu at any time."<sup>150</sup> It was the reason why, Troncotă suggests, Antonescu had ordered SSI to continue the effective surveillance on Iron Guard also after the rebellion. Thus, we can interpret Troncotă's suggestions in the sense, that Hitler did ultimately support Antonescu in his struggle against the Guard by taking rather into consideration the realities in Romania favoring such a decision.

For us, Hitler was right by giving priority to *realpolitik* reasons instead of ideological ones in supporting Antonescu. His decision was in conformity with both the realities in Romania and German interests there, as the sequence of events was to prove. In other words, the interpretations promoted by Schönherr and Troncotă taken together best reveal the two principal reasons behind Hitler's decision to support the *Conducător*.

Our assumption above meets that of Romanian historian Ioan Chiper. According to Chiper, one of the reasons why Hitler supported Antonescu was Sima's refusal to visit him at the beginning of January 1941, the invitation being sent through the Romanian Foreign Minister, Mihai Antonescu. Hitler was outraged by Sima's attitude. Chiper suggests that one year later, on 18 January 1942, Hitler told his collaborators at Wolfsschanze that had he been in Antonescu's place he would have shot dead Horia Sima. However, in Chiper's point of view, " Hitler decided to support Antonescu during the rebellion for practical reasons in the first place."<sup>151</sup> Thus, his interpretation meets both that of Schönherr and Troncotă's one.

Chiper also suggests that, in his secret reports of February 1941 sent to Berlin, German Ambassador

<sup>149</sup> Troncotă, *SSI versus Mișcarea Legionară*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 4, 1997, p. 23.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> Chiper, *Mișcarea Legionară și acoliții lui Hitler*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 4, 1997, p. 18.

in Romania, Manfred von Killinger, informed his chief von Ribbentrop about the rebellion and the involvement in the events of some German officials. According to Chiper, von Killinger considered that, " besides the struggle for power in Romania, in the rebellion were involved also Great Britain and Soviet Union, and although the German side wasn't directly involved some of its representatives did actually stimulate the legionnaire action by their encouragements."<sup>152</sup> In his report of 26 February 1941, Chiper suggests, von Killinger did mention the following German individuals: the SD resident in Romania von Bolschwig; the SS criminal counselor Geissler; Könen, Waschinowski, the attaché for agriculture Krantle, Count Merau, Wenzel from the economic section of German Legation, all of them SS members; Knall from the AO ( NSDAP's foreign organization ), the journalists Christoph and Streiter, and DNB's representative in Romania Schickert.<sup>153</sup> According to Chiper, they were all of them the agents of Himmler and Goebbels. Manfred von Killinger was called " for explanations " in Berlin, but without consequences for him.<sup>154</sup> However, Romanian historian suggests that, after the incident, " the relations between the Foreign and Interior ministries in Berlin, especially between their chiefs, became more tense."<sup>155</sup> Chiper emphasizes the fact that, according to W. Schellenberg's memoirs, "after the legionnaire rebellion Hitler became aware of the fact that Himmler was carrying on a personal policy in Romania."<sup>156</sup> Consequently, in estimating the development of Romanian domestic and foreign policy, especially between January 1942 and August 1944, " Hitler relied rather on the informations sent by the German Legation in Bucharest and his AA than on those arrived through the SD, in great extent because he also trusted and needed Antonescu."<sup>157</sup> Chiper suggests that, although Iron Guard's relations with Nazi Germany are still a matter incompletely investigated, " the guardist actions had an impact, sometimes with important consequences, at the highest level of Nazi Germany's party and state hierarchy."<sup>158</sup> Thus, Chiper suggestions above can be interpreted in the sense that, in uprising and opposing armed resistance against Antonescu, the Guard relied on the support of the German SS and SD representatives in Romania.

Alina Tudor's point of view on the involvement of certain German officials in the rebellion is similar to that of Chiper. For Tudor, there is no doubt that some SD and SS agents in Romania got

<sup>152</sup> Chiper, *Mișcarea Legionară și acoliții lui Hitler*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 4, 1997, p. 18.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> *Idem*, p. 19.

<sup>158</sup> *Idem*, p. 17.



directly involved in drawing the plans of the legionnaire rebellion. Romanian historian suggests that " this fact was clearly demonstrated by the inquiry performed by Manfred von Killinger, at Hitler's personal request, after the events."<sup>159</sup> Thus, Tudor's assertion above enables us to suggest that Himmler's men in Romania not only encouraged Iron Guard to uprising against Antonescu, but they also got directly involved in the events, by participating in the elaboration of the " operational plans " of the rebellion.

The suggestions expressed by Chiper and Tudor in their articles make us to assert that, hadn't Iron Guard enjoyed the manifest support of the SS and SD officials in Romania it would have hardly openly uprising against Antonescu. Thus, Himmler's direct support to Iron Guard could serve as one of the explanations why the guardists took over the official buildings, why they responded with fire to army assaults, and why the rebellion lasted for so many days.

Now, we can promote some general conclusions about the role played by Nazi Germany in the January 1941 events in Romania. First, both mainstream Romanian historians and foreign researchers suggest in their studies that Nazi Germany's involvement in the struggle for power between Antonescu and Iron Guard was real, shaping in great extent the path taken by the sequence of events in Romania. Second, their studies reveal the fact that Nazi Germany's role was a two-dimensional one, a kind of *divide et impera* policy ultimately serving the supreme German interests in Romania and Eastern Europe. If Hitler and the Wehrmacht assisted Antonescu and the Romanian Army, Himmler and the SS and SD gave their support to Sima's Iron Guard. Third, Hitler's direct intervention, on 23 January 1941, put an end to the struggle for power in Romania on behalf of General Antonescu. The Führer handled the Romanian domestic crisis as a statesman and not as a party politician because he was already preparing the war against Soviet Union, Romania being seen by him as the most important potential ally in the anti-Bolshevik campaign. It seems that, according to mainstream historians, there was a tacit agreement between Antonescu and Hitler to allow Iron Guard to definitely compromise itself before taking strong actions against it. In this sense, we believe that the words expressed by Iuliu Maniu, at the Peasant Party meeting of 25 January 1941, suggesting that " Hitler first waited to see who's the best, Antonescu, or the legionnaires, and with whom the army moves ", before directly intervene in the conflict, represent an interesting viewpoint of a contemporary to the events which should be taken into consideration

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<sup>159</sup> Tudor, *Rebeliune sau lovitura de stat?*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 1, 1999, p. 31.

by mainstream historians in the future.<sup>160</sup> Fourth, post-communist historians suggest that Hitler did actually support Antonescu because he thought him the most qualified person to ensure the necessary domestic stability in Romania essential for the preservation of the major German interests there. Fifth, the Romanian-German relations during the war were, doubtless, of a great complexity in kind, being marked in their nature, at least until January 1941, by a deep mutual mistrust. Romanian historians suggest that, in recent years, their German colleagues have dealt with this matter and reached rather similar conclusions. They all agree that a thoroughgoing analysis on these complex relations, based on both Romanian and German official documents and other primary sources, is still waiting to be performed.

How did the other big powers of the time perceive the unfolding of January 1941 events in Romania?

Mainstream Romanian historians suggest in their recent articles that, besides Nazi Germany, also the still non-belligerent United States and Soviet Union, but especially Great Britain, which was already at war with The Reich, did closely watch the struggle for power in Romania. Thus, the American spy C. F. J. Bohlen ( engineer at Bell Telephone Co. Romania ) was informing the US State Department on April 1st, 1941, about " the opportunism of the Nazis " as regards to " the civil war in Romania."<sup>161</sup> According to Tudor, Bohlen informed on that occasion: " When the conflict provoked by the Germans had finally broke out openly, these one didn't intervene in the first run but waited for the two sides to weaken one each other."<sup>162</sup> In our opinion, from the words above it can be derived the still neutral attitude in early 1941, if not an entirely indifferent one, of the Americans toward the events in Europe in general, and Eastern Europe in particular. Historian Ioan Chiper suggests that, according to von Killinger's reports to Berlin, " Great Britain and Soviet Union got in their turn involved in both the struggle for power and the rebellion in Romania."<sup>163</sup> Alina Tudor is more categorical by suggesting that, according to some documents, at the same time with the unfolding of the events in Romania in January 1941, " at the Romanian-Soviet border the Red Army was concentrating its troops seeming to prepare itself for an eventual invasion."<sup>164</sup> When thinking the Soviet-Romanian dispute over the border line ( see footnote No. 105 ) still unsolved

<sup>160</sup> Hudîță, Pagini de jurnal, Magazin Istoric, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 39.

<sup>161</sup> Tudor, Rebelliune sau lovitură de stat?, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 1, 1999, p. 31.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Chiper, Mișcarea Legionară și acoliții lui Hitler, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 4, 1997, p. 18.

<sup>164</sup> Tudor, Rebelliune sau lovitură de stat?, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 1, 1999, p.31.

by January 1941, there is a sound reason which makes us suggest that Soviet Union didn't just watch the Romanian events. A state of general anarchy in Romania would have best served her territorial interests. Therefore, in our point of view, Soviet Union must have played, in somehow, an active role in creating and sustaining a climate of anarchy within Legionnaire Romania. Waiting for the Russian archives to open themselves to foreign researchers ( a short access liberalization did actually occur in early 1990s ), we believe that a deeper study of the official documents in national archives by Romanian historians would bring, almost certainly, more arguments in the sense above. Great Britain, too, had an interest in sustaining the chaos created by Iron Guard. According to Tudor the Foreign Office note of 12 January 1941 was making known : " It is in our net advantage that the domestic situation should deteriorate in Romania to such an extent, that it would be more difficult for Germany to exploit her as a cereal producer, oil supplier, and as a market for armament delivery."<sup>165</sup> Moreover, Tudor suggests that the British SOE <sup>166</sup> was instructing its agents in Romania, during the rebellion days, as follows: " Taking into consideration the general chaotic situation in Romania, do urgently instruct all your open channels in this country to discharge all possible plans in order to increase the chaos and cause her further dismemberment. Spend all the funds at your disposal. Her Majesty's Government has approved the instructions above."<sup>167</sup> However, historian Ioan Chiper suggests that " SOE couldn't exploit the situation because the legionnaire rebellion had been prematurely launched, and rapidly stifled, vis-à-vis the British interests in Romania."<sup>168</sup> Thus, for both Tudor and Chiper, official British documents reveal the fact that Great Britain, through her secret services, got actually involved in the January 1941 events in Romania with the purpose to undermine as much as possible the political, social, and economic stability of the Romanian State. For us, whether the Greek who killed the German officer in Bucharest, on 19 January 1941, is proved to have been a British spy, then it would be easy to assert that those who had provided Antonescu the needed pretext of getting rid of Iron Guard were the British. On the one hand, the rebellion outcome meant the strengthening of Antonescu's position and German influence in Romania, both contrary to the British interests. On the other hand, its immediate consequence was the elimination of the Romanian Far Right from the political scene. Seen in this light the British action was a successful one and of a greater importance in the long run.

<sup>165</sup> Tudor, *Rebeliune sau lovitură de stat?*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 1, 1999, p. 31.

<sup>166</sup> Special Operations Executive, including the sections D, EH, and MI(R). One of the British secret services, set up by the British War Cabinet on 27 May 1940, and headed until the spring of 1942 by the War Economy Minister, Hugh Dalton. See for more details on its wartime anti-Romanian activity: Ioan Chiper, *Englezii, petrolul românesc și loviturile de stat*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 1, 1999, p. 32-34.

<sup>167</sup> Tudor, *Rebeliune sau lovitură de stat?*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 1, 1999, p. 31.

<sup>168</sup> Chiper, *Englezii, petrolul românesc și loviturile de stat*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 1, 1999, p. 32.

## How are they perceived the events of 19 – 24 January 1941 in nowadays Romania?

The investigation of the available sources makes us suggest the existence of three main approaches on this issue among Romanian historians. Two of them stand at the opposite pole from one each other representing the viewpoints of the politically oriented historians, that is the viewpoints expressed by the bourgeois liberal and marxist historians in contrast to the approaches performed by those belonging to the Far Right. The third approach is rather a neutral one, less emotional and more scientific, striving to bring together in a sound interpretation the multitude of facts belonging to that short but dense period of time. If the two opposite approaches could be extended to cover the whole nowadays Romanian political spectrum and electorate ( democratic bourgeois and socialist parties *versus* far right and nationalist parties ), it can be said about the third approach as representing the viewpoints of the majority mainstream Romanian historians. The three different approaches suggested above can be best revealed through the interpretation given to the events by three Romanian historians.

Dan A. Lăzărescu deals with this problem, among other things, in a large article.<sup>169</sup> Lăzărescu emphasizes the exceptional performance by Antonescu to obtain Hitler's full trust in his struggle against Iron Guard, through the audiences of November 1940 and January 1941. He suggests that, according to Goebbels' type-written *Tagebuch* ( published in English as *Goebbels' Diary* ), Hitler was suspicious about all the allied chiefs of states excepting Mussolini and Antonescu, whom he trusted for the very beginning. Romanian historian points out that Hitler, in evaluating the situation in Romania, " listened to the advices given by his marshals, diplomates of the *Auswärtiges Amt*, and Fabricius, and ended by giving Antonescu free hands to liquidate the Legionnaire Movement."<sup>170</sup> Thus, Lăzărescu, too, indirectly confirms the fact that Hitler didn't trust the Nazi circles in making his decisions regarding Romania. Enjoying the Führer's support, Antonescu called for the Pitești Division previously commanded by him, by then under Gen. Ion Boiteanu's command, " and with its help crushed the rebels after two days of street fights."<sup>171</sup> Lăzărescu emphasizes that this was done with the consent of Hitler's representative, Dr. Hermann Neubacher, who actually transmitted Horia Sima the Führer's order of January 23rd, 1941, to immediately cease the armed resistance. For the Romanian historian, this is in formal contradiction with Antonescu's

<sup>169</sup> Lăzărescu, O chestiune de drept: sare pe rana deschisă, *Aldine*, Nr. 93, 6 decembrie, 1997, p. I-III.

<sup>170</sup> *Idem*, p. II.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

statement, at his trial in 1946, suggesting that "Horia Sima was representing by that time the political basis of the country, and the whole country was legionnaire."<sup>172</sup> Lăzărescu asserts that "had it been so, then it would have been impossible for the Legionnaire Movement to represent nothing in just four months, to be defeated by a single division, and to see its leaders rescued by the German secret services, with hidden purposes, and interned in a German camp."<sup>173</sup> Although Lăzărescu's assumption seems to be a sound one, we cannot entirely agree with it. Iron Guard did really enjoy the wide sympathy and support of both Romanian military strata and civilian population until late November 1940, as well as Nazi Germany's sympathy. Nevertheless, the revenge acts and murders perpetuated by the guardist members on both the military and civilian population made Romanians change, since December 1940, their attitude toward Iron Guard into a hostile one. Moreover, on that occasion Iron Guard definitely lost Hitler's support, which in the end mattered most. Seen in this light, an eventual Iron Guard uprising was bound to fail from the start.

Those days events are also addressed by Gen. Platon Chirnoagă in his 1986 (2nd ed.) book. For Chirnoagă, "the troubles of 21 – 23 January 1941, commonly known as < the legionnaire rebellion >, weren't initiated by the legionnaires, but they only belonged to Antonescu's willingness to separate himself from those who had opened him the way to state rulership, and who had supported him with all the power they had to exercise this leadership, whilst all other political parties left him to fall."<sup>174</sup> According to Chirnoagă, Antonescu's decision to cut off his links with Iron Guard was one of his great political mistakes, because the Guard was making the link with the nation. Instead, he left alone, Romanian historian suggests. Moreover, Chirnoagă emphasizes that "had the war quickly ended and in Germany's favor, thus in Romania's favor as well, as Antonescu believed to happen, the brutal separation from the legionnaires would have had minor consequences, because a victorious war would have covered domestic mistakes."<sup>175</sup> Instead, the war went on for many years "and Antonescu would have had a strong domestic support, had the Movement been in power."<sup>176</sup> In this perspective, "the ill-fated act of the King and Opposition, on 23 August 1944, wouldn't have taken place, he wouldn't have been handed over to the Russians, and the country would have had a true armistice and other fate."<sup>177</sup> Chirnoagă suggests, by relying on the statements of the guardist

<sup>172</sup> Lăzărescu, O chestiune de drept: sare pe rana deschisă, Aldine, Nr. 93, 6 decembrie, 1997, p. II.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Chirnoagă, 1986, p. 83-84.

<sup>175</sup> Idem. p. 84.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

leaders Horia Sima and Mihail Sturdza, quoted within his book, that Iron Guard never intended to uprising against Antonescu and Romanian Army. The historian asserts as a general conclusion that "the actual reasons which pushed Antonescu to break up the collaboration with the Legionnaire Movement are unknown."<sup>178</sup> We believe that an active officer, as Chirnoagă was by then, must have known Antonescu's repeated warnings addressed to Iron Guard to stop its propaganda and interference in the military institution, and to hand over the arms. The fact that the Guard didn't consent to the *Conducător's* demands in the sense above was the main reason which made him first change his attitude toward Iron Guard, and ultimately get rid of it. On the other hand, we cannot fully disagree with Chirnoagă's assumption regarding the January 1941 events. In our opinion, too, the events seem to have been initiated rather by Antonescu than by the Guard.

Historian Alina Tudor points out within her article mentioned before the different terms used by the two sides as regards to the events of 21 – 23 January 1941.<sup>179</sup> According to Tudor, in his memoirs Horia Sima sees the events as a "coup" orchestrated by General Antonescu against the only legal party in the country besides the German one, Iron Guard.<sup>180</sup> Prince Mihail Sturdza, the former legionnaire Romanian Foreign Minister, did qualify the events as a military "putsch" launched by Antonescu against the Guard.<sup>181</sup> In his writings Antonescu labels the street fights of January 1941 as a "rebellion" launched by Iron Guard against him and the army.<sup>182</sup> According to Tudor, Antonescu's term is the one which has made career within Romanian historiography. For the Romanian historian, "the short existence and the failure of the legionnaire experiment in Romania are registered within a complex interpretative framework implying besides the domestic and external political situation also the different ambitions and psychology of the two governing partners: Ion Antonescu and Horia Sima."<sup>183</sup> We already know her interpretation of the events in the sense above: Antonescu, assured by Hitler of his support, was ready to get rid of Iron Guard in mid-January 1941; the pretext was provided on the 19th of January by the murdering of a German officer by a Greek spy; the *Conducător* took advantage of the situation and dismissed a series of legionnaire ministers and high officials; these one refused to leave their posts and barricaded themselves within the official buildings in Bucharest and province; on January 22th, Antonescu

<sup>178</sup> Chirnoagă, 1986, p. 84.

<sup>179</sup> Tudor, *Rebeliune sau lovitură de stat?*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 1, 1999, p. 28-31.

<sup>180</sup> *Idem*, p. 28.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

ordered Romanian Army to take by assault the buildings occupied by the insurgents, who did respond with fire; at Hitler's personal request the next day, on January the 23rd, Horia Sima ordered Iron Guard to stop the armed resistance; by the 24th of January, 1941, the uprising was stifled countrywide by Antonescu; Iron Guard leaders were preserved and sent in custody to Germany by the German Military Mission in Romania. Thus, for Tudor, although being very complex and needing further investigation, the events of January 1941 should be interpreted rather as a coup by Antonescu against Iron Guard than *vice versa*. The Guard's uprising, or rebellion, was actually the outcome of the manifest attempts by Antonescu to get rid of it.

As revealed before, other mainstream historians, too, have rather similar approaches on the origins, immediate causes, and the unfolding of the 21 – 23 January 1941 events, known in Romanian historiography as *The Legionnaire Rebellion*. The main characteristic of the researches in last years is that of setting under the question mark the label "rebellion" as regards to those days events. For mainstream Romanian historians, the careful analysis of both Romanian and German archive documents tells rather a different story. In other words, the events in Romania weren't initiated by Iron Guard, but they were brought about by Antonescu himself who, by mid-January 1941, was determined to get rid of the former in full agreement with Hitler. The new orientation is best revealed by the very title of Tudor's article, largely used in this chapter: *Rebellion, or Coup?* Iron Guard's uprising didn't precede, but it was a consequence of the dismissal by Antonescu of several important guardist ministers and other high officials. Thus, according to mainstream historians, as regards to the January 1941 events in Romania, one can rather speak about a coup by Antonescu against Iron Guard, the legal party in power by then, than about the latter's rebellion against the *Conducător*. Nevertheless, Romanian historians suggest that further researches are needed in order to bring more light on those days complex events, especially in German archives, but also in the Soviet and British ones.

In our opinion, leaving aside the manifest *pro domo* approaches, the majority mainstream historians are on the right tracks with respect to this period of Romanian history. The January 1941 events were actually premeditated by Antonescu and can be seen as a coup by him against Iron Guard. The murdering of the German officer did only provide Antonescu with the pretext to take actions against the Guard. The fact that C. Sănătescu's return to Moscow ( member of the Moscow Commission. See Note 105 ) was stopped by the *Conducător*, in mid-January 1941, " because of the

forseeable domestic events which were expected to happen ”, strengthens our assumption above.<sup>184</sup> Thus, General Sănătescu’s confession, expressed within his memoirs, provides us the best argument to suggest that Antonescu was ready, in mid-January 1941, to get rid of the Guard as soon as possible. There’s no doubt that, hadn’t Major Doering been killed on the streets of Bucharest, on 19 January 1941, Antonescu would have found another pretext legitimizing his envisaged coup against the Guard. On the one hand, it is true that the repeated guardist interferences, abuses, violences and, especially, the incapacity of the Guard to govern the country, as largely described in the previous chapter, were the very reasons which made Antonescu seriously think of getting rid of his unpleasant governing partner by early January 1941. On the other hand, it is also true that the events in the second half of January 1941 were initiated by Antonescu and not by the guardists, and, as such, they can be seen as a classical military coup opposing the army to the legally governing party. The legionnaire rebellion followed Antonescu’s coup, and not *vice versa*. So being, and by taking into consideration the ” sufficient ” time perspective, we should give the events the real name, and this despite the fact that both domestically and internationally the history is usually written by the victors: *Antonescu’s Military Coup*, or, *Antonescu’s Second Coup*.

#### **4. POLITICAL LIFE DURING THE ANTONESCU MILITARY REGIME, FEBRUARY 1941 – AUGUST 1944**

Antonescu set up his new government on the 27th of January, 1941, that is three days after his final victory over the Guard. The new government was to stick to power, with all cabinet reshuffles included, until August the 23rd, 1944. Although several technocrats were coopted to carry out the economic and financial ministerial posts, it was about a predominantly military administration. With its assistance, Antonescu ruled Romania authoritatively by decree-laws. During this period of time the *Conducător* led a nationalist policy, one officially called ” the romanianization ” of the economic and social life in Romania. All political parties were officially banned by Antonescu and supervised by his secret services. Romanian Army joined, under his supreme command, the Wehrmacht in the anti-Soviet war. Invoking state security reasons, he ordered the deportation and internment of Jews, Gypsy individuals, communists, and iron guardists within the country, but mainly to Transnistria, a Soviet region under Romanian administration from late 1941 until early 1944. After the defeat at Stalingrad of Axis armies by the Red Army, he allowed both his men and

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<sup>184</sup> Dobrinescu & Constantin, 1995, p. 203.



the Opposition secret talks with the Western Allied Powers with the purpose to bring Romania out of the Axis war through an armistice. Antonescu rejected the Soviet truce proposals, which were seen by him as damaging the vital national interests of Romania. The increasing pressure of the Red Army on Romania's eastern borders during the summer of 1944 made King Michael I depose and arrest the *Conducător* on August the 23rd, 1944. Antonescu was sent by the Romanian communists to Soviet Union and was kept there in custody for over one and a half year before being returned to Romania to face a trial as war criminal, in May 1946.

All the facts and events above have been investigated in earnest in recent years by post-communist historians. Having been for over forty years rather a taboo research problem, the complex 1941 – 1944 period, time when Antonescu ruled with tough hands Romania, became, after the fall of Communism in 1989, the main interest point among mainstream historians. Although thousands of books, studies and documents have been published since on the "rough materials" provided by the opening archives, a wide synthesis over the period cannot be envisaged until its comprehensive analysis is carried out. In other words, Romanian historians are still working on the period. Nevertheless, their main orientations on the different aspects of the period can be derived from the available sources. So, how all these aspects are addressed by post-communist historians constitutes the topics of the next several chapters.

#### **4.1. Antonescu Administration**

What kind of government did Antonescu set up, and why, on January the 27th, 1941? What about the legitimacy of the new regime? What kind of social policy did it pursue? What was it, its economic orientation? How are they seen by mainstream historians the ministerial teams used by Antonescu between February 1941 and August 1944?

The nature of the new government set up by Antonescu following his victory over Iron Guard is indirectly revealed by historian Marian Ștefan through his comments on the referendum held in Romania in March 1941.<sup>185</sup> According to Ștefan, the functioning of the body set up by Antonescu on 25 September 1940 within the Council of Ministers, the Cabinet Council, was maintained under the new conditions. Its official task was "to manage and solve the running affairs of the state."<sup>186</sup>

<sup>185</sup> Ștefan, In culisele plebiscitului din 2 – 5 martie 1941, Magazin Istoric, Nr. 4, 1999, p. 19-22.

<sup>186</sup> Idem, p. 19.

According to the same historian, the Cabinet Council was regularly attended by the Chief of State, the President and the Vice President of the Council of Ministers, the State Subsecretaries at the National Defense Ministry, the Interior Minister, the Foreign Affairs Minister, the National Economy Minister, the Finance Minister and, in case when on the agenda were issues concerning domestic order, by also the SSI chief and the Subsecretary of State at the Interior, who was at the same time the General Inspector of the Gendarmerie. Stefan suggests that at the Cabinet Session of February 28th, 1941, chaired by the Romanian Chief of State and President of the Council of Ministers, General Ion Antonescu, were also present: " the generals N. Stoenescu and D. Popescu – the Finance and, respectively, Interior Minister; Lt.Col. N. Dragomir – the Coordination and Economic General Staff Minister; the generals Gh. Potopeanu and C. Pantazi – the National Economy Minister and, respectively, the Land Army State Subsecretary at the National Defense Ministry; C. Stoicescu – the Justice Minister and Ovidiu Vlădescu – the Secretary General at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers."<sup>187</sup> Thus, only two of the participants at the Cabinet Meeting were civilians, whilst the rest of them were senior officers: five generals and one colonel. Moreover, the important ministerial posts of the Finance and National Economy were detained by two generals. We should remind ourselves that, by February 1941, Romania was not at war yet. Therefore, we can reinterpret Ștefan's suggestions in the sense that Antonescu did actually set up, on 27 January 1941, a military regime.

This assumption stands when taking a look at Dan Amedeo Lăzărescu's article on Antonescu, including the complete list of the Romanian dignitaries which served under the *Conducător* until August 1944.<sup>188</sup> We can say that, despite the fact that civilians, too, were sometimes appointed by Antonescu for varying terms in the economic posts, as the technocrat Ion N. Fintescu ( National Economy Minister, 15 August 1942 – 20 February 1943 ) and the liberal Alexandru Neagu ( Finance Minister, 26 September 1942 – 4 April 1944 ), the generals were always the majority within the Cabinet Council. As we already know from Ștefan's comments above, the main decisions were taken there. Moreover, by checking Lăzărescu's list, one can find that Antonescu occasionally appointed generals, as ministers and state subsecretaries, also to some other important ministries besides the National Defense one: Grigore Georgescu ( Public Works and Communications Minister, 17 January 1941 – 10 July 1941 ), Radu R. Rosetti ( Public Instruction and Religious Cultes Minister, 27 January 1941 – 12 November 1941 ), Eugen Zwiedineck

<sup>187</sup> Ștefan, In culisele plebiscitului din 2 – 5 martie 1941, *Magazin Istoric*, Nr. 4, 1999, p. 19.

<sup>188</sup> Lăzărescu, O chestiune de drept: sare pe rana deschisă, *Aldine*, Nr. 93, 6 decembrie, 1997, p. I-III.

( first Minister, then Subsecretary of State for Romanianization, 27 January 1941 – 5 December 1941 ), Constantin C. Voiculescu ( Subsecretary of State at the Work, Health and Social Protection Ministry, 27 January 1941 – 10 July 1941 ), Victor Iliescu ( Subsecretary of State at the National Instruction, Cultes and Arts Ministry, 15 February 1941 – 23 August 1944 ).<sup>189</sup> Thus, from the very beginning Antonescu appointed Romanian generals in high posts to all major civilian ministries, besides the National Defense Ministry. It is reasonable to suggest that the generals were supervising the activity of their civilian bosses. We may also assert that, in this way, the *Conducător* had the control over the entire government, and country, respectively. The high number of generals appointed to the office, as suggested by Lazarescu's list, leaves little doubts about the character of the Government set up by Antonescu on the 27th of January 1941: it was overwhelmingly a military one, at least in its initial phases. We shall return to Lăzărescu's article later on.

For historian Marcel-Dumitru Ciucă, too, Antonescu's new government " was made up of military officers in majority."<sup>190</sup> According to Ciucă, Antonescu was upset about the fact that, despite his readiness for collaboration, he found, once again, no understanding among Romanian political leaders. For Ciucă, the reasons which made Antonescu set up a military regime are best revealed through the *Conducător's* own words at the first meeting of the new government on January the 27th, 1941:

" Why did I appoint soldiers to the government? Because I found nobody else to trouble himself in doing this operation. I had a talk with the civilians. I found no civic courage in them. I pleaded them because I didn't want the Army involved in a political action. I fought with all my strength to keep the Army out of this. But, when I saw at our men the lack of civic courage, whilst they were full of criticism, and when I asked them responsibility, by calling them to work and offering them ministries, they moved away. They said: Let the soldiers come! ... Everybody is afraid to get a hole in his dirty skin."<sup>191</sup>

Ciucă suggests that Antonescu reverted to the collaboration idea in the Government Session of March 11th, 1941, but he was anew disappointed. The *Conducător* said on that occasion: " They are some who refuse to cooperate not because they don't want the collaboration with General Antonescu, but just from cowardice, since they know nothing about tomorrow. That's tragical and

<sup>189</sup> Lăzărescu, O chestiune de drept: sare pe rana deschisă, Aldine, Nr. 93, 6 decembrie, 1997, p. II-III.

<sup>190</sup> Ciucă, " Am construit un sistem de dictatură în Fără Românească, trebuie să ne folosim de toate avantajele pe care acest sistem ni le oferă ", Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 11, 1998, p. 60.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

shameful, but it's true!"<sup>192</sup> Thus, for Ciucă, too, the government set up by Antonescu in late January 1941 was prominently a military one, which had been made possible by the refusal to join it on the part of the bourgeois political parties. Moreover, according to the same historian, Antonescu himself described the real nature of the new government during one of its first sessions: " ... I set up a system of dictatorship in Romania, and we should rather utilize all the advantages which this system offers us than thinking of its inconveniences ..." <sup>193</sup> Thus, we can interpret Ciucă's suggestions above in the sense that Antonescu didn't form a loose military regime. In January 1941, he actually set up a genuine military dictatorship, but one, in the end, rather authoritarian than totalitarian in its nature, as we shall see later. According to Romanian historian, the Royal Decree No. 314 of February 14th, 1941, abolished the totalitarian Legionnaire State, by replacing that one of September 14th, 1940. Ciucă also emphasizes the fact, that one of the first measures taken by Antonescu was the strengthening of his new military regime. Thus, as the historian puts it, the Decree-Law No. 236 of February 5th, 1941, " was directed against the individuals who, by their acts, were endangering the existence and the interests of the State." <sup>194</sup> Ciucă points out that the decree was stipulating " the death penalty " for all those who, among other things, were found: in the possession without license of fire arms, ammunition and explosive; robbing in gangs, instigating and plotting actions against either the public, or social order of the State; holding public buildings illegally; as the authors and distributors of manifestoes; attempting on the King's, and his family, life. <sup>195</sup> We can suggest that capital punishment was in place, for some of the charges above, also in the democratic states of the time, but its extension to cover less dangerous crimes, as for instance the spreading of manifestoes, was the print of any dictatorship, whether political or military.

Thus, directly, or not, Romanian historians suggest that the new regime, set up by the *Conducător* following his victory over the Guard, was a military one. The extent to which, on the one hand, the attitude of Romanian bourgeois parties and, on the other hand, Antonescu's own will had a say in the setting up of such a government is still an open question on which mainstream historians keep on working. Obviously, both factors had their impact. As for us, we are inclined to believe that it was Antonescu's own will which did actually prevail. After the guardist anarchy the *Conducător* needed domestic peace in order to speed up the modernization of the army, started by him in

<sup>192</sup> Ciucă, " Am construit un sistem de dictatură în Țara Românească, trebuie să ne folosim de toate avantajele pe care acest sistem ni le oferă ", *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 11, 1998, p. 60.

<sup>193</sup> *Idem*, p. 61.

<sup>194</sup> *Idem*, p. 60.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

September 1940, and assisted by Hitler, since November the same year, through the German Military Mission in Romania. We believe that Antonescu must have known about the Führer's real intentions *vis-à-vis* the Soviet Union, so that the best way to prepare Romania for the coming war was to set up a military regime.

What about the legitimacy of the new regime? We can say from the start that, according to Romanian historians, both the *Conducător* and his military regime were twice backed, in 1941, by the Romanian People with an overwhelming majority. So, whatever causes might be invoked to explain the results of the two referendums held that year, one thing cannot be denied: the historic fact that Antonescu and his military regime did really enjoy the wide support of the masses, both before and during the war.

According to Marian Ștefan, between the 2nd and 5th of March 1941, the Romanians were called to the poll to openly express, by *Yes* or *No*, their opinion " as regards to the domestic and foreign policy carried out by General Ion Antonescu."<sup>196</sup> The reasons which made Antonescu organize the plebiscite had been previously explained by him during the Cabinet Session of February 28th, 1941. Ștefan suggests that Antonescu's most assertions on that occasion " shouldn't be put under the question mark since that discussion was confidential, and it was held within a small circle of trustees."<sup>197</sup> Among other things, the *Conducător* said:

" ...You're surprised, of course, by my decision to hold a plebiscite. Nevertheless, the measure is necessary because I stand on coups only. I stand on the coup of September 6th [ a.n., 1940 ], on the coup introducing the legionnaire regime [ a.n., 14 September 1940 ], and now, on the coup through which I recently crushed that regime in Romania [ a.n., 21 – 23 January 1941 ]. We're, at last, on the right path on which Romanian People should walk: the integral Nationalism. We're standing on this principle now. I decided that the plebiscite should take place for the People to recognize, in the first place, the Act of September 5th. There's some informations suggesting that Charles considers himself as having been forced by Gen. Antonescu, that I'm responsible, and that the People is waiting for him to return. I want, once for all, to prove for history that he's not expected by the People, and that, had I left him in power nobody would have saved him. There's another reason convincing me to hold a plebiscite... It's necessary to see whether the country did really mix up Gen. Antonescu's activity with the hateful actions of the legionnaires. I believe the country never did such a confusion. I need the country to approve my guideline, one totally different from that of the Guard... I also need the approval for my foreign and future home policy, aiming to unite all willing Romanians to defend the State and save Romania."<sup>198</sup>

<sup>196</sup> Ștefan, In culisele plebiscitului din 2 – 5 martie 1941, Magazin Istoric, Nr. 4, 1999, p. 20.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

It comes out very clear from the citation above, that Antonescu was aware that his rule was lacking sound legitimacy. Although he was officially appointed Prime Minister by King Charles II, on September 5th, 1940, he, nonetheless, remained in power through three consecutive coups. He started his career as the *Conducător* by removing first Charles II, then the parliamentary system, and ultimately the sole legal party. Antonescu felt himself strong enough to ask, in February 1941, from Romanian People the approval for his policy, which would have meant in his mind the very recognition of the act of September 5th, that is, the legitimacy of his rule. Antonescu was quite confident about the backing by the Romanians of his policy since, during the same Cabinet Session of February 28th, he instructed his Interior Minister, Gen. Dumitru Popescu: "In which concerns the guards, do command the soldiers and officers to have a proper behavior, to keep distance from the voters, to interfere in no way, and to have a correct stand..."<sup>199</sup> He also informed his collaborators about his intention to step down and let Romanians find another leader in the case of the rejection by them of his policy. Whether by that he was serious, or not, only him could have known it for sure. We think he was, because, to rule against Romanian People's will was not the same with governing without the support of the political class, and it was the former, not the latter, with whom Antonescu had always identified himself.

According to Ștefan some things were not discussed by Antonescu on that occasion, "as the fact that his regime was already feeling the effects of its political isolation at home, following the refusal by the peasants and liberals to join a pro-German government."<sup>200</sup> Romanian historian points out, that Antonescu organized the referendum short time after the legionnaire uprising when his popularity was high, the majority of Romanians having backed him. Ștefan suggests, that also the second plebiscite, that of November 1941, was held by Antonescu during "a favorable psychological period", that following the conquest of Odessa by the Romanian-German troops on the 16th of October the same year.<sup>201</sup> The *Conducător* was again backed by the majority of Romanians. Thus, Ștefan's suggestions can be interpreted in the sense, that Antonescu did organized the two plebiscites in order to obtain the approval by the Romanians of his policy, in other words, the needed legitimacy for his military regime. He chose the right time for the referendums, that is, when his popularity was at the highest level, and the outcomes, indeed, met his expectations.

<sup>199</sup> Ștefan, În culisele plebiscitului din 2 – 5 martie 1941, Magazin Istoric, Nr. 4, 1999, p. 21.

<sup>200</sup> Idem, p. 20.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

Marcel-Dimitru Ciucă's comments on the plebiscite held in March 1941 are rather similar to Ștefan's ones. For him, too, Antonescu held the referendum in order to obtain the approval of the Romanians for his domestic and foreign policy. Ciucă cites the results of the referendum from the Communiqué of the Plebiscitary Central Commission of March 11th, 1941: "For the approval of the manner in which General Ion Antonescu has ruled the Country since September 6th, 1940 – 2,960,298 <Yes> votes. For the disapproval of the way in which General Ion Antonescu has led the Country since September 6th, 1940 – 2,996 <No> votes."<sup>202</sup> Thus, Ciucă's suggestions can be seen in the sense that the Romanians backed, in March 1941, the *Conducător* and his new nationalist military regime with an overwhelming majority.

For mainstream historians, there is no doubt that Antonescu and his military regime were twice backed by the Romanian People. However, in our point of view, some remarks should be promoted here. Romanian historian Petre Otu suggests in an article that, according to the April 1941 Census (thus, a month after the plebiscite of March), "Romania had 13,535,757 inhabitants from which 49.3% were males, that is 6,674,248 persons."<sup>203</sup> Now, if we think that, by then, the franchise was denied both to the persons under the age of 21 and to women, then we may assert that Antonescu was backed by almost the entire adult male population of the country irrespective of their social status. The exception was, as Ștefan suggests in his article, "the clergy, a large number of priests and theology students having allowed for themselves another attitude than that expected by General Antonescu", as it comes out from the minute of the Session of March 7th, 1941, of the Council of Ministers.<sup>204</sup> Although Antonescu was aware of the fact that many priests and theology students were whether members, or sympathizers of Iron Guard, their negative votes took him by surprise, Ștefan suggests. In other words, Antonescu and his military regime were actually backed by less than a quarter of the Romanian population. Anyway, had Romanian women been allowed to vote, they probably would have had the same stand as that of their fathers, brothers, or husbands, especially when thinking the difficult situation in which Romanian was by then. In any case, Antonescu would have been backed by more than half of the adult population of the country. Moreover, by that time the franchise was denied to women in most European countries, so that, we may agree with mainstream historians' viewpoints, suggesting that Antonescu was twice backed by

<sup>202</sup> Ciucă, "Am construit un sistem de dictatură în Țara Românească, trebuie să ne folosim de toate avantajele pe care acest sistem ni le oferă", *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 11, 1998, p. 61.

<sup>203</sup> Otu, "Ostași, vă ordon: trecați Prutul!", *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 19.

<sup>204</sup> Ștefan, *In culisele plebiscitului din 2 – 5 martie 1941*, *Magazin Istoric*, Nr. 4, 1999, p. 22.

the Romanian People in 1941. However, with all reserves comprised, we may conclude that, by having directly expressed on two occasions their approval to the *Conducător's* domestic and foreign policy, the Romanians did actually provide to his military regime the much needed legitimacy.

What was it, then, the socio-economic programme of the "legitimate" military government, and how was it implemented, between 1941 and 1944?

Mainstream Romanian historians have been working on these broad questions since the fall of Communism, in late 1989. Nevertheless, their answer to the second question in particular is still expecting the proper formulation. This is an understandable delay, because they have set out to investigate the official documents issued by the Antonescu Regime during its entire period in power, obviously a difficult and time-consuming endeavour. As a general impression here, we can say that Romanian historians see Antonescu Military Regime 1941 – 1944 as essentially nationalist in its nature but, nonetheless, one strongly influenced in its social and economic policy by Nazi Germany. According to mainstream historians, Antonescu envisaged as main task for his new military regime the "romanianization" of the social and economic life of the Romanian State. What did he mean by that, and how was the new policy implemented?

The economic recovery was one of the main goals of the new regime, as the minute of the Council Session of March 28th, 1941, well reveals. According to Ciucă, during that session were discussed the budget and the economic situation of the country. For Ciucă, the eventual reader "would be surprised to find out that many of the economic problems confronting Nowadays Romania were urgent in 1941, too."<sup>205</sup> Antonescu spent much time talking about the "national industry", but he also emphasized the necessity for a national revision of the industrial investments through a state policy, in order to see to which extent Romanian State "could maintain a parasitical, or costly industry."<sup>206</sup> The *Conducător* was upset by the fact that in Romania many production costs were much higher than abroad: "... For example... the overhauling cost of locomotives at home, for which we're doing so many sacrifices, is three times higher than the cost by which they could be repaired in Germany, not to speak that in Germany their repair would take 30 days, instead of three

<sup>205</sup> Ciucă, "Am construit un sistem de dictatură în Țara Românească, trebuie să ne folosim de toate avantajele pe care acest sistem ni le oferă", *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 11, 1998, p.61.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*



months at home.”<sup>207</sup>

Although Romania had a heavy industry, its most efficient sectors were those producing for war: armament, explosive, locomotive, pipe and barrel industrial plants. According to Ciucă, Antonescu was delighted by Romanian war industry organized around the Malaxa Group.<sup>208</sup> In Antonescu’s opinion, this industry was from many points of view ” much more modern than the corresponding plants in Germany ”, but it was highly dependent on ” the raw materials provided by the Germans and the demands from the State.”<sup>209</sup> For Ciucă, the *Conducător* was aware of the fact that the end of the war in Europe would have also meant the end of that industry. It was the very reason why he emphasized, on the same occasion, the necessity for the development of other industrial sectors, as textile, leather and, especially, chemical industry. The focus was to be set, in the last case, on the drug industry development in order to minimize the dependence on foreign providers, since ” the drugs are prohibitive to the poor due to their high price.”<sup>210</sup> We can interpret Ciucă’s suggestions above in the sense that, although Romania had a ” national industry ” by early 1941, it was not at all one harmoniously developed. With the exception of several heavy industry branches, almost entirely orientated toward war production, and the oil industry, the bulk of the sectors representative for a modern industrial nation, as chemical and consumer goods industries, were whether missing, or inefficient by their high production costs.

The same historian suggests that the problems of the agricultural sector were also discussed during the Council Session of March 28th. According to Ciucă, the *Conducător* was even more dissatisfied with the then situation in that economic field than with the industry. Romanian historian emphasizes that Antonescu set the blame for ” the tragical experience ” of the interwar Romanian agriculture on both former authorities and foreign competitors.<sup>211</sup> Australia, Canada, and Brasil had succeeded, by having modernized their agriculture, to overthrow from the cereal markets the European countries, in particular Russia and Romania. The outcome was a general crisis of the

<sup>207</sup> Ciucă, ” Am construit un sistem de dictatură în Tara Românească, trebuie să ne folosim de toate avantajele pe care acest sistem ni le oferă ”, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 11, 1998, p. 61.

<sup>208</sup> Nicolae Malaxa was the greatest industrialist of Interwar Romania. The spinal column of country’s heavy industry was made up of his industrial empire, ranging from metallurgy to machine building. The Grivița Workshops in Bucharest ( building locomotives ) and Reșița Plant in southwest Romania ( building guns ) were the main plants of the Group. They still are two of Romania’s biggest industrial plants.

<sup>209</sup> Ciucă, ” Am construit un sistem de dictatură în Tara Românească, trebuie să ne folosim de toate avantajele pe care acest sistem ni le oferă ”, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 11, 1998, p. 61-62.

<sup>210</sup> *Idem*, p. 62.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*

Romanian agriculture. For the *Conducător*, the crisis of the agriculture ” did rapidly result in a social and financial crisis.”<sup>212</sup> Ciucă suggests that Antonescu intended to tackle the crisis by strengthening, on the one hand, the control over prices, which were actually fixed by the state and, on the other hand, ” by realizing a proper balance between the prices of the agricultural produces and those of the industrial products.”<sup>213</sup> The price fixing by the state was not a measure taken by the new military regime, but it had been introduced by Antonescu earlier, because, in his own words, ” had I let the prices on the rising course, the State and the economy would have collapsed.”<sup>214</sup> Thus, we can reinterpret Ciucă’s suggestions above in the sense that, by the time Antonescu set up his new military regime, Romanian agriculture was in a much deeper crisis than the industry. To blame for this was its backwardness in comparison to the more advanced agriculture of the competitors.

As for us, the negative economic consequences of the Great Depression on Romania were still there by 1941. Although a smooth industrial recovery could be observed for 1937 – 1939, Romania was pushed back into the crisis by the sudden fall of the cereal prices on the international markets, the outbreak of the new war in Europe, and the territorial losses of 1940. Romanian capitalists had succeeded in building up a ” national industry ” by the outbreak of the Second World War, but, nevertheless, they failed to modernize the agriculture. Their policy turned to be a disastrous one since, as a predominantly agrarian country, Romania was financing her industrial drive with the revenues from cereal exports. Antonescu inherited a difficult economic situation of which he was well aware, and which he was determined to correct, especially after his victory over the Guard.

Did Romanian National Economy move forward under Antonescu, or not? It seems that it did. Though we have no knowledge of any comprehensive study on Wartime Romania’s economic performances, we strongly believe that such eventual studies by Romanian historians would support our assumption. It is based on the data provided by Antonescu himself within his Memorandum addressed to The People’s Tribunal of Bucharest on May 15th, 1946. In their turn, the figures were taken by Antonescu from the brochure *Trei ani de guvernare* [ Three Years of Governing ] published in 1944. Moreover, within the brochure were used the official figures provided by the Romanian economic actors of the time. Waiting for Romanian historians to check out and analyze

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<sup>212</sup> Ciucă, ” Am construit un sistem de dictatură în Țara Românească, trebuie să ne folosim de toate avantajele pe care acest sistem ni le oferă ”, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 11, 1998, p. 62.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

the figures of the period in archives, or to revise them, we have to rely on the informations provided by Antonescu ( see the detailed figures in Appendix 1. ).

Here, we briefly point out some of the main ones in order to support our interpretation. In industry: the overall industrial output increased between 1940 and 1944 by 122%; coal production by 51%; steel production by 65% ( every year the bulk, ca. 70%, went to the general economy, the army receiving the rest ); sulphuric acid production by 69%; leather items manufacturing by 140%; Resita Plant manufactured 110 guns monthly, instead of 4 previously; rubber industry was built up. In agriculture, they were imported between 1940 and 1944: 9,800 tractors, to be added to the existing 3,260 pieces in 1940 ( a tractor plant was built up in those years in Romania ); 3,890 tractor ploughs; 680 threshing machines; 530 engines; 11,000 tons of tools and machines. The finances: the war budget represented 48,2% of the ordinary budget, in comparison to over 70% in other European countries; both domestic and foreign remained still between 1941 and 1943; the war effort of the National Bank was far bellow 10%; the total inherited debt of 105 md. Lei decreased by 1944 with 26 md. stabilized Lei; to 16 waggons of gold detained by the National Bank in 1940 were added 7 more by 1944. In our opinion, the figures above could hardly be kept as belonging to a country in economic crisis, not to speak to one at war: the total industrial output more than doubled in four years; the main branches of heavy industry increased their total production by more than half during the same period; new chemical and consumer goods branches made their appearance and rapidly developed; the difficult situation of the agriculture was eased by a widespread mechanization, especially by the thousands of new tractors delivered to the peasants; the inherited debt of the state was reduced during the war; the war budget represented less than half of the ordinary budget; the gold reserve of the Romanian National Bank augmented. Obviously, one can argue about the extent of the 1941– 1944 economic growth, but in itself it couldn't be denied by anyone on the official figures above. It doesn't mean that Romania became an industrial nation by 1944, but, in any case, she was pushed forward by the resolute policy of Antonescu and his military regime. We may conclude by suggesting that, with all the distress caused by the war, Romania had been by far in a worse economic shape in 1940 than she was in 1944, at the rise and fall of Antonescu, respectively.

How was it possible for a backward economy to register major steps forward in such a short period of time? One explanation would be a correct understanding of the Romanian-German relationships. The other one, more important, should be found in the nationalist policy carried out by Antonescu.

As we already know, the Germans had strongly supported Antonescu's rise to power in September 1940. In Legionnaire Romania the links between the *Conducător* and Hitler got ahead, leading in November, the same year, to the deployment of the German Military Mission on the Romanian soil. The German assistance proved to be essential to Antonescu also during his open fight against the Guard, in January 1941.

According to Marian Ștefan, the setting up of the new military regime by Antonescu had as immediate consequence the strengthening of the multiple relations between Romania and Nazi Germany, especially in the economic field. Ștefan points out that the minute of the Cabinet Council of February 7th, 1941, clearly reveals the fact that the basic framework of the Romanian-German relationships had been established by Antonescu with the Germans even before his rise to power. Thus, Antonescu told his principal ministers on that occasion, that "the whole governing programme, and the basic principles of the future Romanian State, mainly in the economic field," had been discussed by him with the Germans whilst he was still interned at Bistrița.<sup>215</sup> The *Conducător* also emphasized that the basic two principles were "fully accepted" by the Germans during his visit to Berlin, in late November 1940. He clarified them to his ministers as follows:

" 1) I won't distort the essentials of the Romanian riches. 2) I'll romanianize the economic life of the Romanian State. By Romanian riches I mean all: the coal, the oil, the methane gas etc. As regards to the romanianization of the economy, our own capital and technocrats aren't sufficient to replace the foreign and Jewish ones which will be thrown away.. This empty space, which I won't be able to cover due to the lack of means, will be kept at Germany's disposal, with the only condition that the control over each economic action should be mine. I'm the one who should dictate the economic life of Romania. In other words, in each compartment, and each production branch I should have the control, that is at least 51% of the votes. My last agreement with the Germans was [ a.n., during the visit of January 14th, 1941 ], that they should retreat from the compartments where they had previously increased their presence because of the difficult situation [ a.n., until the Legionnaire Rebellion ]. I'm the one who decides to which extent the Germans may penetrate. That's my agreement with them, and it is clear that things must change. I told the Führer, Ribbentrop and Clodius, and they agreed, that their move back should include even the oil industry. I told them: the oil policy carried out by the Americans and Englishmen was the impoverishment of the Romanian reserves and the preservation of the oil fields in Asia, in order to have Europe at their feet. We should do the contrary, and preserve the European reserves for the future. The Führer understood it immediately, and issued the proper orders in my presence: the oil from outside Europe will be used and Romanian reserves will be preserved... Of course, during the ongoing war we must extract our petroleum at maximum in order to fuel it..."<sup>216</sup>

<sup>215</sup> Ștefan, Ion Antonescu: " De când eram în închisoare am discutat cu nemții tot programul de guvernământ ", Magazin Istoric, Nr. 9, 1998, p. 14.

<sup>216</sup> Idem, p. 14-15.

For Ștefan, Antonescu's words are relevant in many ways, and they need "no further comments."<sup>217</sup> However, the minute of the February 7th Cabinet Council has its importance because it brings more light on the details of the contacts, "still insufficiently known", between Antonescu and the Germans.<sup>218</sup> Thus, Ștefan's suggestions above can be interpreted in the sense, that the economic path on which Romania was to walk forward had been discussed by Antonescu with the Germans on three occasions previously to the setting up by him of new the military government, in January 1941. On the one hand, Jewish capital was to be replaced by the Romanian one. In its turn, German capital was to be attracted to fulfill the empty places. On the other hand, the Romanians were to regain the control over the economic branches, including oil industry, fallen into the German hands before January 1941. In other words, Hitler gave Antonescu free hands "to romanianize" Romania.

As for us, when thinking at the positive economic figures presented before, and acknowledging the fact that oil industry although in Romanian hands did also work for the Nazi war-machine, we are inclined to think that the terms of the agreement were implemented to a great deal. Otherwise, it would be very difficult to explain Wartime Romania's economic growth, if it really happened.

The guideline principles of the Romanian-German collaboration were once more discussed at a meeting in Vienna, on March 5th, 1941, between Antonescu and Hermann Göring, at the latter's request. Marcel-Dumitru Ciucă suggests that Antonescu informed about the meeting the Council of Ministers the next day, on March 6th. According to Ciucă, Antonescu presented his ministers the principles which were to guide Romania's basic economic relations with Germany and Italy: "Romania wouldn't distort the essentials of her riches; the penetration of the Romanian economy would be permitted only with the consent of the Government, and only to the level which would allow it to have the economic and political control over the national economy."<sup>219</sup> According to Ciucă, the minute reveals the fact that two of the main topics of the Antonescu-Göring meeting were the oil and the agriculture. In the first case, Romania was to increase her oil production for the Axis, but the oil price was to rise, since, "the maintenance of the concessions granted by the former regime would have pushed the country into economic slavery."<sup>220</sup> In the second case, the prices of

<sup>217</sup> Ștefan, Ion Antonescu: "De când eram în închisoare am discutat cu nemții tot programul de guvernământ", *Magazin Istoric*, Nr. 9, 1998, p. 15.

<sup>218</sup> *Idem*, p. 14.

<sup>219</sup> Ciucă, "Am construit un sistem de dictatură în Țara Românească, trebuie să ne folosim de toate avantajele pe care acest sistem ni le oferă", *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 11, 1998, p. 61.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*

Romanian cereals were to be balanced with those of the tools and machinery imported from Germany. Ciucă also suggests that the *Conducător* manifested on that occasion his intention to diminish the country's foreign debt. Thus, we can say that Ciucă's suggestions above meet those expressed by Ștefan, and could be interpreted in the sense that Antonescu's intended to strengthen Romanian economy through a collaboration, on equal terms, with Nazi Germany. Romania's development was to be pushed ahead through a "romanianization" process of the economy, to which the Germans had finally shown the green light on March the 5th, 1941, through the person of Hermann Göring. Ciucă's approach makes us strengthening our belief, that the 1941 – 1944 Romanian economic growth wouldn't have taken place had the Germans rejected the economic collaboration on equal terms or, worse, disagreed with Antonescu's nationalist policy ( see some details on the collaboration with Nazi Germany in Appendix 1 ).

The second explanation for the positive economic performances experienced by Wartime Romania might be found, thus, in the nationalist economic and social policy carried out by the military regime in power. That policy was officially called "The Romanianization of Romania", and had as principal initiator Antonescu himself.

Ștefan points out that, during the same Cabinet Session of February 7th, Antonescu expressed his intention to reorganize the social and economic basis of the country by "cleansing" Romanian society, first by isolating, then by eliminating the minorities, "the Jews and Gypsy population in particular."<sup>221</sup> According to Ștefan, the *Conducător* was upon to introduce a new law laying down the broad principles of his new policy. Antonescu mentioned on that occasion that the law was necessary because he wasn't keen to implement the new policy "by brutal means, in a revolutionary way, but rather through consecutive phases, in an evolutionary manner."<sup>222</sup> Ștefan also emphasises that the source of inspiration for the new policy, Nazi Germany, was indirectly leaked by "the Ruler."<sup>223</sup> Thus, we can reinterpret Ștefan's suggestions in the sense, that the economic and social "romanianization" of Romania was to be done in the detriment of the national minorities, the Jews in particular.

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<sup>221</sup> Ștefan, Ion Antonescu: "De când eram în închisoare am discutat cu nemții tot programul de guvernământ", Magazin Istoric, Nr. 9, 1998, p. 13.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

Ciucă, too, reaches similar conclusions in his comments on the same minute of February 7th. For him, the minute explicitly reveals the fact that Antonescu intended the "romanianization" of Romanian economy as to be done through the massive penetration of the native Romanian elements mostly in the detriment of the Jewish ones.<sup>224</sup> Moreover, that Antonescu was serious as regards to his new policy toward the Jews, it comes out from the minute of the Council Session held three days earlier, on February the 4th, 1941. According to Romanian historian, Antonescu was ready to compensate all material losses and bankruptcies previously caused to the Jews by the guardist uprising. The *Conducător* added on the same occasion: "Thus, although we have to compensate the Jews now, their urban properties will be taken by us later, as we've done it with the rural ones."<sup>225</sup> Thus, we can suggest that, in Ciucă's point of view, Antonescu was serious about the "romanianization" of Romania, and that the first to pay the price of the new nationalist policy were the minorities, in front with Romanian Jewry.

But, what did actually Antonescu say on February 7th, 1941? Among other things, the *Conducător* said:

"This romanianization policy has two aspects. First, a successive and progressive penetration of the Romanian element in the economic life of the State should take place, but in such a way that the economic structure of the State wouldn't be dismantled, and an economic catastrophe would be avoided. That's the key problem. There's another aspect, that of cleansing the atmosphere of Jewish elements. If the times were normal, I would proceed to the elimination in mass from Romania of the Jewish individuals, that is to throw them over the borders. But, I can't do it today. I have to be merciful. I find no place where to send them, and I can't let them starving to death either. In consequence, I see this problem in a special way, one which should be adapted to the present international situation..."<sup>226</sup>

Obviously, in early 1941 the *Conducător* was intending "to romanianize" Romania, by getting rid first of the Jewish capital and, later, of the Jews themselves. A ministerial post for Romanianization was set up to specially deal with the problem. How Antonescu's new policy was in fact implemented it is still an open question, dividing not only Jewish and Romanian historians, but also one incompletely answered yet because of the large amount of official documents still waiting to be analyzed. Antonescu had to explain, during his trial in 1946, the reasons behind the romanianization

<sup>224</sup> Ciucă, "Am construit un sistem de dictatură în Tara Românească, trebuie să ne folosim de toate avantajele pe care acest sistem ni le oferă", *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 11, 1998, p. 62.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Stefan, Ion Antonescu: "De când eram în închisoare am discutat cu nemții tot programul de guvernământ", *Magazin Istoric*, Nr. 9, 1998, p. 13.

policy by the time he was in power. Antonescu asserted, during his interrogatory taken by the People's Tribunal on May 6th, 1946, that many of the romanianization laws had been previously introduced by the Legionnaire Regime but, nevertheless, " they were introduced during the entire governing period " of his regime, in order " to set the administrative, economic, and political bases of the Romanian People."<sup>227</sup> He also said on that occasion, that the laws in case were imposed on him by the streets and Iron Guard, and that he had to do great efforts to curb the Guard's " tougher requests " on the matter.<sup>228</sup> He persuaded in that sense the leader of the Romanian Jewish Community, Dr. Filderman, to collaborate. According to Antonescu, Filderman agreed on the taking over by the Romanians of the rural Jewish properties, on which Jewish workers were not allowed to work, in order " to preserve the productive ones, Jewish commercial and industrial enterprises, which were to employ all jobless Jews, thrown away by the Romanian clerks and institutions, and thus to make a living."<sup>229</sup> Thus, we can suggest, that the new policy envisaged by Antonescu and his new military regime, as it is well revealed by the minute of the Cabinet Session of February 7th, 1941, was in fact a continuation of the romanianization process previously initiated by Iron Guard in Legionnaire Romania. Consequently, we may see the policy envisaged and implemented by Antonescu Military Regime, between 1941 and 1944, as the second phase of the romanianization process, during which many Jews were certainly deprived of their urban properties and deported, after having been previously deprived of their rural assets in Legionnaire Romania.

Antonescu asserted within his Memorandum of May 15th, 1946, addressed to the People's Tribunal of Bucharest, that the romanianization and racial laws, although having been introduced in order " to calm down the streets ", were applied by him " with humaneness. "<sup>230</sup> He also mentioned that Mr. Vlădescu " was preparing " by that time a new draft, " erasing all racial features in the existing laws."<sup>231</sup> Now, if we take a look at Lăzărescu's list, mentioned before, we may find that Prof. Ovidiu Alexandru Vlădescu was the Subsecretary of State for Romanianization, Settlement and Inventory during the period " 7 November 1943 – 23 August 1944."<sup>232</sup> In other words, the laws were still valid by the fall of Antonescu, in August 1944. Thus, Romanian historians should focus their investigation, as many of them actually do, on the degree of " humaneness " with which those

<sup>227</sup> Antonescu, in Ciucă, 1996, Vol. I, p. 192.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Idem, p. 193.

<sup>230</sup> Antonescu, in Ciucă, 1996, Vol. II, p. 179.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Lăzărescu, O chestiune de drept: sare pe rana deschisă, Aldine, 6 decembrie, 1997, p. III.



laws were to be carried out in practice, since, in no circumstance, their existence could be denied, the more that Antonescu himself did recognize their validity for the whole period when he was in power.

The nationalist policy introduced by the new military regime had also a social dimension besides the economic one. Romanian historians suggest in their articles that the romanianization policy in the social field was to be implemented at the same time by isolating, on the one hand, the national minorities, especially the Jewish and Gypsy communities from the Romanian ones and, on the other hand, by improving the living conditions of the Romanian workers within the framework of an organized and disciplinary working climate.

For Ștefan, the same minute of the Cabinet Session of February 7th, 1941, reveals the fact, that one of the most urgent measures for the new government was "the isolation and elimination of minorities, especially of the Jews and Gypsy individuals, from the social and economic life of Romania."<sup>233</sup> Indeed, when looking at the minute text cited by Ștefan almost in its entirety, it remains little doubt about which were Antonescu's intentions in early 1941 toward Romanian minorities. Thus, the Jews were to be first settled down in their own ghettos in each town and allowed to do business on their own, with the obligation to pay the respective taxes to the state. Thereafter, they were to be gradually deprived of their economic activities and, ultimately, forced to leave the country. Antonescu's very words are more than explicit: "...Everything I'll take from the Jewish trade won't be confiscated by me, but it will be rewarded to some extent, so that in five, ten years this trade could fully fall in the Romanian hands..."<sup>234</sup> The Gypsy population was to be expelled from Bucharest and other cities onto the villages to be built for them alone on the banks of Danube and on the shores of its neighboring lakes, with houses, huts, sanitation, commerce and pubs. This population was to be forced to earn their own livelihood mostly by fishing and working the land of the big estates. Moreover, in Antonescu's vision the villages were to be enclosed, with guardians around. A similar fate was envisaged for the Hungarian domestic servants (ca. 40,000) who, in their turn, were to be driven out of Bucharest into the province, on the charge of having previously supported Iron Guard in its uprising against the *Conducător*. Thus, Ștefan's suggestions can be interpreted in the sense that also the romanianization of the social life in Romania was planned by

<sup>233</sup> Ștefan, Ion Antonescu: "De când eram în închisoare am discutat cu nemții tot programul de guvernământ", *Magazin Istoric*, Nr. 9, p. 13.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

Antonescu in early 1941, and that it was to be implemented by isolating Romania's national minorities from the rest of the population.

Needless to add that also Ciucă, in commenting the minute of February 7th, arrives at the same conclusions.<sup>235</sup> Interesting is Ciucă's mentioning of the Council Session of January 17th, 1941. According to Ciuca that session's minute reveals the fact, that Polish refugees in Romania since September 1939, in front with Josef Beck and Rydz-Smigly, were still there and were costing the Romanian State 997 mil. Lei each year. Ciucă points out that Antonescu resisted all pressure from the Gestapo to deliver them, by motivating that it was " a question of honor for the country."<sup>236</sup>

As for the Romanians themselves, it seems that they were, too, the target of Antonescu's envisaged resettlement policy, as it is revealed by the same minute of February 7th. According to Ciucă, " also Romanian peasants, who had previously moved in the slums of Bucharest and other major towns, were to be driven out of there."<sup>237</sup> Only those skilled were to remain in Bucharest. The minute, largely cited by Ștefan, reveals the fact that Antonescu was ready to sacrifice budgetary funds in order " to build villages " for them in the countryside, whilst the empty spaces left in Bucharest were to be reclaimed, and stuffed with " schools and other useful public buildings."<sup>238</sup> Thus, the suggestions expressed by both Ciucă and Ștefan can be interpreted in the sense that Antonescu was ready to get rid of the surplus of Romanians in towns, mostly peasant at origin, who were to be resettled in the countryside in new villages, or houses, to be built with the financial support of the state.

On the other hand, Antonescu's new military regime was envisaging a rise in the living conditions of the Romanian People, which was to be, however, achieved through the general principle of compulsory work. According to Ciucă, from the minute of the Council Session of February 3rd, 1941, comes out the fact that the *Conducător* was intending to augment the salary of Romanian public servants because, in Antonescu's own words, " as far as the clerks and magistrates are improperly paid, we cannot pretend to have a good Justice, and an adequate functioning of the State

<sup>235</sup> Ciucă, " Am construit un sistem de dictatură în Țara Românească, trebuie să ne folosim de toate avantajele ps care așest sistem ni le oferă ", *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 11, 1998, p. 62-63.

<sup>236</sup> *Idem*, p. 63.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>238</sup> Ștefan, Ion Antonescu: " De când eram în închisoare am discutat cu nemții tot programul de guvernământ ", *Magazin Istoric*, Nr. 9, 1998, p. 14.

institutions.”<sup>239</sup> Nevertheless, the minute of the Council Session of March 11th reveals the fact that Antonescu was critical about the way the Justice machinery had worked until then. As Ciucă points out, the *Conducător* was categorical on this aspect in his words to his ministers: ” The functioning of the Justice stands at the very basis of the State... and, the country has got into the present situation because the trust in Justice was totally lost... so, both I and You, we don’t have the right to interfere in the Justice matters.”<sup>240</sup> Thus, Ciucă’s suggestions can be reinterpreted in the sense, that Antonescu intended to improve the State administration functioning by granting, on the one hand, the major institutions more freedom of maneuver and, on the other hand, by increasing the salaries of Romanian public servants. For us, it seems that the improvement measures were actually introduced, as suggested below.

How the Justice actually worked under Antonescu, it is still an open question for Romanian historiography. Nonetheless, within his Memorandum of May 15th, 1946, Antonescu asserted that, during his administration, he did introduce the immovability of the coroner’s offices, granting them independence, and added: ” Nobody could prove that the Justice has ever been obstructed by me, whether in matters of trials, or appointments.”<sup>241</sup> As regards to the several exceptional laws, imposed on all Romanians irrespective of their ethnic belonging, Antonescu said that they had been required by the war situation, as in many other countries, but, ” in their vast majority, they weren’t applied in Romania.”<sup>242</sup> Thus, we can promote the assumption that also the better functioning of the Justice and other public institutions could stand as an additional explanation for the positive economic performances of Wartime Romania.

According to Ciucă, the same Council Session of March 11th, 1941, set the principles ” for the introduction of the compulsory work in Romania.”<sup>243</sup> In Antonescu’s vision, Romania’s economic recovery was to be achieved through the hard and coordinated work of all Romanians, irrespective of their age and gender: ” Everybody has the right to work freely, from own initiative, but, in refusing to do so, he, or she, will be forced to work of behalf of the State.”<sup>244</sup> The compulsory work

<sup>239</sup> Ciucă, ” Am construit un sistem de dictatură în Țara Românească, trebuie să ne folosim de toate avantajele pe care acest sistem ni le oferă ”, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 11, 1998, p. 62.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>241</sup> Antonescu, in Ciucă, 1996, Vol. II, p. 178-179.

<sup>242</sup> *Idem*, p. 178.

<sup>243</sup> Ciucă, ” Am construit un sistem de dictatură în Țara Românească, trebuie să ne folosim de toate avantajele pe care acest sistem ni le oferă ”, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 11, 1998, p. 62.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*

was to be introduced for all, even for those in jails or interned in camps, and was to be properly paid on age and skill criteria, because, in Antonescu's own words, "the building up of a nation of slaves is out of the question."<sup>245</sup> According to Ciucă, Antonescu saw the model for the Romanian worker, quite surprisingly, in the Soviet stahanovist labour policy: "As a model, the factory worker should be celebrated in public fairs, protected by law, and given all honors."<sup>246</sup> Nevertheless, the law makers were called by the *Conducător* to take into consideration, when drafting the new compulsory law, "the manifest stubbornness of the Romanian People at any attempts by authorities to introduce whatever discipline on it", and to try to regain its soul rather through methods "allowing it more freedom."<sup>247</sup> Thus, Ciucă's suggestions can be seen in the sense, that Antonescu was intending, in early 1941, the framing of all Romanians, from factory and land workers to public servants, into the existing labor market. The implementation of the economic and social policy envisaged by Antonescu's new military regime was to be carried out, on the one hand, by the introduction, for the first time in Romania, of the general compulsory law and, on the other hand, by increasing the salaries and other incentives for Romanian workers. How the new policy was carried out in practice between 1941 and 1944, it is still a research problem for Romanian historical writing. However, that policy seems to have been introduced to a certain degree. Otherwise, the presumed economic growth of the period would be very difficult, in not impossible, to explain.

Thus, major Romanian historians suggest in their articles that the socio-economic policy introduced by the new military regime, set up in late January 1941, was in fact a nationalist one. It was officially called by Antonescu himself as the "romanianization" of Romania. The new policy had the approval and support of Nazi Germany, it was directed against the minorities, and set the bases for the total framing of the Romanian People within a countrywide disciplinary climate of compulsory work (continued and "improved" by the Communist Regime, from 1946 until 1989). To which extent the nationalist policy was implemented in reality, as already mentioned several times, it is still incompletely answered by mainstream historians, a thoroughgoing analysis of the official documents of the period needing its time. As for us, we think that Antonescu's intended "romanianization" of Romania must have succeeded to a certain degree. It might serve, thus, as a major explanation for the presumed positive economic performances of Wartime Romania. Seen in

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<sup>245</sup> Ciucă, "Am construit un sistem de dictatură în Țara Românească, trebuie să ne folosim de toate avantajele pe care acest sistem ni le oferă", *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 11, 1998, p. 62.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

this light, Antonescu's assertions during his trial in 1946, suggesting that the romanianization and racial laws, though introduced, were not applied by him on a large scale, represent a real challenge for Romanian historical writing. The more, that Antonescu also asserted in 1946 about the "Gruia Law", stipulating the liquidation of the Jewish commercial assets and which term was to expire the next day following the Council Session of February 17th, 1941: "I did prolong its term, but the law was never applied by me."<sup>248</sup> It remains to be seen whether the complete analysis of the official documents of the period would be a confirmation, or rather a denial of Antonescu's assertions?!

How, then, is it seen by mainstream historians Antonescu Military Administration as a whole? As we already know, major historians see it as having been rather nationalist and dictatorial in its nature.

The same opinion is also shared by Dan Amedeo Lăzărescu who, in a large article, not only clarifies many aspects of the period, but the article in itself is a remarkable synthesis on the 1940 – 1944 Antonescu Regime in Romania.<sup>249</sup> At the same time, it can be seen as representative for the general orientation of mainstream Romanian historians on this matter.

According to Lăzărescu, the *Conducător* was assisted in ruling Romania, between January 1941 and August 1944, by a great number of ministers and subsecretaries of state in different departments, that is by "a ministerial team of technocrats, with the participation, in small number, of the former politicians belonging to the old parties."<sup>250</sup> Despite their skepticism about Antonescu's political wisdom, and their mistrust *vis-à-vis* the eventual victory of the war by Nazi Germany, "they carried out their tasks on behalf of the Romanian People with correctness, honesty, and patriotism, but without the smallest ideological deviation."<sup>251</sup> In order to argument his assumption, he presents the complete list of those 51 officials used by Antonescu, with a short biography for the each name on the list. By checking it, one can draw the conclusion that, indeed, the military and civilian officials did belong, in their vast majority, to the interwar Romanian cultural, scientific, and economic elite. In Lăzărescu's opinion, their work proved to be essential "to the discipline maintenance within the army, and for the preservation of the Romanian society as a capitalist

<sup>248</sup> Antonescu, in Ciucă, 1996, Vol. II, p. 179.

<sup>249</sup> Lăzărescu, O chestiune de drept: sare pe rana deschisă, Aldine, 6 decembrie, 1997, p. I-III.

<sup>250</sup> Idem, p. III.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

and healthy one.”<sup>252</sup> Lăzărescu’s assertion above seems to be a sound one, the more that it is sustained by the presumed economic growth of Wartime Romania, as suggested by us previously. Antonescu was the one who had introduced, during his military regime, the compulsory work and the corporatist system in Romania ( to which extent, it remains to be seen ), but he did it by preserving the basic capitalist principles. Despite his admiration for the Soviet stahanovist methods, Antonescu never intended to push Romania towards Socialism.

Romanian historian is categorical in his interpretation on the nature of the Wartime Antonescu Administration: ” The political regime led by Antonescu between 1941 and 1944 had no connection – but absolutely none – with the totalitarian and ideological political regimes of the Far Right – totalitarian as ideological, and ideological as totalitarian – that had led some European countries during the first half of the 20th Century, and upon which was set, lacking a more adequate one, the term *fascist*.”<sup>253</sup> For Lăzărescu, Antonescu Regime ” was undeniably dictatorial ”, but its historic equivalent could rather be found in the dictatorships of Attatürk, Piłsudski, Salazar, Franco and, more recently, Pinochet, some of them ” benefic ” ( sic! ) to the countries concerned.<sup>254</sup> It is the reason why, in Lăzărescu’s point of view, ” no connection, between the 1946 trials of Antonescu and his ministers in Bucharest, and those in Nürnberg, could support any comparison of a political, judicial, or, least of all, moral order.”<sup>255</sup> He emphasizes the fact that, had Iron Guard won the January 1941 battle against Antonescu and, thus, introduced its political ideology of revenge, Romania would have seen ” the elimination of her ruling elite, and the deportation of the whole Jewish population to Germany.”<sup>256</sup> Thus, Lăzărescu’s viewpoints can be reinterpreted in the sense, that the regime introduced, between 1941 and 1944, by Antonescu in Romania, although dictatorial and nationalist in its nature, was not at all a totalitarian fascist one. Its contemporary equivalent were rather the regimes in Spain and Portugal, than those in Germany and Italy. Lăzărescu understands by dictatorial rather an authoritarian regime of technocrats, 34 of the 51 officials used by Antonescu belonging to this category. For us, too, Antonescu Regime was dictatorial in its nature. Moreover, to our mind, it was about a military dictatorship. It comes out by carefully checking the same list: the 17 persons left were all generals, and they did actually occupy the main ministerial posts during the whole 1941 – 1944 period, as full ministers or subsecretaries of state.

<sup>252</sup> Lăzărescu, O chestiune de drept: sare pe rana deschisă, Aldine, 6 decembrie, 1997, p. III.

<sup>253</sup> Idem, p. I.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Idem, p. III.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

Now, what can we say, as final conclusions, about mainstream Romanian historians' approaches on the Antonescu Administration 1941 – 1944 in Romania?

First, they all agree that the new regime set up by Antonescu, following his victory over Iron Guard in January 1941, was a dictatorial one. Moreover, Romanian historians directly, or not, suggest that the new regime was, at least in its initial phase, a genuine military dictatorship. The administration of the country was left by Antonescu, during Romania's anti-Soviet war, to a greater extent on the shoulders of the technocrats, but, by having preserved the high ministerial offices for his generals Antonescu did actually ensure the control of the government by the military. There is some debates on this matter among Romanian historians, but the main approach is, that one can speak about Romania's wartime administration by Antonescu as: *Antonescu Military Regime 1941 – 1944*. Here are some other terms used in the past, but also nowadays, by both Romanian and foreign historiographies for Antonescu's 1941 – 1944 rule in Romania: Antonescu Military-Fascist Dictatorship; Antonescu Dictatorship; Antonescu Fascist Regime; Antonescu Military Dictatorship; Antonescu Regime; Antonescu Administration; Antonescu Rulership; Antonescu Authoritarian Regime. Whatever might be the label given to this period of Romanian history, a fact is certain: all historians, domestic and foreign alike, have suggested since the end of the Second World War that Antonescu Regime 1941 – 1944 was a dictatorial one. The more, that it was Antonescu himself who did actually characterize it as such.

Second, for mainstream Romanian historians, the new military regime set up by Antonescu in January 1941 was, doubtless, by far more " legal " than its predecessor, the Legionnaire Regime, although it had been introduced, in its turn, through a coup. The military regime received its legitimacy directly from the Romanian People through the two referendums held in early and late 1941, one before, the other during Romania's anti-Soviet war.

Third, according to Romanian historians, the new regime was both dictatorial and nationalist in its nature. Its envisaged socio-economic policy was the " romanianization " of Romania. The living standard was to be improved for the Romanians through better salaries and economic incentives, but within the framework of an universal compulsory work system based on law and order. The minorities ( Jews in particular ) were to be deprived of their economic power by the Romanian and German capital and isolated, socially, from the Romanians. How far the romanianization policy was applied in practice, it is still an open question on which Romanian historians are working on.

Finally, the general view among mainstream Romanian historians on Antonescu Regime 1941 – 1944 is that, despite its nationalist features, it was not a totalitarian fascist regime on the German, or Italian model. It was rather an authoritarian military administration of war, with technocrats carrying out, indeed, most of Romanian State's current affairs, but with generals supervising them politically. If one can speak about Legionnaire Romania as having been, indeed, a totalitarian state based on the National-Christian ideology, about Antonescu's Romania we can rather speak as a classical right wing dictatorship or, more precisely, as a military dictatorship.

As for us, we should remind ourselves that the romanianization and anti-Semitic laws were neither Iron Guard's monopoly, nor Antonescu's one. Many of them had been already introduced, in early 1938, by the pre-war Goga Government.<sup>257</sup> On the other hand, a similar nationalist and racial legislation had been previously introduced in many European states during the interwar period, so that the Romanians were neither the first, nor the only ones who did it. Although Antonescu was willing to "romanianize" the Romanian economy, this one was so largely dependent on the native Jewish capital and entrepreneurship that he had to compromise to some extent. It is hard to believe that the native Jewish capital was entirely swallowed by the Romanian-German one, the more that Antonescu's supreme goal was to preserve not only the capitalist economy in Romania, but a healthy one. Thus, the main problem for Romanian historians should be to find out to which extent the Romanian Jews were actually deprived of their economic power.

And finally, the "romanianization" of Romania was intended by Antonescu initially for the country's territory as it was by early 1941. Once regained from the Russians, in July 1941, the eastern provinces ( Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine ) were to be "romanianized" through the mass deportation of the local Jews ( seen guilty as having collaborated with the enemy during the summer of 1940 ) from there to Transnistria. To our mind, it is the only case when we can speak, without the fear of being completely wrong, about romanianization leaving aside the quotation marks. Nevertheless, thousands of Romanian Jews from other regions of the country were also deported by Antonescu during the war, on security reasons, but they had a better treatment, and many of them were allowed to come back, or to emigrate to Palestine, as we shall see in the next chapter.

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<sup>257</sup> See in this sense, Leon Volovici: *Ideologia naționalistă și "problema evreiască"* – Eseu despre formele antisemitismului intelectual în România anilor '30, 1995, p. 170-171.



## 4.2. Antonescu and the Romanian Jews

Antonescu joined the Axis in its anti-Soviet war on June the 22nd, 1941. The eastern Romanian provinces of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine were liberated by the Romanian-German armies by the end of July, the same year. Antonescu didn't stop at the Dniester ( Greater Romania's former eastern border ), but he went on with the military operations deeper into the Soviet territory, up to Stalingrad. The Soviet territory between the rivers Dniester and Bug, known as Transnistria ( see the maps in Appendix 5 and 6 ), was occupied by the Romanian-German armies during the initial phases of the war, that is between July and October 1941. From the conquest of Odessa ( the major town of the region ) by the Romanian Army, on October 16th, 1941, and until the beginning of 1944, the territory was under Romanian administration. If for the Romanian Army, and Romanians alike, the anti-Soviet war turned to be in the end a national disaster, for the local Jews it meant, nonetheless, a continuous nightmare. It was the same Transnistria where the majority of Bessarabian Jews, but also from other Romanian regions, had been deported by Antonescu during the war. Despite his open anti-Semitic feelings, Antonescu didn't envisage for them the " final solution " on the Nazi model. Moreover, he rejected all German demands to deliver the Romanian Jews, from both inside Romania and Transnistria, to the death camps in the occupied Poland. It didn't mean that the Romanian Jews found themselves in a much more privileged situation than their fellows elsewhere in Europe. Due to the backward transportation conditions, to the military operations in the region, to the miserable living conditions in the labor camps and, nonetheless, because of some occasional military reprisals and individual acts of revenge by Romanians, tens of thousands of the deported Romanian Jews lost their lives during the Second World War. Jewish historians have tackled, especially since early 1980s, this problem. They began to speak about the fate of the Romanian Jews during the last war, that is under Antonescu Regime 1940 – 1944, as: *The Holocaust of the Romanian Jews*. It is an open challenge for the Romanian historians who, after the fall of Communism in late 1989, have started their own investigations on this forgotten and tragic chapter of Romanian history. Their dispute makes the topic of the present chapter, which is structured around the following four major questions:

What did Antonescu's anti-Semitism consist of? What made him issue the deportation order of the Romanian Jews? Could Antonescu's treatment of Jews be seen as a local Holocaust? What do statistical figures and other estimations reveal on the pre-war and wartime Romanian Jewry?

The Romanian born Jewish historian Leon Volovici suggests in his 1995 published book, that the origins of the widespread interwar Romanian anti-Semitism should be found in the intellectual Nationalism manifested, within their works, by the great classics of the Romanian Culture ( i.e., Mihai Eminescu, Vasile Alecsandri, Vasile Conta, Nicolae Iorga ). One of the major topics of their nationalist discourse was the so called " Jewish danger." The Jews were seen, because of their increasing number, growing economic power and, nonetheless, social isolationism, as the principal obstacle in the way for Romania's development as a powerful nation-state. After the First World War the nationalist discourse was carried on and developed by major Romanian intellectuals, particularly in the 1930s by the *Young Generation* ( i.e., Mircea Eliade, Constantin Noica ). In Volovici's point of view, the intellectual nationalism had a decisive educational impact on the Romanian cultural life, " from which also the political leaders were recruited."<sup>258</sup> For Volovici, someone who might read Antonescu's speeches, justifying the fight against the " Jewish element " and the chauvinistic policy, " would acknowledge that political and military leaders were entirely the outcomes of the ` teachers ' and ` apostles ' of the Romanian Nationalism."<sup>259</sup> For the Jewish historian, the intellectual anti-Semitism " did actually nurture with ideological arguments the discrimination and antagonism towards the Jews carried out by politicians."<sup>260</sup> Thus, we can interpret Volovici's suggestions above in the sense, that Antonescu's anti-Semitism was generated by the Romanian cultural context of the time, one in which major Romanian intellectuals were preaching the nationalist values. As for us, we have to agree with Volovici: official documents of the period, some of them presented earlier within this thesis, confirm the fact that Antonescu was both an anti-Semite and a nationalist. Moreover, in early 1941, the path envisaged for the Romanian People by the *Conducător* and his military regime was the integral Nationalism ( see Footnote No. 198 ).

Mainstream Romanian historians don't deny, in their studies, Antonescu's anti-Semitism. For historian Alex Mihai Stoenescu, Antonescu was, doubtless, an anti-Semite mainly because of his " xenophobic stand and unsteady temperament."<sup>261</sup> Stoenescu sees Antonescu's anti-Semitism as having consisted of: a synthesis-conception gathered through the long-time practiced anti-Semitism by the political parties; an insistently projected image by some popular newspapers; the public

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<sup>258</sup> Volovici, 1995, p. 200.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Stoenescu, Antonescu și evreii, *Aldine*, Nr. 221, 1 iulie, 2000, p. IV.

attitude manifested by some outstanding personalities whom Antonescu was admiring; and, especially, of " a direct association of the Jews with Communism after 1921."<sup>262</sup> However, in Stoenescu's opinion, the anti-Semitic stand by Antonescu did manifest itself within the coordinates of a " conceptual primitivism."<sup>263</sup> According to Stoenescu, Antonescu, too, was contaminated by the widespread prejudices and stereotypes among Romanians as regards to the " Jewish danger." He saw the Jews as a foreign population who, in its vast majority, had " illegally " settled down in Romania during the second half of the 19th Century.<sup>264</sup> Also the strong Jewish monopoly on the Romanian trade, banking, and countryside commercial activities was seen by Antonescu as having taken place " illegally ", through the obvious close connection between the local and the international Jewish capital.<sup>265</sup> Moreover, Antonescu saw the local Jews as the initiators of the " horrible blackmail " set on Romania by the Great Powers: " Greater Romania only in return for citizenship for the local Jews!"<sup>266</sup> According to Stoenescu, Antonescu was convinced that the appearance of the anti-Semitic movements in Interwar Romania originated in the same " illegal situations and injustices" , and that the violences carried out by the democratic parties against the movements, at the International Masonry's order, did break the Romanian society in two, the native young men, both Christian and nationalist, " having been supplanted " in this way.<sup>267</sup> For Antonescu, the subsequent lack of trust crisis within the society had ultimately led, through the manifest party struggle, to the substantial weakening of the Romanian State. In Antonescu's eyes the Jews were, consequently, guilty for the " national disaster ", Stoenescu concludes.<sup>268</sup> Thus, we can reinterpret Stoenescu's suggestions above in the sense, that Antonescu's anti-Semitism didn't substantially differ from the general European anti-Semitic attitudes, based on the century-long

<sup>262</sup> Stoenescu, Antonescu și evreii, Aldine, Nr. 221, 1 iulie, 2000, p. IV.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid; Because of the discrimination by local authorities, tens of thousands of Jews from the neighboring countries, in particular from the European part of Tzarist Russia, did migrate to the Old Kingdom of Romania ( Wallachia and Moldova ) during the second half of the 19th Century. European Great Powers urged the independent Romania, at the Congress of Berlin in 1878, to recognize the Jewish minority within her borders and to grant civil rights to the Jews. However, large, but not complete, civil and political rights for Jews were granted only with the introduction of Greater Romania's new Constitution , in 1923. By 1900 A.D., Romanian Jewry had augmented to ca. 5% of Romania's total population. Despite the emigration to America of thousands of Romanian Jews before WWI, their share from the total population was, by the outbreak of the Second World War, almost unchanged, that is ca. 4-5 %. The explanation lies in the fact that, on the one hand, Transylvanian and Bessarabian Jews were incorporated within Greater Romania in 1918, and, on the other hand, that thousands of Jews did enter Romania during the 1930s whether by fleeing the surrounding totalitarian regimes, or by aiming to take advantage of the better Romanian legislation with respect to their rights. See, for more details on the Romanian Jews, Satu Matikainen's License Thesis ( 1998 ) preserved by the Department of History within the University of Jyväskylä.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

cultural and economic prejudices of the Christian Europeans *vis-à-vis* the Jews ( i.e., seen as: the murderers of Jesus; the representatives of an anti-Christian religion; an isolationist and enclosed community; stingy money lenders ), and to which was added, in the first decades of the 20th Century, the so called *Worldwide Zionist-Masonic Plot*.

Thus, both Jewish and Romanian historians see Antonescu as having been an anti-Semite. Basically, there is no difference between their approaches on this matter. Antonescu's anti-Semitism is seen by them as having originated in the widespread cultural and economic prejudices of the Christians towards the Jews. However, some nuances can be observed in their approaches. If for Volovici it was the intellectual Nationalism of the most outstanding representatives of the Romanian Culture which had nurtured Antonescu's anti-Semitism, for Stoenescu, though not denying the influence of the academic Nationalism on Antonescu, it was rather the conceptual primitivism towards the Jews, widespread among ordinary Romanians, which did it. Anyway, there is a major difference, as we shall see further in this chapter, between the Jewish and the Romanian interpretation on Antonescu's Nationalism and anti-Semitism: the former adds them also a racist feature, whilst the later resumes them to the chauvinistic character.

As for as, we think that both approaches are right. Actually, they are completing one each other. Antonescu's anti-Semitism did originate in both the academic Romanian Nationalism and in the chauvinistic stand of the Romanian peasant.

What made Antonescu deport the Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovine to Transnistria?

Antonescu told to the People's Tribunal in 1946 that he did it for political and military security reasons, and for the own security of the Jewish population. The big cities of Bessarabia as Bălți, Soroca, and Chişinău were both the major Jewish ghettos and the strongholds of Iron Guard and Nazis. Violences against the Jews by Iron Guard started anew soon after the occupation of the province by the Romanian-German armies, in July 1941. Romanian peasants in the region refused to shelter the homeless Jews, seen by them as Soviet Union's collaborators. Antonescu told the People's Tribunal that, in order to avoid a Romanian St. Bartholemew envisaged by Iron Guard in agreement with the Nazis and to bring the Jews out from the area through which the Germans troops were moving to the front, he had to evacuate the Bessarabian Jews in the north of Transnistria,

measure strongly demanded by the Romanian military commanders, too. On the same occasion, Antonescu emphasized the fact that the back front population has always been evacuated by all armies, and that he did it with the Romanians, too ( see Appendix 2 ). Thus, we can suggest that behind Antonescu's decision to deport the Bessarabian Jews were, according to his own confession, not only the Romanian political and military security reasons, but also the security of the Jews themselves. He wanted, on the one hand, to spare the country from sabotage acts and to clear the way for the ongoing military operations and, on the other hand, to protect the local Jewish population from the revenge acts by the Romanians and the Nazis. Antonescu might have been well intentioned, and he really wanted to spare the lives of the local Jews. At the same time, his intimate goal might have been, by taking advantage of the war situation, nothing but the rapid romanianization of Romania's eastern provinces by throwing out the Jews of there. As in many other cases in history the truth might stand halfway.

Mainstream Romanian historians see the wartime deportation of Jews by Antonescu both as a security measure, and as a punishment act. Stoenescu suggests, that Romanian Army's disastrous withdrawal from Bessarabia and Bukovine in the summer of 1940, event to which local communist Jews were proved of having participated on the Soviet side, did strengthen Antonescu's anti-Semitic feelings. According to Stoenescu, Antonescu kept all the time the Jews as guilty for all the troubles in Romania. Some of them, mostly those in the Old Kingdom, were treated by Antonescu more gentle, that is, they were forced to do " financial contributions and compulsory work." <sup>269</sup> The others, especially those in Bessarabia seen by the *Conducător* as " the declared enemies " of the Romanian State, were treated by him, on the contrary, with severity, by " deportation and reprisals." <sup>270</sup> Stoenescu emphasizes the fact that, for Antonescu, the deportation of the communist Jews, or of those too poor to have any opinion, from Romania's eastern provinces to Transnistria was not only " a healthy and legitime act ", but it represented " an unique historical occasion." <sup>271</sup> Thus, Stoenescu sees Antonescu's deportation decision as having been taken, on the one hand, as a security measure against the communist Bessarabian Jews seen as the enemies of the Romanian State and, on the other hand, as a punishment act for the same Jews seen guilty for the loss of the province to the Soviets one year earlier. Antonescu was selective in his anti-Semitic policy. He deported the majority of the Bessarabian Jews, whilst the Jews in the Old Kingdom were spared.

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<sup>269</sup> Stoenescu, Antonescu și evreii, *Aldine*, Nr. 221, 1 iulie, 2000, p. IV.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*

Aurel Sergiu Marinescu, a Romanian historian living in New York, has rather similar views as regards to the reasons behind Antonescu's deportation decision of Jews during the Second World War. He suggests that Antonescu issued the order for the deportation of several hundreds of communist Jews from the Old Kingdom to Transnistria " as a security measure, in order to avoid sabotage actions. "272 On the other hand, Antonescu issued the deportation order to Transnistria " only " for the Jews from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine because of their " manifest hostility and anti-Romanian feelings " proved during the withdrawal of the Romanian Army and authorities from the provinces, following the Soviet ultimatum of 1940.<sup>273</sup> Marinescu emphasizes the fact that, invoking security reasons, " the Americans, too, did intern their Japanese population during the war, as Israel did it later, by throwing the Arabs over the border into Jordan and Lebanon."<sup>274</sup> Thus, we can interpret Marinescu's suggestions above in the sense, that the security reasons were those which had ultimately determined Antonescu to deport an important part of the Jewish population, and less his spirit of revenge towards the Jews.

But, what actually did the Jews that made Antonescu deport them? Historian Grigore Traian Pop brings some informations on this matter. Pop suggests that, during the period of time between the withdrawal of Romanian Army and the moving in of Stalin's Red Army in Bessarabia, many groups of Jews " had devastated Romanian churches and institutions, thrusting the red flag on them, and had committed criminal attempts and assassinations, individually, or in groups."<sup>275</sup> Pop emphasizes that all these hostile and criminal actions by Jews individuals are certified by the preserved documents of the time, some of them published within Alex Mihai Stoenescu's book *Armata, mareșalul și evreii* ( Bucuresti, Ed. RAO, 1998 ). Pop points out that, according to Stoenescu, the communist Jews, many in number, did constitute themselves in a veritable Soviet 5th Column, many of them leaving even Bucharest for the conflict zone, having justified in this way their marking by the Romanians as " belligerent part " and " enemy."<sup>276</sup> For Pop, not all Jews were anti-Romanian, neither the advocates of the internationalist-communist ideology. Moreover, he suggests that many of the communist Jews were not essentially hostile to the Romanians, but " they must have thought the Soviets as philo-Semites, an error of judgement for which they were to pay a high

<sup>272</sup> Marinescu, Mareșalul Antonescu – Controverse și adevăruri – De ce atâta nedreptate?, Aldine, Nr. 221, 1 iulie, 2000, p. II.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Pop, Holocaust al evreilor în România?, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 11, 1999, p. 12.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

price later.”<sup>277</sup> For Pop, when one speak about the reasons behind Antonescu’s deportation decision of Jews during the war, we should have in mind an important aspect, usually neglected by the Jewish historians in their studies on the matter: ” The Romanian citizens who had betrayed, manifested hostility towards the Romanian Army in withdrawal from Bessarabia, or committed crimes, organized in ‘ militias ’, were not accused of having been Jews, but just of having been traitors and criminals.”<sup>278</sup> We can promote own interpretation on Pop’s suggestions above. Antonescu must have known the informative reports about the involvement of the Bessarabian ethnic Jewish population on the Soviet side, in the summer of 1940. That made him, after the reoccupation of the region, in July 1941, by the Romanian Army, deport the Bessarabian Jewry rather on security than ethnic reasons.

Jewish historians have an opposite stand on this matter. For them, the reason behind Antonescu’s deportation decision of the Bessarabian and Bukovinian Jews was not at all his care for the security of the Romanian State, but his will to exterminate them. Romanian Jewish historians, within a collective work, on which we shall return soon, are categorical in this sense: ” The Jewish community of the two provinces made the object of a punitive treatment of extermination at Antonescu’s direct order, starting from June – July 1941 on.”<sup>279</sup> The lines above are so categorical that they need no further comments. However, because we are dealing here with the reasons which made Antonescu deport the Jews, and not with what and why actually happened to them during the war, we think that Romanian historians should keep on checking the local and central official documents of the period in order to find out whether behind Antonescu’s decision was indeed his intention to physically exterminate the Jews, or rather his will to secure Romania’s eastern border by throwing the undesirable Jews out of there into the neighboring Transnistria. The more that deportations have always and everywhere been carried out, on different reasons, by both authoritarian and democratic states, and leaders alike.

We may conclude by suggesting that if for the Romanian historians the security of the Romanian State was the reason behind Antonescu’s decision to deport the Bessarabian Jews, for their Jewish colleagues it was instead Antonescu’s will to exterminate the Jews which made him deport them.

<sup>277</sup> Pop, Holocaust al evreilor în România?, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 11, 1999, p. 13.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Evreii din România între anii 1940 – 1944. Problema evreiască în stenogramele Consiliului de Miniștri, Vol. II, București, Ed. Hasefer, 1996, p. X. In Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 11, 1999, p. 14.

Could we speak about a *Holocaust of the Romanian Jews* during the Second World War?

Jewish political and cultural personalities, including all Jewish historians in both Romania and abroad, are unanimous on this matter: Yes, we can! The Romanian side is divided on the issue. Broadly speaking, Romanian Far Right denies the wartime Holocaust of the Romanian Jews, whilst the Extreme Left recognize it as having happened. The majority politicians and intellectuals belonging to the Center of the Romanian political spectrum have rather an ambiguous stand. If one can easily understand the opposite stands of the Romanian political extremes because of the ideological motivation behind them, the ambiguity of the political Center lies in the fact that the proper study of this aspect of national history by Romanian historians is still at its beginnings. Mainstream Romanian historians agree with their Jewish colleagues that thousands of Romanian Jews died, from different reasons, during their wartime deportation by Antonescu, but they suggest that, at the present stage of research, one cannot speak about a Holocaust of the Jews in Romania. As we shall see below, there is a strong dispute between Romanian and Jewish historians over this tragical aspect of Romanian history.

Jewish historians' viewpoints on the matter are best revealed within the collective work already mentioned in the previous page:

" In this conflict [ a.n., the war ], a special chapter is held by the Jewish population of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine, reunited with the Homeland in 1941. As known, according to the 1930 Census, from the 756,930 Jews living in Romania more than a quarter ( 27.3% ) were residing in Bessarbia, and 12.4% in Bukovine. The Jewish community of the two provinces made the object, from June – July 1941 on, of a punitive treatment of extermination. The order was directly issued by Ion Antonescu. As some of the documents in the present volume demonstrate, Ion Antonescu didn't decide the liquidation of some individual Jews but of the entire local community. The horrors and atrocities were so bestial that, by the time when the Nazis had not yet adopted the ' final solution ', it aroused even the disapproval of some German officers. The number of Jewish victims from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine ranges between 105,000 ( figure promoted in a 1957 document by Sabin Mănuilă and W. Filderman ) and 120,000. Some analysts propose 150,000. No matter which of these figures will be validated later, it remains the cruel and indisputable fact that at Ion Antonescu's order were killed in Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine over 100,000 Jews ( by evacuations, internments in ghettos, or by the deportation to the bigger ghetto which was Transnistria ). It is true that the Jews in the Old Kingdom and Southern Transylvania, counting 307,376 souls, were spared from the ' final solution ', having been used by both Antonescu [ a.n., Romanian Foreign Minister, Mihai Antonescu ] as a political capital during the talks with the United Nations. In no way their preservation by Ion Antonescu could absolve him for the killing of the Bessarabian and Bukovinian Jews, to whom should be added the 15,000 Jewish victims in the Old Kingdom ( the pogrom of June 29th, 1941, at Jassy, the massacre of



Dorohoi [ a.n., in Southern Bukovine ], and the massacre carried out during the Legionnaire Rebellion etc. ). All these are indisputable realities (...), systematically neglected by the zealous supporters of Marshal Antonescu in present days (...)."<sup>280</sup>

The stand on this problem by Jewish personalities born in Romania goes hand in hand with that expressed by Jewish historians. It was made public by the former chairman ( 1940 – 1947, after Dr. W. Filderman's retirement ) of the Romanian Jewish Communities and present Chief Rabin of Geneva, Dr. Alexandru Șafran, within his 1997 interview granted to *Magazin Istoric*:

" ... I have to recognize that, thanks to the providence and to Dr. Filderman's and my relations with the Romanian ruling personalities, an important share of the Jewish population was saved, and what constitutes the special, and even the exceptional aspect on the Holocaust in Romania is that the local Jews were not deported to the extermination camps in Poland. This fact doesn't diminish at all Romania's responsibility represented by the person who used to called himself the Ruler of the State, a huge responsibility if we're thinking the deportations and massacres which were personally and directly ordered by the State Ruler, and executed by his collaborators. In many countries involved in the Holocaust during the last war the chiefs of states have officially, and solemnly, beg forgiveness for what happened. This forgiveness can do nothing to alleviate the pain of that tragedy but, from a moral point of view, it is the duty of every human being, of every rational individual to recognize the facts. Romania, through her official representatives, hasn't done it yet. I use this occasion in addressing my native country the request that this moral repair should take place."<sup>281</sup>

Thus, one can observe a clear stand by both Jewish cultural and political personalities and historians on the fate of the Romanian Jews during the war. In their eyes Antonescu was rather the exterminator than the saviour of the local Jews. How Romanian historians respond to their Jewish colleagues on the different aspects above, we shall see, point to point, next. In which concerns Antonescu's own interpretation on the facts, see Appendix 2.

First, Romanian historians agree that over 100,000 Romanian Jews died during the war. Historian Dinu C. Giurescu presents in his two articles, among other things, also the official statistical figures on the Jewish population in Romania before and during the Second World War, and the available estimations on the number of dead persons.<sup>282</sup> According to the 1930 Census, Romania had on her soil 728,115 individuals of Jewish origin. Giurescu suggests that, after the territorial losses in the

<sup>280</sup> Evreii din Romania între anii 1940 – 1944. Problema evreiască în stenogramele Consiliului de Miniștri , Vol. II, București, Ed. Hasefer, 1996, p. X; Here, citation integrally taken from Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 11, 1999, p. 14.

<sup>281</sup> Șafran, " Sunt un copil al României și ființa mea este adânc legată de țara românească ", Magazin Istoric, Nr. 6, 1997, p. 47.

<sup>282</sup> Giurescu, Evreii din România ( 1939 – 1944 ), Magazin Istoric, Nr. 10, 1997, p. 47-51; Nr. 11, 1997, p. 72-76.

summer of 1940, they were distributed: 312,115 in Romania; 275,419 in Soviet Union ( Bessarabia, Northern Bukovine, Herța County ); 138,917 in Hungary ( Northern Transylvania ); 807 in Bulgaria ( Cadrilater ); thus, ” 728,115 Jews ” in total.<sup>283</sup> The wartime number of the dead among Romanian Jews is estimated, according to the same historian, as follows: 15,000 for Old Kingdom, Southern Transylvania and Southern Bukovine; 108,710 for Bessarabia, Northern Bukovine and Herța County; 90,295 for Northern Transylvania; that is, a total of 214,005 dead persons. Giurescu suggests that the Romanian and Romanian-German authorities were responsible for the death of 123,710 Jews, whilst the Hungarian authorities, at Eichman’s order, for a number of 90,925 dead Jews. It is estimated the number of the surviving Jews for Romania at the end of the war, in 1945, as being 355,972 individuals. The 1942 Census gives the figure of 292,149 persons. For Giurescu, the difference upwards is explained by the returning, after the war, of the survivors ” from Transnistria, Germany and other places.”<sup>284</sup> By adding the number of the dead ( 214,005 ) to that of the survivors ( 355,972 ), one get the total of 569,977 individuals. By subtracting this figure from that of the 1930 Census ( 728,115 ), one obtain the number of 158,138 missing Jews. It is estimated that over 100,000 of them did actually flee with the Soviet troops, in withdrawal in June – July 1941 ( 10,000 Jews having been possibly deported to Siberia by the Soviets). For Giurescu, ” it remains a figure of 58,138 missing Jewish individuals about whom we still know nothing yet.”<sup>285</sup> Giurescu urges Romanian historians to seriously tackle this problem, by doing researches not only in the Romanian archives, but also in the Russian, Ukrainian, German, Hungarian and Israeli ones, in order to know for sure ” how many Jews, having resided in Bessarabia, Northern Bukovine, and Northern Transylvania died, and how many did survive the war.”<sup>286</sup> Thus, Giurescu promotes an overall figure of 108, 711 Jewish victims for the Romanian eastern provinces ( 49,419 missing Jews before the Census of September 1st, 1941, and 59,292 dead Jews by September 1st, 1943, in the labor camps of Transnistria ), and for Romania ( Northern Transylvania excluded ) the total figure of 123,711 dead Jewish individuals.

Other Romanian historians promote roughly similar figures. For Stoenescu, ” 400,000 Romanian Jews ” were preserved by Antonescu, but ” ca. 70-80,000 Jews ” died in Bessarabia and Transnistria during the war.<sup>287</sup> As for Marinescu, ” Marshal Antonescu was the co-author of the preservation of

<sup>283</sup> Giurescu, *Evreii din România ( 1939 – 1944 )*, Magazin Istoric, Nr. 10, 1997, p. 48.

<sup>284</sup> Giurescu, *Evreii din România ( 1939 – 1944 )*, Magazin Istoric, Nr. 11, 1997, p. 75.

<sup>285</sup> *Idem*, p. 76.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>287</sup> Stoenescu, *Antonescu și evreii*, Aldine, Nr. 221, 1 iulie, 2000, p.IV.

Romanian Jewish Community, but, at the same time, ca. 70-80,000 Jews lost their lives during his rule...<sup>288</sup> In his turn, historian Grigore Traian Pop points out the fact, that " the Jewish analysts " have suggested a figure, for Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine, of " 120,000 Jews killed at order " by the Romanian Army and Gendarmerie, between 1941 and 1944.<sup>289</sup> Thus, mainstream Romanian historians don't deny the number of over 100,000 wartime Jewish victims as suggested by their Jewish colleagues.

Second, in their vast majority, Romanian historians, although admitting that atrocities have been committed against the Jews during the war, disagree with their Jewish colleagues in seeing the death of thousands of Romanian Jews as a local Holocaust because, as far as the official documents of the period have been analyzed by them, they don't suggest such a term could be used ( at least for the time being ).

For Stoenescu, Antonescu should remain a war criminal mostly because of his irresponsible war across the Dniester, killing tens of thousands of Romanians, but also " because of the death, under the covering of his order, of many Jews in Bessarabia and Transnistria, because of the indiscriminatory execution, under the covering of his order, of some hostages of the reprisals at Odessa, and because of the massacre in Jassy , which he couldn't stop."<sup>290</sup> Nevertheless, in Stoenescu's point of view, " the official stand of the Romanian State and Army towards the Jews was not the component of a terror campaign organized on racial principles and planned before the war, and carried out as such according to a subsequently conceived, or imagined project as in the case of Nazi Germany."<sup>291</sup> For him, the strong reaction against the Jews did manifest itself within the framework of demagogic anti-Semitism, and was related to the association of Jews with Communism, " ideology which was directly menacing, by its doctrine and practice, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Romanian State."<sup>292</sup> Nonetheless, because the identification of Jews with Communism caused the death of ca. 70-80,000 ethnic Jews during the war, and despite the fact that the majority Romanian Jews did survive, " Antonescu cannot be removed from this equation."<sup>293</sup> Thus, for Stoenescu, the killings did happen occasionally, but not systematically.

<sup>288</sup> Marinescu, Mareşalul Ion Antonescu – Controverse şi adevăruri – De ce atâtă nedreptete?, Aldine, Nr. 221, 1 iulie, 2000, p. III.

<sup>289</sup> Pop, Holocaust al evreilor în România?, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 11, 1999, p. 14.

<sup>290</sup> Stoenescu, Antonescu şi evreii, Aldine, Nr. 221, 1 iulie, 2000, p. IV.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

We may find, by bringing together Marinescu's suggestions, that he's more categorical on this aspect. For him, the death of thousands of Romanian Jews during the last war " was not the outcome of an organized campaign of terror, based on racial principles and planned as in the Hungarian case, neither the preservation of those 400,000 Jews can be attributed to an opportunistic stand following the changes on the Eastern Front, but it was the result of the conceptual differentiations which were manifest between Antonescu's Romania and Nazi Germany."<sup>294</sup> For Marinescu, the *Conducător* cannot be seen as guilty for the death of ca. 100 Jews during the Legionnaire Rebellion, and he was not involved in the massacres at Jassy, which were mainly German reprisals despite the involvement of some Romanian authorities. Nevertheless, in the autumn of 1941, Antonescu " commanded military retaliations at Odessa, following the killing of 120 Romanian officers, in head with Gen. Glugojeanu, in the blow up of the Romanian Headquarters there perpetrated by the communist partisans of Jewish origin."<sup>295</sup> Thus, Marinescu's views above can be reinterpreted in the sense, that one cannot speak about " the Holocaust of the Romanian Jews " since, on the one hand, the crimes against them by Romanians were only occasionally carried out and, on the other hand, the direct reprisals by Antonescu were carried out in war conditions, that is, by seeing the local Jews as a belligerent side, and not an ethnic minority.

As for Romanian historian Grigore Traian Pop, the fact that the distinction between those 120,000 Bessarabian Jews, who died because of their deportation to Transnistria in war conditions, and those 135,000 Transylvanian Jews, who were sent by the Hungarian authorities to be burnt alive at Auschwitz, haven't been done yet either by The Museum of the Holocaust in Washington or by the influential international massmedia, " it is sufficient to promote the idea that a local Holocaust of Jews would have taken place in Romania."<sup>296</sup> In Pop's point of view, " whether it is proved that, at Antonescu's order, Romanian Army and Gendarmerie would have had on their conscience the death of those Jews, then we can speak about a local Holocaust. "<sup>297</sup> Pop's final conclusions are representative for the present Romanian historical writing on this matter:

" The figures are still relative. Moreover, it was a time of war, when the customs were reversed, and the applied laws and rules extremely restrictive. As regards to the deported persons, they had illegally entered Romanian soil in their vast

<sup>294</sup> Marinescu, Maresalul Ion Antonescu – Controverse și adevăruri – De ce atâta nedreptate?, Aldine, Nr. 221, 1 iulie 2000, p. III.

<sup>295</sup> Idem, p. II.

<sup>296</sup> Pop, Holocaust al evreilor în România? Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 11, 1999, p. 14.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

majority. It doesn't mean that the tragedy " of the trains of death" [ a.n., many Jews died during their transportation to, or from the Transnistrian labour camps ], the events of 25 – 30 June 1941 in Jassy, and the cases of Odessa, Dalnic and Chişinău should be forgotten. But, in our point of view, we cannot speak about the Holocaust of the Jews in Romania at the present stage of research."<sup>298</sup>

Thus, mainstream Romanian historians see Antonescu rather as the saviour than the exterminator of the local Jews. Many of them were killed during the war occasionally, but not systematically, and though he directly ordered military reprisals on Jews, Antonescu did it because he saw in them the belligerent side, and not the ethnic group. For Romanian historians, despite the fact that the majority of wartime crimes against the Jews cannot be attributed to Antonescu personally, he is, nevertheless, responsible, in his quality as Ruler of the Romanian State, for the thousands of dead among Romanian Jewish population during the war. According to the same historians, for the time being one can speak about occasional massacres, but in no way about a wartime Holocaust of the Romanian Jews. Thus, their interpretation of the events is in total opposition to that of their Jewish colleagues. The more interesting, that both sides sustain own viewpoint whether by making reference to several documents of the time, or by acknowledging their inexistence.

And finally, as regards to the allegations expressed by many Jewish personalities that Romania hasn't asked yet forgiveness for the crimes committed against her Jews during the war, it is not entirely true. According to Pop, during a visit to the Holocaust Museum in Washington in early 1990s, Romanian President of the time ( since the beginning of 2001, again in office ), Ion Iliescu, " has deplored the Holocaust which the Romanians would have been guilty for."<sup>299</sup> For Pop, this is a way, at least an unfortunate one, " to take into the political attitude the controversial, and even abusive, hypotheses of history."<sup>300</sup> As for the former Romanian President, Emil Constantinescu, he made, on the 4th of May 1997, the following statement:

" The wartime Romanian authorities resisted the repeated demands of the Nazis for a total extermination of the Jewish population, organized the emigration to Palestine for many Jewish groups, and openly protected some personalities belonging to the Romanian Jewish community. At the same time, the same authorities carried out deportations and built up labor camps, and they did introduce a racial legislation, too. Today, we feel ourselves responsible for this dramatic inconsistency. The sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of Jews all over Romania is a hard burdern for our souls, for all Romanian souls. The death of the innocents can't be forgiven, repaired, or forgotten. We have the duty towards the

<sup>298</sup> Pop, Holocaust al evreilor in România?, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 11, 1999, p. 14.

<sup>299</sup> Idem, p.12.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

victims of the Holocaust to offer them our memory all the time, and the certainty that nothing, and nobody, will be forgotten, whether a fact, or a name. It is my duty as President of Romania, of all Romanian citizens, to be the guarantor of this memory, whatever painful it might be; it is my duty to keep alive the memory of the Romanian Jews who lost their lives in the genocide."<sup>301</sup>

Thus, both post-communist Romanian presidents did recognize the local Holocaust, Iliescu in early 1990s, Constantinescu later in the decade, by expressing their deep regret for what happened to the Romanian Jews during the Second World War, and by assuring that the memory of the victims will be kept alive in Romania. We have to say that Constantinescu came up with his statement after Safran's request in this sense, which makes us suggest that behind it was the pressure came from the Jewish circles in Romania and abroad. However, despite all international pressure, neither Iliescu, nor Constantinescu, went so far to officially beg forgiveness from the Jews on behalf of the Romanian State and People. This is the very ambiguous stand, mentioned before, of the Romanian political class: a halfway between Jewish historians' assertions and those expressed by their Romanian colleagues, between the general view among Jews, that it was a Holocaust in Romania, and that among Romanians, that they were just occasional killings, military reprisals, and the deportation in war conditions. Maybe both presidents had to compromise, by having in mind, on the one hand, the present interests of Romania and Romanian People and, on the other hand, the fact that Romanian historical research hasn't drawn yet its final conclusions on the fate of the local Jews during the last war.

As for us, due to our professional orientation, we have to agree with Pop, by suggesting that Romanian politicians should restrain themselves of making any official statement, involving thus both Romanian State and People, on the historic facts and events of the past still under the question mark. We think that, if the killing in mass of the local Jews are proved, by Romanian historians, to have been carried out, on ethnic grounds, by the Romanian military authorities at Antonescu's direct order, then we can speak about a genocide, but not about a Holocaust, since the Jews were neither burnt locally, nor sent to be burnt to the death camps in Germany. On the other hand, the majority Jewish victims, seen as belligerent, lost their lives during their deportation and internment in war conditions, as many other political and war prisoners did everywhere in Europe, and it was neither Romania, nor Antonescu, who had started the Second World War. Until the contrary is proved by also Romanian historians, one can speak here about an involuntary genocide.

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<sup>301</sup> Magazin Istoric, Nr. 6, 1997, p. 42.

Pop's critical stand as regards to the official declarations by Romanian politicians, but also the official statements in last years by some European leaders regarding the fate of the Jews during the war in their countries, make us promote some thoughts here. First, it is not only incorrect, but also irresponsible, for all politicians to make official statements on uncertain historical facts and events in their country's past, before their thoroughgoing analysis by national historians is done. Second, should the national history of any country be written by the victors, foreigners, or minoritarians? No, but national historians should restrain themselves from hiding, distorting, or embellishing the past of their country. Third, should current political and economic interests of any country prevail over the national pride of its inhabitants represented by their national history or, in other words, is it morally acceptable to pursue political and material advantages by assuming disputable charges for the past? No, it's not. But it is a moral obligation to recognize the facts as they are objectively proved, to seek responsibilities, and to beg forgiveness according to their gravity. That would bring satisfaction to the relatives of the victims, would preserve both the national pride and the lessons of history for the countries involved in the past in any kind of atrocities and, most of all, would serve the truth. In the Romanian case, there's a wide gap between "Holocaust", suggested by the Jewish historians, and "occasional killings", promoted by their Romanian colleagues on the fate of the local Jews during the war. Whether the last approach will be the right one in the end, it won't change anything, Romania having officially recognized the Holocaust at the highest level. What is, then, the reason of any national historical research if it is ignored by the politicians themselves, who are supposed to look to the past in thinking the future?

Thus, both Romanian and Jewish historians agree that Antonescu was an anti-Semite, a nationalist, and a chauvinist, the latter seeing in him also a racist. Both sides agree that over 100,000 Romanian Jews have lost their lives during wartime deportations. Romanian historians suggest that Antonescu decided their deportation for national security reasons and for their own security, and less as a revenge for their anti-Romanian attitude in the summer of 1940. Jewish historians suggest the contrary: Antonescu issued the deportation order by having in mind their physical extermination. In their opinion, over 100,000 Romanian Jews were killed at Antonescu's direct order, so that one can speak about a local Holocaust. Romanian historians disagree, by suggesting that their deportation and internment in war conditions were the causes of death for the majority of them, and that the massacres and military reprisals against them took place occasionally, but not systematically. In conclusion, "the dialog of the deaf" is still going on between Romanian and Jewish historians.

### 4.3. Party Life during Antonescu Military Regime

At the same time with the setting up of the new military regime in Romania, in late January 1941, and despite the fact that politicians belonging to traditional parties were also coopted within this government, Antonescu officially banned, once again, the activity of all political parties and organizations, including Iron Guard. The ban was to last until Antonescu's fall, in August 1944. Political parties didn't cease their activity, but their actions moved underground. The *Conducător* was regularly informed by the Romanian military and police secret services about any move by the political opposition. Communist Party<sup>302</sup> and Iron Guard, seen by him as the real Opposition to his regime, were supervised in particular, whilst to the "Opposition" represented by the bourgeois Liberal and Peasant Parties was granted larger freedom of maneuvering.

We shall briefly point out in the next several pages the main actions of each party mentioned above, in both the domestic and international field, during Antonescu Military Regime, as they are suggested by post-communist historians, or by the available official documents of the period brought into the scientific circulation by the same historians.

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<sup>302</sup> The birth of Romanian Communist Party took place in May 1921, when a group of radical, or revolutionary socialists, influenced by the successful Bolshevik revolution in Russia, left the Romanian Social-Democratic Party to form a party of their own. Since its birth and until the outbreak of WWII, and even during the war, the party was under Moscow's direct control through the Third Communist International ( COMINTERN ), in the majority high posts having been assigned foreign or minoritarian communists ( Hungarians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Russians, Jews ). Seen as anti-Romanian by the Liberal Government in power, Communist Party was outlawed in 1924, after which it surreptitiously carried on its activity until 1944. The party didn't enjoy any sympathy among Romanian People before 1945, neither among land workers, nor among the industrial proletariat, party members hardly having reached the figure of 1,000 individuals. Under Soviet pressure ( with Vishinski menacing with the loss of independence and Red Army within the country ), King Michael I had to allow the participation to the governing act of the communists within the coalition government of Dr. Petru Groza ( Chairman of the Ploughmen's Front, close to the Communist Party ), following the general elections of March 1945. After having falsified the 1947 elections, actually won by the bourgeois parties, the communists and their electoral allies banned the bourgeois parties, and took over the whole governing power. Michael I was forced to abdicate on December 30th, 1947, the People's Republic of Romania having been proclaimed at the same time. One-party system was introduced once again in Romania in 1948, by the Left this time, when Social-Democratic Party was forced to merge into the Communist Party. Between 1948 and 1965 the communists acted, and governed Romania, under the name of Romanian Labour Party, time when the Romanian stalinist and nationalist wing of the party, represented by the First Secretary Gheorghie Gheorghiu-Dej, had succeeded in replacing in the party high posts the minoritarian, internationalist, and pro-Soviet wing represented by Ana Pauker. National-Communism was carried on in Romania from Gheorghiu-Dej's death, in 1965, until his own fall, in 1989, by the Secretary General of the Romanian Communist Party ( re-baptized as such in 1965 ), Nicolae Ceausescu. The widespread wounds left by the communist experiment in Romania are still open ( by the time the Communist Regime collapsed in 1989, they were ca. 4 mil. party members ), so that the moral trial of Communism, and the analysis by historians of what it really meant for the Romanian People, might have to wait for the proper time perspective. Nevertheless, when thinking their aim for Euro-Atlantic integration, the faster Romanians would come to terms with own recent past the better. The legacy of the former Communist Party has been taken over and continued, since 1990, by the Socialist Labor Party led by Ilie Verdet.



Despite all exaggeration by former communist historiography as regards to the role played by Romanian Communist Party during the Second World War, there is little doubt that the communists, though few in number, were those who created most damages to Romania's wartime national economy by their sabotage acts. As both anti-capitalist and anti-fascist, Romanian communists started their sabotage acts, at Moscow's order, once Antonescu's Romania had joined the Tripartite Pact in November 1940. During Romania's anti-Soviet war, between June 1941 and August 1944, sabotage acts increased in number, and were mainly directed against those two economic sectors essential for the Axis troops in their offensive campaign on the Eastern Front, that is oil industry and railway transportation network.

Official documents brought into circulation by post-communist historians confirm both these sabotage acts and the communist propaganda among Romanian Army's rank and file. The documents also reveal the collaboration between communists and legionnaires ( a strange one, when thinking the ideological incompatibility between them ) against the common enemy represented by Antonescu and his regime, aspect on which former communist historiography said nothing. Thus, according to the High General Staff's Note of February 18th, 1941, communist propaganda was aiming " to create by any means advocates among soldiers and officers; to discredit the army, by propaganda from man to man in the barracks; to take advantage of any dissatisfaction and situation, by falsifying and presenting them in a way that may attract the soldiers on the Communist Movement's side."<sup>303</sup> The Note dated March 24th, 1941, is more revealing about the wartime connections between Communist Party and Iron Guard: " The involvement of communist elements came out in all violent legionnaire actions, the pursuing goal by both sides being in fact the same: the destruction of the basic pillar of the State, the Army, by disintegrating its moral forces... Legionnaire leadership uses the same propagandist issues among soldiers as communists do, with whom they did actually act hand in hand on the 21st of January this year."<sup>304</sup> For the time being, the most revealing seems to be the Intelligence Report of July 24th, 1941 ( by that time Romania was at war ), within we can read, among other things, the following: " The legionnaires have received the order to go on with their defetist activity, and to infiltrate themselves

<sup>303</sup> Notă asupra/Propagandei comuniste și legionare în armată, 18 februarie 1941; Marele Stat Major/Secția 2/Birou 2/ Arhivele Marelui Stat Major General Român, București. Here from: Ardeleanu & Beldiman ( edit. ), *Mișcarea Legionară în documente inedite*, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 4, 1997, p. 50-51.

<sup>304</sup> Notă informativă; Marele Stat Major/Secția 2/Biroul 2/Nr. 228628/B, din 27 martie 1941/MStM/catre/MAN Subsecretarului de Stat al Armatei de Uscat/Secretariatul General. Arhivele Statului Major General Român, București. Here from: Ardeleanu & Beldiman ( edit. ), *Mișcarea Legionară în documente inedite*, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 4, 1997, p. 47.

among communists in order to urge them toward terrorist and sabotage acts... Some legionnaire units have decided that their members should even start separate sabotage acts and, in case of being arrested, at the inquiry they should declare themselves communists, but not legionnaires."<sup>305</sup> Thus, we can conclude by suggesting that, from January 1941 until at least the early stages of the anti-Soviet war, in July 1941, Communist Party and Iron Guard worked together in destabilizing both Romanian Army and Romania's national economy. It seems that ideology played a minor role as far as Antonescu was kept by both sides as the main enemy. After the crossing by Romanian-German armies of River Dniester, in late July 1941, and despite the fact that Antonescu was still the common enemy, the situation changed. For Iron Guard the pro-Nazi policy came in first, whilst for Communist Party the pro-Soviet one. It meant that, on the one hand, the sabotage acts by legionnaires decreased, while, on the other hand, those carried out by communists did substantially increase. We have all reasons to believe that, besides the already published documents by the former communist historiography, other documents, still unpublished, would confirm the wartime sabotage acts by the communists. The more that they were suggested by Antonescu himself during his trial in 1946. He must have been properly informed by his secret services. In his Memorandum of May 15th, 1946, addressed to the People's Tribunal of Bucharest, among other things, Antonescu asserted:

"I'm accused of political crimes. No outstanding politician was arrested, interned, or tried. Even these days, all dictators liquidate their political adversaries. One speak about the numerous camps scattered across the country. When I took over the power, I found over 2,000 communists interned at the Caracal Camp. In November 1940 I visited the Jilava Prison where I found 1,000 inmates: desertors, thieves, and communists. I spoke with them, and I released at once 700 men, in majority communists. I went on two occasions together with the Justice Minister to Văcărești Prison. In conformity with the instructions received from me following my findings there, this one issued amnesty decrees by which were released, as in the Jilava case, thousands of men, many of them waiting for months to be tried. The situation suited them because they were aloof of the war. Many, after having deserted the army, committed thefts or economic sabotage acts, declared themselves communists in order to be sent to camps, or imprisoned, and thus to avoid the war. For the whole country there was only the Târgu Jiu Camp with 2,000 places. It was full only during the Rebellion and short time then after. Afterwards, only between 800 and 1,000 men were interned there, the majority for sabotage acts..."<sup>306</sup>

Thus, clear suggestions by Antonescu, who must have known best the real situation, that those who

<sup>305</sup> Raport contrainformativ/ 24 iulie 1941; Comandamentul Fortelor de Apărare/Interioară a Teritoriului/Stat Major/Biroul 2/ 17180 B/1941 iulie 25. Arhivele Statului Major General Român, București. Here from: Ardeleanu & Beldiman ( edit. ), Mișcarea Legionară în documente inedite, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 4, 1997, p. 46.

<sup>306</sup> Antonescu, in Ciucă, 1996, Vol. II, p. 177.

caused most damages to Romania's wartime economy were the communists. Sabotage acts were also done by other people who, in order to escape of being sent to the front, declared themselves as communists. Strange enough but, as we shall see in the next pages, Antonescu's sympathy seems to have been directed rather toward communists than Iron Guard members.

Romania's anti-Soviet war made the communists increase their sabotage acts. Nevertheless, they had to find at home other political allies than Iron Guard. It wasn't easy at all. With the exception of Iron Guard, the other Romanian political parties were not only pro-Western and anti-German, but they were at the same time anti-Soviet. Revealing in this sense is the letter addressed by the communist leadership to the peasant leader, Iuliu Maniu, on the 20th of December 1942. The communists were criticizing the changing stand by Peasant Party regarding its eventual participation to the Romanian Patriots' United National Front envisaged by the Communist Party. According to the letter, in the summer of 1942 Maniu agreed to collaborate "for the liberation of the country from Germans, for the moving out of war, and for the crushing of Antonescu's regime", but he didn't condition the common action by a guarantee on the part of the Soviets of the 1939 Romanian border.<sup>307</sup> In the autumn of the same year, peasant leadership, through Ghiță Popp, set two conditions for the eventual collaboration: "1) A public declaration on the part of the Communist Party in favor of the 1939 boundaries. 2) Soviet Union should accept through her official policy the re-establishment of these borders."<sup>308</sup> Through the letter the communists were asking the peasants to leave aside the ideological reasons, when at stake was Romanian People's very existence, and to fight together against the common enemies represented by "Nazi Germany and Antonescu's regime of national treason."<sup>309</sup> In exchange for their support to the eventual actions by Maniu and Romanian Army to liberate Northern Transylvania from Hungarians, the communists were asking the peasants to leave the fate of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine to be solved by Soviet Union and Western Allies after the war. The communists were also assuring the leadership of the Peasant Party that its public demand for Romanian Army's withdrawal up to the borders of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine was enjoying their support, too. The letter reveals the fact that communist leaders were abreast of the events, since they knew about the agreement concluded between the peasant, liberal, and social-democratic leaders to set up an anti-German and

<sup>307</sup> 1942 decembrie 20, București. Scrisoarea C.C. al P.C.R. adresată lui Iuliu Maniu, președintele P.N.T., îndemnând la adoptarea unei atitudini comune față de problemele păcii și războiului implicând România. Biblioteca Academiei Române, Arhiva Istorică, cota A XXXVI-9, București. Here from: Arimia & Ardeleanu & Cebuc ( edit. ), 1994, p. 205.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> Idem, p. 206.

anti-Antonescian National Bloc. The communists were saluting in the letter the agreement, " which would make possible the unity of the entire Romanian People within a single patriotic bloc ", but, with the only condition that democratic parties " shouldn't recognize the annexation of Bessarabia and Bukovine, temporarily invaded and occupied, as the other Soviet territories, by Hitler and his gauleiter in Romania, Antonescu."<sup>310</sup> Thus, clear attempts by the Communist Party to seek not only its recognition on the part of the bourgeois parties, but also to persuade them to join their forces in a common patriotic bloc directed against both Antonescu and the Germans. By December 1942, peasant leaders were not ready yet to fight together with the communists against Hitler and Antonescu without an official recognition by Soviet Union of the 1939 Romanian borders.

Although, by the middle of the war, the attempts by the communists to set up a common patriotic bloc with the traditional parties failed, nevertheless, their mutual contacts didn't cease. After the defeat, in February 1943, by Red Army of the Axis forces at Stalingrad, the contacts increased in number. According to historian Tudor Călin Zarojanu, after having met, and been assured by the American and British Ambassadors, A. Harriman and Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, following the November 1943 meeting of the Allies in Moscow, that they concluded no agreement with the Soviets damaging Romania, Maniu met the communist leader Lucretiu Patrascanu ( a lawyer and a moderate, executed as traitor in late 1940s by the stalinists in power ) the same month, " in order to discuss an eventual armistice with the Allied Powers."<sup>311</sup> However, the communists' long time desired common political platform was set up only on the 20th of June 1944, when Red Army's massive counter-offensive already reached Romania's eastern borders. According to Zarojanu, Iuliu Maniu ( Peasant Party ), C. I. C. Brătianu ( Liberal Party ), C. Titel Petrescu ( Social-Democratic Party ), and Lucretiu Pătrășcanu ( Communist Party ) met on that day, and signed up the platform of the *National Democratic Bloc* , " with the purpose of concluding the armistice with the Allies."<sup>312</sup> Thus, we can suggest that democratic parties didn't consent to a full co-operation with the communists until the summer of 1944, when the occupation of Romania by Red Army was imminent, mostly because of their opposite ideology and different stand on the Bessarabian issue.

The pro-Soviet policy of the Romanian Communist Party, well-known long before the outbreak of

<sup>310</sup> 1942 decembrie 20, București. Scrisoarea C.C. al P.C.R. adresată lui Iuliu Maniu, președintele P.N.T., îndemnând la adoptarea unei atitudini comune față de problemele păcii și războiului implicând România. Biblioteca Academiei Române, Arhiva Istorică, cota XXXVI-9, București. Here from: Arimia & Ardeleanu & Cebuc ( edit. ), 1994, p. 207.

<sup>311</sup> Zarojanu, 1996, p. 24.

<sup>312</sup> Idem, p. 26.

the Second World War, became manifest during Romania's anti-Soviet war. Moreover, Romanian communists left aside the ideological reasons and, at Moscow's request, made public their support to the Atlantic Charter, which was seen as "the basis of the future peace."<sup>313</sup> Revealing in the sense above, and for the entire wartime foreign policy of the Communist Party, are two citations within the already mentioned letter of the communist leadership, which needs less further comments. The communists were making reference to the Soviet-British Treaty of May 26th, 1942, stipulating among other things that, for the future stability and economic prosperity of Europe, "the United Nations will act in conformity with two principles: not to pursue territorial gains for themselves, and not to interfere in the domestic affairs of other states."<sup>314</sup> The other citation is from Stalin's Report of November 6th, 1941, on the occasion of the 24th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution: "We have no intention to conquer foreign territories, or Peoples... USSR doesn't pursue to impose her will and regime either on the Slav, or other Peoples, but just to help them liberate themselves from the German yoke. We won't interfere in their domestic affairs..."<sup>315</sup>

We just confine ourselves to remark that neither Western Allies, nor Soviet Union, kept their promises, Romanian bourgeois parties having been right in doubting both sides. By May 1944, but especially after Churchill's visit to Moscow in October the same year, the fate of Romania ( 90% to Soviet Union ) and Eastern Europe had been already decided in conformity with the famous "percent agreement" between the Western Allies, Great Britain in particular, and Soviet Union, regarding each one's sphere of influence there.<sup>316</sup> The division between "The Big Three" of both Germany and Europe was sanctioned by the Yalta Conference, held between February 4th and 11th, 1945.<sup>317</sup> Stalin rewarded his Romanian party fellows for their wartime fidelity according to his own and Soviet Union's interests. First, he forced their participation to the 1944 – 1945 Armistice Military Governments led by the generals Sanatescu and Radescu, and to the 1945 – 1947 Coalition Government of Petru Groza. After the disintegration, in 1947, of the wartime alliance between "The Big Three", Stalin urged and supported, through the Red Army present everywhere in Eastern and Central Europe ( in Romania until 1958 ), Romanian and other East European communists to take over the whole power at home, the process ending by 1948. Red Army, though still present

<sup>313</sup> 1942 decembrie 20, București. Scrisoarea C.C. al P.C.R. adresată lui Iuliu Maniu, președintele P.N.T., îndemnând la adoptarea unei atitudini comune față de problemele păcii și războiului implicând România. Biblioteca Academiei Române, Arhiva Istorică, cota XXXVI-9, București. Here from: Arimia & Ardeleanu & Cebuc ( edit. ), 1994, p. 207.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> Idem, p. 208.

<sup>316</sup> See, for more details, Dobrinescu & Constantin, 1995, p. 289-290.

<sup>317</sup> Idem, p. 292.

there, couldn't foresee, or stop the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe in 1989.

As a political party Iron Guard was crushed by Antonescu in January 1941. Thereafter, but especially after Romania had joined her forces with Nazi Germany against Soviet Union, the subversive activity and violent acts by the Guard went on, but they were mainly directed rather against Antonescu and his collaborators than the Romanian State. As we already know, the principal legionnaire leaders, in front with Horia Sima, were saved and sent to Germany by Himmler's representatives in Romania, whilst thousands of local leaders and ordinary members of the Guard were imprisoned, or interned by Antonescu, following the Legionnaire Rebellion.

As we've seen in the previous pages, the official documents of the time issued by the Romanian secret services suggest that, at least from its defeat and until the beginning of Romania's anti-Soviet war, Iron Guard worked hand in hand with Communist Party in carrying out economic sabotage acts, a subversive activity against Antonescu Regime, and a propagandist activity among Romanian Army's rank and file. Our suggestions above are also shared by Romanian historian Cristian Troncotă in his comments on the SSI Note of February 13th, 1941, bearing the title *Activitatea legionară în căminele studențești* [ The Legionnaire Activity in Student Dormitories ]. According to Troncotă, by having been sent as an informative document to the Presidency of the Council, the Foreign and Interior Ministries, and to the High General Staff, " the note demonstrates the fact that the vital structures of the Romanian State were connected and interested by the development of the Legionnaire Movement also after the rebellion – the SSI sounding alarm on the new eventual dangers."<sup>318</sup> Troncotă points out that, according to the note, the most active legionnaire students in their propagandist activity were those " organized in nests " at the dormitories for students in theology , politechnics, and oil industry scattered across Bucharest, buildings which " were still sheltering many persons arrived before and during the rebellion."<sup>319</sup> Romanian historian also emphasizes that, according to SSI's point of view, the most dangerous was a certain Leonid Lututovici, belonging to the terrorist group " The Front-Breakers ", and " who had organized local insurrections during the rebellion."<sup>320</sup> For SSI, Lututovici's father was " a notorious communist ", who didn't leave Bessarabia after the 1940 Soviet occupation.<sup>321</sup> Thus, a clear confirmation of Iron

<sup>318</sup> Troncotă, *SSI versus Mișcarea Legionară*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 4, 1997, p. 23.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>320</sup> *Idem*, p. 24.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*

Guard's subversive activity, and of its strange links with the Communist Movement up to June 1941, is brought in by also Troncotă through his comments on the official documents of the period.

Although defeated in January 1941, Iron Guard carried on both its propaganda among soldiers and the attempts to subordinate the army. The High General Staff's Informative Note dated February 18th, 1941, addressed to the National Defense Ministry is explicite. The note was informing about the manifest attempts by the Guard to set up military nests within the army with the purpose to have its control when the envisaged comeback to power would happen:

" Once in garrisons, legionnaire reserve officers must set up *military nests* together with the active ones sympathetic to the Legion... When several nests are established within an unit, the higher officer, that is the nest chief, should take the command of the legionnaire military group in that unit. The links between separate legionnaire groups should be secured by loyal legionnaire couriers. The setting up of legionnaire nests in the armament factories should go on, especially *nests of gunmem* and, in each garrison, *nests of tank drivers*... If the army would be called again to crush the rebels... the legionnaires in the military units... should shoot dead their commanding officers. Instructions recommend that, in order to succeed, the legionnaires should have by circumstance a correct attitude, keeping away any suspicion over their intentions. All drivers and legionnaire commanders are demanded to work day and night in such a manner, that the entire apparatus be ready and well organized within a month."<sup>322</sup>

The High General Staff was informing, in the end of its note, the Ministry of Defense that it had reminded the previously given orders to all military commanders, that is, " to pay a special attention to the spiritual atmosphere within their units, and to take all necessary measures to prevent whatsoever propaganda and political activities in the military units."<sup>323</sup> Thus, we can suggest that, at a month distance of its defeat, Iron Guard, still animated by revenge feelings, was plotting the comeback to power. Without the control over the army it was impossible to succeed, and the Guard was aware about that and acted in consequence. Nevertheless, Romanian military commanders, and obviously Antonescu, knew about the attempts of the Guard in this sense, and cut them short from the start. The SSI Note of August 14th, 1941, reveals the fact that, even by then, some Iron Guard agitators, eager for revenge, were ventilating the comeback idea. According to the note, they were spreading rumors as: " Something is going to happen soon, that would bring again the Legion in the spotlight ", because of the Government " responsibility " for having executed those who committed

<sup>322</sup> Notă informativă; Marele Stat Major/Secția XI-a/Biroul 2/Spre știință/Nr. 226.276/B/18 februarie 1941/Marele Stat Major/Secția 2-a/către/Ministerul Apărării Naționale/Urmare la nr. 224.049, din 30 ianuarie 1941/Nr. 225.944, din 12 februarie 1941. Arhivele Statului Major General Român, București. Here from: Ardeleanu & Beldiman ( edit. ), *Mișcarea Legionară în documente inedite, Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 4, 1997, p. 49-50.

<sup>323</sup> Idem, p. 50.

the murders of 26 –27 November 1940.<sup>324</sup> However, according to the note, the rumors were just pure legionnaire propaganda, ” in order to maintain awaken the attention of the masses toward Legionnaire Movement and its possibilities.”<sup>325</sup>

Since the beginning of the anti-Soviet war, in June 1941, onwards, we can observe a change in the attitude of the majority Iron Guard members at home. Although Antonescu Regime was still their enemy, their criminal and sabotage acts against it decreased in number, the fight against the common enemy, the Soviet Union, coming in first. Suggestive in this sense is the letter of June 22nd, 1941, addressed to Mihai Antonescu, the Vice-President of the Council of Ministers and Foreign Minister, by Professor Ion Zelea Codreanu, the father of the *Căpitan* Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, assassinated in 1939 by the men of Charles II. Professor Codreanu was asking in his letter the favor to be sent to the front, whether as the Commander of the 2nd Battalion of the 25th Infantry Regiment ( who’s Commander he was in WWI ), or at the head of the assault units to be set up by voluntary legionnaires. He was also asking the favor on behalf of his two other sons to be called under arms in the legionnaire voluntary units, as well as for his daughter, a skilled nurse. Moreover, Professor Codreanu was informing M. Antonescu that *Căpitan’s* legionnaires, receiving no personal call-ups, were asking through him the favor ” to fight in the first line of the front, or to be called at once at the fighting units to which they belong.”<sup>326</sup> Codreanu was pleading that not only free legionnaires, but also those interned and imprisoned to be called under arms, ” whether they declare that they were misled in their goodfaith.”<sup>327</sup> Codreanu, after praising Hitler and Mussolini for having started their anti-Bolshevik war, as ” the envoys of God on Earth to defend the Christian Church and Lord Jesus ”, was also congratulating Antonescu for having joined them.<sup>328</sup> Professor Codreanu was begging M. Antonescu to consider as a right the favors asked for himself, his family, and his comrades, because ” all our martyrs, in head with the *Căpitan*, were killed by the advocates of the communist Jews, that is our very enemies today... and, thus, this holy national war is their war in the first place.”<sup>329</sup> Thus, once the war broke out, the Guard members at home, through one of their most venerated veterans, officially asked the state leadership to be called-up and sent to fight.

<sup>324</sup> SSI/14 August 1941/Strict secret/Notă. Arhivele Statului Major General Român, București. Here from: Ardeleanu & Beldiman ( edit. ), *Mișcarea Legionară în documente inedite*, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 4, p. 52.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> București, 22 iunie 1941/Profesor Ion Zelea Codreanu. Arhivele Statului Major General Român, București. Here from: Chiritoiu & Suci ( edit. ), *Mișcarea Legionară în documente inedite*, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 4, 1997, p. 59.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.



The attitude change by Iron Guard is confirmed by another document of that time. The SSI Note of July 5th, 1941, in revealing on this aspect. It is said in the note: " One can see among the former legionnaire members a manifest action of solidarity with the present situation and calls for hard working, all in order to contribute to the domestic needs of those families who's members left home to fight."<sup>330</sup> According to the same note many imprisoned Guard members were asking to be sent on the front, while some of those working in industrial plants were demanding for additional daily working hours " in order to have a couple of days-off to assist the frontmen's families."<sup>331</sup> The note is also a confirmation of our already expressed suggestion that the strange connections between the Guard members and the communists ceased at the beginning of the war: " At the same time, one can observe that the legionnaires are dissociating themselves from their fellows who, before September 6th, 1940, were known as cherishing communist ideas, and who had enrolled thereafter as members of the Legionnaire Movement."<sup>332</sup> Thus, the outbreak of the anti-Soviet war meant the breakup of the strange alliance between the Romanian political extremes against Antonescu and his regime.

What was, then, the *Conducător's* response to the demands by many Iron Guard members to be sent on the front to fight for the homeland? We can say that Antonescu responded affirmatively to their requests, as it is suggested by historian Grigore Traian Pop in a short but interesting article dealing with the unfortunate fate that the legionnaires seem to have had on the Eastern Front.<sup>333</sup> In the spring of 1942 a great many of the imprisoned legionnaires, especially the young ones, asked Antonescu the favor to fight against the Russians. For Pop, " it is certain that Ion Antonescu didn't miss the occasion in his attempt to slaughter them usefully."<sup>334</sup> After having been incorporated and trained in special military units, the so called " rehabilitation battalions ", the young legionnaires were sent on the front to fight.<sup>335</sup> Pop points out that, according to legionnaire historians, the reason for the setting up of the special units was not at all the rehabilitation, but the slaughtering of Iron Guard members. On the one hand, the slaughtering would have taken place " through the absurdity of the missions entrusted to their units directly sent to die in the Russian hell, the Soviets having been even warned in advance on the attack by the Romanian Headquarters " and, on the other hand,

<sup>330</sup> Notă informativă/Nr. 1.796, din 5 iulie 1941/SSI. Arhivele Marelui Stat Major General Român, București. Here from: Chirițoiu & Suci ( edit. ), *Miscarea Legionară în documente inedite*, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 4, 1997, p. 59.

<sup>331</sup> Idem, p. 60.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

<sup>333</sup> Pop, *Legionarii pe frontul antisovietic*, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 47-48.

<sup>334</sup> Idem, p. 47.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

” through the fire from behind by the Romanian machine guns, veritable mass assassinations.”<sup>336</sup>

For Pop, the figures suggested by legionnaire historians, that is ” the murdering of 15,000 university students and teaching staff and 5,000 high school students ” between 1941 and 1943 by the Romanian Army at Antonescu’s order, are obviously exaggerated, but they cannot be completely denied.<sup>337</sup> The evidences in this sense stand rather on memorial works, Pop emphasizes, and therefore ” a large documentary effort completed by one of objectivity are needed, too, in order to bring more light on those events.”<sup>338</sup> Nevertheless, Pop suggests that the Sărata Center, in Bessarabia, where the young legionnaires were instructed before being sent on the front, was excelling neither in officers of a Prussian type, nor in officers with studies at Eton, and that many of the students had no previous military instruction. It was the cause of death for many young people, who often died in vain after having fought with heroism. Moreover, at Eugen Cristescu’s advice ( the SSI chief ), it seems that Antonescu would have issued direct orders for the tracing out and execution of those legionnaires involved in all kind of plots against him, a couple of them having been real, but clear documentary evidences to support this assumption are missing. Pop suggests that, according to the memoirs by former Iron Guard members, Antonescu himself ” would have commanded the destruction of the archives regarding the rehabilitation regiments.”<sup>339</sup> In Pop’s opinion, at the extent they really took place, these slaughterings cannot be attributed in their entirety to the intention by Antonescu to get rid of Iron Guard once for all. What’s true is that, although many Iron Guard members had escaped a certain death ordered by Antonescu by manifesting heroism in battle, ” they were to pay this heroism with many years of detention, or even with own life, in the communist prisons ”, Romanian historian asserts as final conclusion.<sup>340</sup>

Thus, we can give our interpretation to Pop’s suggestions above in the sense, that there is still a lot of research work to do for a better understanding of the bad treatment that Iron Guard members encountered on the Eastern Front on the part of their co-nationals, between 1941 and 1944. The truth is, that Antonescu allowed thousands of young iron-guardians to fight for their country within the framework of the so called ” rehabilitation battalions ”, and, that many of them died, on the one

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<sup>336</sup> Pop, *Legionarii pe frontul antisovietic*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 47.

<sup>337</sup> *Idem*, p. 48.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*

hand, due to their military inexperience and, on the other hand, because of the dangerous missions entrusted to them in the first line of the front. That they would have been also shot from behind by the Romanian soldiers at Antonescu's order, it is still a question mark, since there are no official documents to unequivocally support such an assumption, at least for the time being.

As for us, despite Antonescu's manifest animosity towards Iron Guard, we believe that he was rather led by military reasons than personal revenge by the time he allowed young legionnaires to fight on the Eastern Front. We should remind ourselves, that the anti-legionnaire feeling among Romanians, but first and foremost among the rank and file of the Romanian Army, substantially grew in intensity after the defeat of the Guard by Antonescu, in late January 1941. The SSI synthesis-document dated November 13th, 1941, and dealing with the domestic political situation by then, which is presented and commented by historian Cristian Troncotă in his article used by us before, is suggestive in the sense above: "... Since the Rebellion, the Army considers itself in a direct and sharp conflict with the legionnaires, and their eventual return to power would arouse strong reactions on the part of the officer staff..."<sup>341</sup> Thus, whether some young legionnaires were occasionally shot from behind by the Romanian soldiers, as it seems to be the case, it doesn't necessary mean that it happened at Antonescu's direct order. Even in the case that Antonescu would have commanded the execution of some young legionnaires involved in conspiracies against his person and rule, we cannot speak in terms of a systematic slaughter of thousands of them carried out by their very countrymen. The *Conducător* actually allowed both regular soldiers and legionnaire fighters to die heroically for their country, but in a war which turned to be nothing but a slaughterhouse in itself.

The threat from abroad to Antonescu and his regime by Iron Guard was represented by its leadership, in head with Horia Sima. As we already know, all of them had escaped to Germany with the assistance of Himmler and his men in Romania, following the legionnaire uprising. Sima was forbidden by Hitler any kind of political activity in Germany in conformity with his word given to Antonescu. Romanian historians are unanimous: besides the dangerous situation in December 1942, there was no other threat from abroad by Iron Guard to Antonescu's wartime political regime.

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<sup>341</sup> Troncotă, *SSI versus Mișcarea Legionară*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 4, 1997, p. 24.

When there were no doubts left about the imminent defeat of the Axis forces at Stalingrad by the Red Army, the tension between the officials in Bucharest and Berlin augmented at its highest in December 1942. According to Chiper, when the dissensions between H. Himmler and W. Schellenberg, on the one side, and J. von Ribbentrop, on the other side, became obvious, the strange "escape" from Berkenbruck (the legionnaire leaders were residing there since January 1941 in a SS building for guests) of Horia Sima took also place.<sup>342</sup> Ribbentrop took advantage of the situation and informed Hitler that Sima was by then visiting Italy "in order to plan a new coup."<sup>343</sup> That infuriated Hitler who knew nothing about it. According to Chiper the result was, that not only the principal legionnaire leaders in Berkenbruck, but also those hundreds of legionnaires in Rostock, working in armament industry, were all of them interned at Dachau and Buchenwald, and that Ribbentrop's position became stronger in his dispute with Himmler. Moreover, Romanian historian suggests, that "since January 1943 and until August 1944, Hitler trusted rather the informations sent by the German Legation in Bucharest and the AA on the Romanian domestic and foreign policy than those arrived through the SD."<sup>344</sup>

Pop has rather similar views on this aspect. He suggests, that following the tensions between Bucharest and Berlin in December 1942, the Germans left the impression of being ready to set the legionnaires free, by allowing Horia Sima a short "round trip" to Rome.<sup>345</sup> According to Pop, Antonescu reacted "by squeezing the screw, that is, by interning almost 2,000 legionnaires and by hardening their situation on the front."<sup>346</sup> Thus, we can reinterpret the suggestions expressed by Chiper and Pop in the sense that, by taking advantage of the imminent defeat of the Axis armies at Stalingrad, Horia Sima was plotting in December 1942 a new coup against Antonescu with the assistance of the Nazi circles around Himmler. When Hitler and Antonescu heard about it, they responded by interning all the radical Iron Guard members in both Germany and Romania.

Thus, documents of the period and mainstream Romanian historians suggest, that sabotage acts and other subversive actions against Antonescu and his regime by Iron Guard substantially decreased in number with the beginning of the anti-Soviet war, in comparison to those carried out by the communists. Antonescu allowed Iron Guard volunteers to fight on the front, but the deep mutual

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<sup>342</sup> Chiper, *Mișcarea Legionară și acoliții lui Hitler*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 4, 1997, p. 18.

<sup>343</sup> *Idem*, p. 18-19.

<sup>344</sup> *Idem*, p. 19.

<sup>345</sup> Pop, *Legionarii pe frontul antisovietic*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p.48.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*

mistrust and hate didn't disappear with the war. To the plots against the *Conducător* and his regime by young Iron Guard members, most of them rather fictitious than real, the former responded by interning thousands of legionnaires in camps, by commanding some executions, and by making difficult the condition of those on the front.

We can conclude this part of the present chapter by asserting, that the real Opposition to Antonescu's military regime of 1941 – 1944 was represented by the Communist Party and Iron Guard, and this despite the small number of their advocates, particularly that of the communists. This fact is suggested by Romanian historians in their recent writings based on the study of the official documents of the period. Because of their plots, sabotage acts and other subversive actions, Romanian secret services did carefully supervise, at Antonescu's direct order, all the moves by both communist and legionnaire individuals. Historian Maria Georgescu's words can be kept, thus, as representative for the entire post-communist historical writing on this matter: "The supervision of the communists and legionnaires was carried out constantly, although not on the same scale and not with the same frequency as in the case of the democratic parties, and any time the insecurity reasons came out, Antonescu didn't hesitate in taking coercive measures..."<sup>347</sup>

What's interesting here, is the fact that the same official documents, or other written sources of the period brought in by Romanian historians, reveal a surprising thing: contrary to what has been thought until recently, they were the legionnaires, and not the communists, who had been most bad treated by Antonescu and his wartime administration. Why? We can promote two explanations here. The first one is suggested by Georgescu in her article dealing with the opposition activity to Antonescu Regime by the Romanian political parties of the time. According to Georgescu, Romanian communists were encouraged in their sabotage activities not only by Moscow and the Comintern, but also by the Anglo-Saxon secret services. She points out that the SSI Note of August 5th, 1941, informed Antonescu about the demand expressed by the Intelligence Service to the American Secret Service in Romania to collaborate with the communists, "in order to carry out sabotage acts in the industrial and transportation sectors."<sup>348</sup> Thus, though an anti-communist, Antonescu might have thought to spare the communists because he knew them as enjoying the support of the Anglo-Saxon Powers. In other words, the communists were less bad treated by him because he thought them as the best political capital in the case of an eventual defeat of the Axis by

<sup>347</sup> Georgescu, În vizorul organelor de informații: Opoziția, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 41.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

the Allied Powers. A second explanation might lie in the mixed feelings of resentment, mistrust and hate felt by Antonescu towards his former governing partner, the Iron Guard. We already know that, as a governing party, the Legionnaire Movement did nothing else but causing troubles, particularly to the military institution, by the time it was in power in Romania, between September 1940 and January 1941. It might be, thus, that the personal bad feelings towards the Guard members, still alive in Antonescu's heart, were those which made him treat, during all his rule, the legionnaires worse in comparison with the communists. It seems, that the last explanation is more plausible for the post-communist historiographical writing, although the political calculation might have played a certain role for Antonescu in dealing selectively with the communists and the legionnaires.

In our opinion, the finding above, revealed by official documents of the time and suggested by some mainstream historians, is exceptionally important when thinking the present political and historical debate in Romania on Antonescu and his wartime regime. Romanian historians should deepen their investigations on this aspect objectively, and by relying mostly on the primary sources. If so, it won't sound as a manifest attempt of rehabilitating Antonescu, and the label "fascist" on his person might be, if not totally removed, at least set under the question mark also in the foreign encyclopedias and historical writing, which is not the case yet, as we saw in the beginning of this thesis. It seems that for Antonescu most dangerous than any class ideology was the spread anarchy. He was in first a soldier, then a nationalist. Therefore, he saw the cosmopolitan Jews and internationalist communists, whatever strange it might sound, less dangerous for the internal security of the Romanian State than the fascist and nationalist, but anarchic legionnaires. If Antonescu cannot be kept as an anti-fascist, in the sense that he had to follow a foreign policy close to the fascist powers, for the reasons which we already know, he can't be either seen as a fascist leader, since he was the one who, during his rule, had actually suppressed Iron Guard, the main fascist political organization in Interwar Romania. Consequently, we can promote the assumption that Antonescu was the military equivalent of the Romanian National-Liberalism at time of war. He was indeed an authoritarian political leader and a military dictator, but not one of a fascist kind. Otherwise, he would have allowed the submission of the Romanian Army by the governing fascist Iron Guard on the German model and, subsequently, commanded the internment and physical extermination of all political opponents, in front with the communists. He did the contrary actually. The short "collaboration" with the Guard was imposed on him rather by circumstances than by his own belief, and the fact that he treated later the legionnaires the worst possible proves that he might have been both an anti-Semitic and anti-communist individual, but certainly not a fascist dictator.

The National Liberal and National Peasant Parties made up the other " half " of the Opposition against Antonescu and his regime. It is a common place in new Romanian historiography to set the wartime opposition activity of these two parties under quotation marks, that is to see them as having represented the " Opposition " to Antonescu Regime. We shall see in the next several pages why. These parties, too, were banned by the *Conducător*, and their activity was most carefully and frequently supervised by the secret services because, as it is well suggested by Georgescu in her article, " of their importance within the Romanian political *establishment*, and because of the influence they had on the public opinion."<sup>349</sup> Nonetheless, Antonescian authorities took no measures to block these parties' activity, since they were seen by them " as a possible governing alternative."<sup>350</sup> Up to 1940, these bourgeois parties were the main political competitors. They actually governed Greater Romania alternatively for two decades. Their cooperation and mutual consultation came in first once they both moved into the opposition, following Antonescu's rise to power in September 1940. In dealing with the activity of the Romanian Opposition under Antonescu Regime mainstream historians usually take these parties together, and set the activity carried out by the liberals and peasants in contrast either to that undertaken by the communists or, more frequently, to that carried out by the legionnaires.<sup>351</sup>

We shall point out next the principal political actions carried out by the Liberal and Peasant Parties, both at home and abroad, as they are seen and interpreted by mainstream historians. We can best reveal these interpretations by suggesting the answers provided by them to the following questions: What was the attitude on the part of the liberals and peasants towards Antonescu and his regime? What position did they have on the anti-Soviet war and on the territorial issues? What was their stand *vis-à-vis* the communists and the legionnaires? Which were their actions abroad before, and after Stalingrad? Were they the Opposition, or rather the " Opposition " to Antonescu Regime?

The Liberal Party leadership rejected any official participation to a pro-German government after the fall of King Charles II in September 1940. It didn't mean that the liberals were left aside by Antonescu in the governing act. As we know already, high liberal officials were preserved, or appointed by the *Conducător* in the economic and financial ministerial posts both during the week

<sup>349</sup> Georgescu, În vizorul organelor de informații: Opoziția, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 41.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>351</sup> See, for example, C. Troncoț: SSI *versus* Mișcarea Legionară, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 4, 1997, p. 20-25; M. Georgescu: În vizorul organelor de informații: Opoziția, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 40-46.

following his rise to power, and for the whole period of his collaboration with Iron Guard. When Antonescu had to set up a new regime after his victory over the Guard, in January 1941, the liberals were called again to join it. Liberal political leaders rejected once more the official participation of their party at the governing act, and suggested the *Conducător* to set up a military government. Nevertheless, the liberal leadership allowed the active party members to join the government on their own, that is as technocrats, and also suggested to the former members, and to other personalities with liberal views, to provide their assistance to Antonescu in administrating the country. Antonescu banned all political organizations, including the Liberal Party, but allowed political and scientific personalities, particularly with liberal views, to join, or to carry on within his new government. The fact is clearly suggested by Lăzărescu in his article mentioned several times before. If we take a close look at his list of the dignitaries serving under Antonescu between 1940 and 1944, especially after 1941, we may find that out of 51, the total figure, 11 were whether liberal members, or people with manifest liberal views, that is, more than one fifth of the whole administration. We may also find that, in their majority, these men were also scholars and individuals with doctoral degrees at the most respected universities in the West ( Paris, Berlin, Jena etc.), in Economy, Finance, Law, Politics, Philosophy, or Letters. All of them belonged to the Romanian scientific, economic and cultural elite. They were appointed by Antonescu at the technical ministries and central institutions, that is, mainly to the economic and financial high posts: Prof. Gheorghe Leon ( Minister of Economy ), Mircea Cancicov ( Minister of Economy ), Gheorghe Crezianu ( General Manager of the Romanian Bank ), Prof. Mihai Antonescu ( Justice Minister, Vice-President of the Council, Foreign Minister ), Alexandru Neagu ( Finance Minister ), Nicolae Mareş ( Minister of Agriculture and Domains ), Prof. Alexandru Marcu ( National Propaganda Minister ), Prof. Gheron Netta ( Finance Minister ) Prof. Mircea Vulcănescu ( Subsecretary of State at Finance ), Stavril Ghiloiu ( Subsecretary of State at Industry and Commerce ), Prof. Ion Petrovici ( Minister of Public Instruction and Cults ).<sup>352</sup> Many of the generals in the government had doctoral degrees and were also professors in the military high schools, and, despite the fact that they were banned political activity, many of them shared liberal values, more or less openly. According to Lăzărescu all these liberal technocrats, as well as all other dignitaries used by Antonescu, served their country with competence and honor, ” even when they started to doubt about a final German victory, and about the wisdom of the official policy carried out by Antonescu.”<sup>353</sup> Thus, for Lăzărescu, the presence of Antonescu at the leadership of the Romanian

<sup>352</sup> Lăzărescu, O chestiune de drept: sare pe rana deschisă, *Aldine*, Nr. 93, 6 decembrie 1997, p. II-III.

<sup>353</sup> *Idem*, p. II.



State in a time of distress was a saving one, since, by having removed Iron Guard from the political scene, he preserved ” the healthy and capitalist structure of the Romanian society.”<sup>354</sup> There is no doubt that, for Lăzărescu, although this is suggested indirectly by him in his long article, the economic policy carried out by Antonescu’s wartime regime was one based on the national-liberal principles.

As for us, we may go even further. We can assert that, by taking into consideration the great number of generals assigned to the main ministerial offices and of people close to the Liberal Party appointed to the economic and financial ministerial offices, the regime led by Antonescu between 1941 and 1944 was nothing but the very image of the Romanian National-Liberalism ( undressed of its political ideology, but not of its economic principles ) dressed up in military clothes.

We have to agree with Lăzărescu. Otherwise, Romania’s wartime economic ” miracle ”, suggested by us in a previous chapter, would be hard, if not impossible to explain. The fact that the most outstanding representatives of the liberal economic and financial elites were appointed by Antonescu to the main technical ministerial posts might serve as a major explanation. It seems that, by having appointed them, Antonescu set the right men in the right places. As to the liberal leadership, by having allowed and persuaded party members and other people with liberal views to assist Antonescu on their own, it eased to a great extent the setting up by the latter of a workable wartime administration.

Why liberal leaders restrained themselves from any official political commitment, but provided at the same time their strong support to Antonescu? The views on this aspect by mainstream Romanian historians are quite similar, being based on the checking out the official documents issued by the SSI. According to Georgescu, the liberals, as well as the peasants, were hostile to Antonescu’s policy of cooperation with Nazi Germany, ” because they were certain about the final victory by Western Democracies, and because Romania’s national interest was imposing such a victory.”<sup>355</sup> They kept themselves as the most likely governing solution to push the country out of the deadlock, ” when the time to leave the political scene for Antonescu would come.”<sup>356</sup> Georgescu suggests that, according to the SSI Note of 27th June, 1941, even before the outbreak of

<sup>354</sup> Lăzărescu, O chestiune de drept: sare pe rana deschisă, Aldine, Nr. 93, 6 decembrie 1997, p. III.

<sup>355</sup> Georgescu, În vizorul organelor de informații: Opoziția, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 41.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid.

the anti-Soviet war, the indirect support to the *Conducător* by liberal politicians was obvious: ” We should do nothing which could make more difficult General Antonescu’s political position, to whom it should be permitted all freedom of maneuver, because he has assumed alone the responsibility of the policy close by the Axis.”<sup>357</sup> The removal of the regime by force was envisaged by the liberals for the first time only after the reaching by the Red Army of Romania’s eastern borders, in the summer of 1944. Until then, Georgescu emphasizes, they did resume own disapproval to Antonescu’s governing acts and military measures ” through mere memorandums and letters of protest.”<sup>358</sup> Cristian Troncotă goes even further. For him, official documents of the period by SSI confirm the statement made during his trial by its former chief, Eugen Cristescu, on the 16th of May, 1946: ” There was a tacit and permanent agreement according to which General Antonescu was to carry on his policy close by the Germans, while the two parties were to support his action from behind, though by preserving at the same time themselves as < the reserve for the future >.”<sup>359</sup> Troncotă suggests that, by having thought a political strategy ” enabling the preservation of a political alternative for the future ”, Antonescu Regime did actually manifest both political maturity and its responsibility *vis-à-vis* the supreme interests of the Romanian People.<sup>360</sup>

For mainstream Romanian historians, the liberals rejected from the beginning any official participation to a pro-German government because, on the one hand, they were sure about the final victory by the Allies and, on the other hand, because they were confident about Antonescu’s imminent abandon of power at a certain moment. As the most likely political solution in a crisis situation, the liberals were aware about the necessity of having no previous political burden on their shoulders. Liberal Party did actually support, more or less openly, Antonescu Regime. Politically, there was no violent undermining of the regime by the liberals. They just limited own actions to mere letters of protest. Practically, by having persuaded the liberal academic elite, especially economists, to join on their own Antonescu’s 1941 – 1944 governments, liberal leadership assured the functioning of Romania’s wartime economy. Moreover, it seems, that there was an obvious agreement, though one unwritten, between Antonescu and the two bourgeois leaderships: in exchange for their non-active opposition to his pro-German policy, they were both allowed by the *Conducător* to prepare themselves as the only two possible political alternatives to replace him if

<sup>357</sup> Georgescu, În vizorul organelor de informații: Opoziția, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 42.

<sup>358</sup> Idem, p. 41.

<sup>359</sup> Troncotă, SSI *versus* Mișcarea Legionară, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 4, 1997, p. 25.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid.

necessary. Thus, to the question what was, in general, the position of the Liberal Party *vis-à-vis* Antonescu and his 1941 – 1944 military regime, the responses provided by post-communist historians move, all of them, in the same sense: there was no real political opposition by the liberals to Antonescu; on the contrary, they did strongly support his regime from behind. For Lăzărescu and Georgescu, as well as for Troncotă, the official documents of the period checked out in the last years reveal the true story about the liberal attitude towards Antonescu: Liberal Party didn't confront Antonescu Regime as the Opposition, but rather as the "Opposition." Their interpretations of the liberal position on the particular aspects of the period come to strengthen the main orientation suggested above, as we shall see next.

But first, we can say that our personal view on the general liberal attitude towards Antonescu doesn't differ much from that expressed by post-communist historians. Liberal Party was allowed, despite the official ban set on all political parties by Antonescu in January 1941, to carry on its political activity to a reasonable extent, it is true, under the SSI's continuous surveillance. That makes us suggest, at least in the liberal case, that the ban set by Antonescu should be seen under the quotation marks, too, the more when one think at the great number of liberal technocrats present in all wartime governments . In other words, because of its different stand on foreign policy Liberal Party entered the "Opposition", after having been previously "banned" by Antonescu. Why, more precisely, the quotation marks are needed? Because, for liberal leadership and Antonescu alike, the main concern was the existence of both a strong capitalist economy and a reliable national army seen by them as essential keys for the preservation by Romania of her independence in any circumstances, especially at the peace talks, whether as a victor ( Antonescu's opinion ), or as a defeated country ( the liberal view ). In the pursuit of a common goal the two sides had to reach, consequently, an agreement: Antonescu took indefinitely on his shoulders the responsibility of the policy close by the Axis in exchange for the economic administration of Romania by the liberal technocrats. We have reasons to believe, that further studies by post-communist historians based on other official documents would even strengthen the assumption, that, in governing Romania between 1941 and 1944, Antonescu and his military regime basically relied on both the direct and indirect assistance provided by the liberals.

What was the liberal position on Antonescu's anti-Soviet war? Liberal leadership saluted, although with some reserves, Antonescu's decision to join Hitler, on the 22nd of June , 1941, in attacking

Soviet Union. For Georgescu, the SSI Note of June 27th, 1941, speaks for itself: " Liberal circles declare that, although the liberal grouping does understand to remain on expectancy, it sees positively the action started for the destruction of Communism, as well as that one started by General Antonescu for the liberation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine, but the State Ruler should consider the final unfolding of the present international events, because there is no doubt that England and America will win the war."<sup>361</sup> According to Georgescu other SSI notes of the period reveal the fact that liberal leadership was divided in its attitude over the imminent crossing of River Dniester by Romanian Army, by July 1941. The pro-German wing of the Liberal Party, led by Gheorghe I. Brătianu, was in favor of the continuation and sustaining of the war deeper into the Soviet territory, while the pro-Allied wing, led by Dinu Brătianu, wanted to limit Romania's role to just throw the Soviets out from the national territory and remain on the Dniester line, " in order not to complicate the country's position in the future."<sup>362</sup> The two liberal leaders got closer in their views on Romania's anti-Soviet war only in March 1943, that is, after the stabilization of the German-Soviet Front following the Axis defeat at Stalingrad. According to Georgescu the SSI notes informed that the two leaders were agreeing " not to undertake any political action likely to be seen by the government as an underminig of its relations with Germany, but, on the contrary, to assist it in its drive of reorganizing and strengthening the army."<sup>363</sup> However, the different stand on the anti-Soviet war by the two liberal leaders became obvious during the spring of 1944. By then, the Red Army had already reached Romania's borders in its counter-offensive. For Georgescu, the " moderate " armistice proposals sent by the Soviets to Romanian authorities on the 12th of April, 1944, were seen by Dinu Brătianu as the right moment to start the negotiations with the Soviet Government for the moving out of war by Romania.<sup>364</sup> On the contrary, according to the SSI Note of 22nd April, 1944, Gheorghe I. Brătianu, skeptical on both the Soviet assurances and Anglo-Saxon guarantees, asked for the rejection of Soviet proposals, and demanded the continuation of the fight, with all sacrifices, against the enemy who had invaded the country, because, " only the disappearance from the Continent of the Soviet military force could constitute the certain guarantee for Romania's independence."<sup>365</sup> Georgescu suggests that, according to SSI notes, Dinu Brătianu's view on the urgent necessity of concluding the armistice with the Soviets prevailed within the Liberal Party ultimately in June 1944. Brătianu's view was based on the strong conviction that

<sup>361</sup> Georgescu, *În vizorul organelor de informații: Opoziția, Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 42.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> Idem, p. 44.

<sup>364</sup> Idem, p. 45.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

the German-Romanian Front would not resist ” the imminent Soviet new offensive.”<sup>366</sup> Georgescu concludes, that the Opposition, including the Liberal Party, didn’t hesitate to assist King Michael I in removing Antonescu from power on August the 23rd, 1944, time by which Red Army had already shifted on the proper Romanian territory its massive counter-offensive.

Thus, for Georgescu, the Liberal Party as a whole saw Antonescu’s anti-Soviet campaign as a legitimate war for the liberation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine. The shifting by Antonescu, in late July 1941, of the military operations on the proper Soviet territory made the two different approaches on the foreign policy among liberal leadership become more clear. The pro-German wing of the party led by Gheorghe Brătianu had, until the spring of 1944, the upper hand over Dinu Brătianu’s pro-Western wing. It was not until the Soviets had taken over again Bessarabia and reached Romania’s main territory , in July – August 1944, that the two Brătianu agreed in asking Antonescu whether to cut his links with the Axis and conclude the armistice with the Soviets or, otherwise, to step down. In other words, among all other Opposition parties, Antonescu was assisted the most in his anti-Soviet crusade by the Liberal Party, practically up to the final phases. This happened, on the one hand, through the active support provided by the germanophile liberal leaders, and, on the other hand, by the passive stand taken by the anglophile ones.

Georgescu’s interpretation can be seen as representative for post-communist historiography as a whole, other historians and official documents of the time coming to confirm this approach. For example, a SSI report of May 1943 was informing, that Iuliu Maniu, the anglophile peasant leader, was aware of the existing dissensions among the leading liberals over Romania’s anti-Soviet war: ” ...Maniu does extraordinary efforts to work out and maintain the collaboration with the liberal group led by Dinu Brătianu, all in order to neutralize Gheorghe Brătianu’s germanophile tendencies, and even to prevent an eventual governing action by the germanophile politicians...”<sup>367</sup> According to Corneliu Coposu’s diary pages ( one of the peasant leaders of both Wartime and Post-Communist Romania who died in 1995 ), presented by historian Zarojanu in his 1996 book, it was the very germanophile Gheorghe I. Brătianu who had been shuttled by the Opposition, during the day of 23rd August 1944, to persuade Antonescu ” immediately conclude the armistice ” with the Soviets,

<sup>366</sup> Georgescu, În vizorul organelor de informații: Opoziția, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 42.

<sup>367</sup> 1943, mai. Concluzii ale raportului Serviciului Secret de Informații asupra activității Partidului Național Țărănesc și a președintelui său Iuliu Maniu pe perioada 1 septembrie 1940 – mai 1943, Arhiva Ministerului de Interne, București, fondul Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri, parchetul nr. 2., dosarul nr. 369. In Arimia & Ardeleanu & Cebuc ( edit. ), 1994, p. 215.

but with no success at all.<sup>368</sup> Thus, after having supported, more or less actively, for three years Antonescu's anti-Soviet campaign, seen as a legitimate war, the Liberal Party turned openly against it, but not against the *Conducător*, when the military occupation of Romania by the Red Army seemed to be imminent, in August 1944. The liberals did their best in persuading Antonescu to conclude the armistice himself, and they believed until the end that he would do it. When it became obvious for everybody, on the 23rd of August the same year, that there was no other way out for Romania but Antonescu's removal from power, the Liberal Party acted in consequence together with King Michael I and the other democratic parties.

In our point of view, Antonescu was assisted most in his anti-Soviet war by the Liberal Party, notwithstanding the different approaches on the war which were in place at the top of the liberal leadership. Gheorghe Brătianu and the liberals around him did actively support Antonescu's anti-Soviet crusade less because they were germanophile, but mostly because they saw it as having the main purpose the destruction of Communism embodied by Soviet Russia. In their turn, Dinu Brătianu's liberals were less active in supporting Antonescu's war not because they were anglophile, but rather because they saw its only purpose as being the liberation of Romania's eastern provinces and not the destruction of the giant communist neighbor, highly improbable, if not an impossible task to their mind. The liberal leader Gheorghe I. Brătianu ( also one of the most distinguished interwar Romanian historians ) was right by having expressed even since early 1940s his doubts on the real intentions, once the war was over, by both Western Allies and Soviet Union not only over Romania alone, but over the whole Eastern Europe. The 1945 Yalta Conference, and what came after, fully confirmed his suspicions. At least for Romania, the only way to preserve her full independence and bourgeois social system would have been, by taken into consideration the geographical position of the country, the destruction, no matter how and by whom, of the Soviet war machine, that is, the liquidation of the very basis of power on which International Communism was relying on. By having fought against German imperialism Western Allies, themselves imperialist powers, did actually strengthen the Russian expansionism. The *Cold War* was the price they paid for their own misjudgement, but those who did pay most, that is with their freedom and independence, were the peoples and countries of Eastern Europe. Gheorghe I. Brătianu, both a respected historian and an experienced politician, knew very well, that the most unfortunate fate for a country, or a people, was to be settled by history at the crossroads of the great empires, which has

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<sup>368</sup> Zarojanu, 1994, p. 29.

always been the case with the territory inhabited by the Romanians since ancient times. In his view, the most dangerous evil of all the surrounding ones was for Romania the Russian imperialism dressed up in communist clothes. According to many Romanian historians, and not only, had the Romanians continued to fight, they would have kept busy the Red Army six months on the line of the Carpathians, in other words, the war in Europe would have ended half a year later than it actually happened. To our mind, had Romania went on fighting the Soviets, the Yalta Conference would have taken place, if ever, six months later, obviously with a healthy new American president in office, and probably with the Anglo-Saxon troops deeper into Central and Eastern Europe ready to defy Stalin's expansionist desires. Seen in this light, we can better understand now why the liberals, despite their different views, assisted most Antonescu in his anti-Soviet war. They did it less because many of them were germanophile, but mostly because all of them were anti-communist. The very threat to the existence of the capitalist Romanian State was represented by Soviet Union and not by Nazi Germany, rather by Communism than by Fascism, in whatsoever form the latter might have appeared. For them, a capitalist social system, however distorted as that of Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy, was better than a communist society on the Soviet model. But most of all, the liberals supported, more or less openly, Antonescu and his anti-Soviet war because, as a national party, they couldn't set themselves against the majority Romanians, who were still backing the *Conducător* even after the Stalingrad defeat. The preservation of the eastern provinces by Romania would have demanded the defeat of the Red Army by the Axis forces. When it became clear, in the summer of 1944, that the Eastern War was actually lost by the Axis, and thus by Romania, too, the liberals ceased their support, by asking Antonescu immediately conclude the armistice and join the Allies.

The attitude towards the anti-Soviet war by the Liberal Party was reflected, according to Romanian historians, in its foreign policy. The different views that the two liberal leaders, Constantin I. C. (Dinu) Brătianu and Gheorghe I. Brătianu, had also on the foreign issues are confirmed by mainstream historians. According to SSI notes, pointed out by Georgescu, though the liberals had first manifested "reserve" in contacting the Anglo-Saxons, they changed their mind the next month following the outbreak of war.<sup>369</sup> Thus, on the occasion of the Liberal Party's Board Session of 24th July, 1941, the liberal leaders decided "to take a more friendly stand towards England, and especially towards America, but also to support at the same time the State Ruler in his actions..."<sup>370</sup>

<sup>369</sup> Georgescu, În vizorul organelor de informații: Opoziția, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 42.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

According to Georgescu this friendly attitude towards the Anglo-Saxon Powers was actually pursued by the peasant leader Iuliu Maniu together with the anglophile liberal leader Dinu Brătianu. Georgescu points out that, according to SSI informative reports of that period, the two bourgeois leaders, by having kept themselves as the democratic political alternative to Antonescu and his regime and by having relied on the wisdom and goodwill of the Anglo-Saxons, had contacts with the Western Allies throughout the war. Thus, they found understanding on the part of the Anglo-Saxons over the legitimacy of Romania's liberation war of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine.<sup>371</sup> However, the contacts became more difficult once Romanian Army entered the proper Soviet soil, in late July 1941, but especially after the outbreak of war between Romania and the Anglo-Saxon Powers, in December the same year.<sup>372</sup> Georgescu emphasizes, that even after the Stalingrad defeat Gheorghe I. Brătianu was still against Dinu Brătianu's intention to officially contact the Western Allies. Thus, the SSI Note of March 3rd, 1943, was informing about Gheorghe I. Brătianu's reserve on the widespread drive within the liberal leadership "of sending abroad some envoys to contact the Allied circles, in order to sustain the cause of Romania beside the eventual victors, the Allied Powers."<sup>373</sup> Gheorghe I. Brătianu was opposing the action "because of the futile risks to which the Opposition leaders would have been exposed at home, and because the capitulation without conditions already demanded by the Allies would have set from the start under the question mark the efficiency of any eventual attempt."<sup>374</sup> According to Georgescu the actual negotiations, on which also the Romanian authorities were informed, started a year later, in the spring of 1944, with both the Western Allies and the Soviets, in Cairo and, respectively, Stockholm.

Thus, the interpretation given by Georgescu is, that anglophile Romanian liberals maintained the contacts with their British and American friends during the entire wartime period, and this despite the fact that since December 1941 their own countries were at war. The men abroad of the liberal leader Dinu Brătianu together with those of Iuliu Maniu made possible the link between their bosses and Anglo-Saxon politicians. However, official contacts between high liberal politicians and Anglo-Saxon officials had to wait until the spring of 1944. By then, the liberal leadership was united and willing to start peace negotiations with both the Anglo-Saxons and the Soviets.

<sup>371</sup> See in this sense: V. F. Dobrinescu & I. Constantin, *Basarabia în anii celui de-al doilea război mondial (1939 – 1947)*, 1995, p. 223-242.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

<sup>373</sup> Georgescu, *În vizorul organelor de informații: Opoziția*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 44.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid.



What about the liberal attitude towards the communists during the war? Before moving on we should first remark an essential thing. It was the very Liberal Party, in power position, which had actually banned the Communist Party in 1924. Romanian communists, to a large extent of other ethnic origin than Romanian ( Jews, Russians, Ukrainians, Hungarians ), were outlawed because they were seen by the liberals as the instruments of the international Bolshevism led by Moscow, and, thus, as the main danger to the security of the bourgeois United Romanian Nation-State, that is, of *Greater Romania*. For Romanian liberals, the pro-Soviet position that local communist had manifested on the occasion of the lost of the eastern provinces by Romania, in the summer of 1940, and on the occasion of the beginning of her anti-Soviet war, in June 1941, proved once more that the communists were extremists and the declared enemies of the Romanian State and People.

It shouldn't be a surprise, thus, that the liberals were hostile to the communists also during the war. They actually backed Antonescu's measures against the Communist Movement. This fact is revealed by official documents of the period and suggested by mainstream Romanian historians in their studies. Direct contacts between liberals and communists took place only towards the end of Romania's anti-Soviet war, during the spring and summer of 1944.

Thus, according to Georgescu the attitude to follow by the liberals towards Communist Party seems to have been decided a couple of days before the crossing of River Dniester by the Romanian Army. Georgescu emphasizes, that on the same occasion of the Liberal Party Board Session of 24th July, 1941, liberal leadership, among other things, also decided to support Antonescu " in combating the communist and legionnaire extremist tendencies."<sup>375</sup> The SSI Note of March 2nd, 1942, was informing about the attempts by the communists, less revolutionary and more eager to fight for democracy, to set up a patriotic front made up of all anti-German and antifascist Romanian political forces, " including even the capitalist national-liberals, the bourgeois national-peasants, and the anglophile democrats of all political color."<sup>376</sup> According to the SSI Note of February 12th, 1943, the communist attempt ultimately failed because democrat leaders, especially the liberal ones, didn't change their " initial deep reserve."<sup>377</sup> A fundamental attitude change by liberal leaders occurred only in May – June 1944. They joined the peasant and social-democratic leaders in meeting the communist ones, in order " to set up a large political alliance to overthrow Antonescu's

<sup>375</sup> Georgescu, În vizorul organelor de informații: Opoziția, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 42.

<sup>376</sup> Idem, p. 45.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

regime and get Romania out of war.”<sup>378</sup> Georgescu emphasizes, that multi-party talks were materialized on the 20th of June, 1944, with the setting up by the Liberal, Peasant, Social-Democratic and Communist Parties of the ” National Democratic Bloc ”, political alliance which backed King Michael I in removing Antonescu two months later, on 23rd August 1944.<sup>379</sup>

Georgescu’s interpretation is suggestive. Liberal leaders avoided for a long time any direct contact with the Communist Party, which was to their mind an extremist and anti-Romanian organization. Driven by their profound mistrust, they also denied all calls for collaboration expressed by the communists during the three years following the Axis attack on Soviet Union. When the Soviets arrived with their counter-offensive at the Romanian borders, in the spring of 1944, the liberals forgot their hostility and joined the communists in a multi-party political alliance against Antonescu Regime. Georgescu’s interpretation is shared by majority mainstream historians. We may add, that other official documents of that time, brought in recently, confirm the facts. The liberals actually rejected for many years any contact and collaboration with the Communist Party because, on the one hand, of the pro-Soviet stand by the latter on Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine and, on the other hand, because of the sabotage acts and calls for sabotage by the communists.<sup>380</sup>

What was the liberal stand towards Iron Guard during the anti-Soviet war? According to mainstream historians the liberals were more hostile to the Guard members than to the communists. The fact is confirmed by SSI reports of the period brought in by Troncotă. Thus, a SSI document of synthesis of November 13th, 1941, dealing with domestic political situation, informed among other things, that the liberals Dinu and Gheorghe Brătianu were seeing the legionnaires as ” unconscious instruments always ready to be driven against Romania’s interests ”, while the Great Bourgeoisie was manifesting ” her obvious horror ” towards Iron Guard.<sup>381</sup> According to Troncotă, when Antonescu’s worsening health condition became public, SSI organized another opinion test, on July 8th, 1942, to find out the position of the political leaders towards Iron Guard. The SSI document was informing, Troncotă suggests, about the real concern among the peasants and liberal leaders on

<sup>378</sup> Georgescu, *În vizorul organelor de informații: Opoziția*, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 45.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid.

<sup>380</sup> See, for example, the documents: *1942 decembrie 20, București*. Scrisoarea C.C. al P.C.R. adresată lui Iuliu Maniu, președintele P.N.T., îndemnând la adoptarea unei atitudini comune față de problemele păcii și războiului implicând România. Biblioteca Academiei Române, Arhiva Istorică, cota A XXVI-9. In Arimia & Ardeleanu & Cebuc ( edit. ), 1994, p. 204-208; *1943, octombrie 21*. Nota Serviciului Secret de Informații referitoare la opiniile expuse de Iuliu Maniu față de propunerile P.C.R. pentru organizarea unui Comitet Național de Luptă. Arhiva Ministerului de Interne, București, dosar special nr. 3854, vol. 4, partea a II-a, filele 529-531. In Arimia & Ardeleanu & Cebuc ( edit. ), 1994, p. 223-225.

<sup>381</sup> Troncotă, *SSI versus Mișcarea Legionară*, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 4, 1997, p. 24.

the eventual comeback of Iron Guard. The fears of the liberals are clearly revealed by the SSI document: "The only political force on the ground which is organized is the legionnaire one. Its unique and active presence makes difficult the everyday call-ups of the disgruntled and poor persons, particularly hit by the distress caused by war. The bourgeoisie and middle class are confused, lacking initiative and courage: the peasant population has incoherent tendencies, which any extreme could channel tomorrow."<sup>382</sup> On the other hand, according to the already mentioned SSI document of November 13th, 1941, for the majority Romanian public clerks, intellectuals, and small bourgeoisie, the legionnaires were representing "the instability, uncertainty, and lack of competence."<sup>383</sup> According to Troncotă the liberals did assist Antonescu most in his measures against the Guard members during the war, first because the latter was their common enemy, to whom also large categories of Romanians were against. Second, by having been aware that for Antonescu "the political reserve for the future" was represented by the Liberal and Peasant Parties, and not by Iron Guard, the liberals acted in consequence.<sup>384</sup>

Thus, we can reinterpret Troncotă's suggestions in the sense, that political reasons were at the origin of the liberal hostility towards Iron Guard. Although dismantled at the top, Iron Guard continued, through its well organized members on the ground, to be influential among the distressed categories of population, especially among the poor in the countryside. By seeing themselves, together with the peasants, as the sole political alternative to Antonescu's military regime, the liberals had all reasons to support the measures taken by the *Conducător* against the Guard members throughout the war. In other words, the liberals provided Antonescu with their full support in blocking Iron Guard's intended comeback to power because this was not an hypothetical issue, but a real threat coming from both inside and outside Romania (the still large support to Iron Guard in the countryside, and Hitler's possible blackmail on Antonescu through the Guard leadership present in Germany since January 1941). This interpretation can be seen as representing the main orientation on this aspect by post-communist historians.

Our viewpoints on the liberal attitude towards the two extremes are similar. We may just add, that the liberals opposed both the communists and the legionnaires, the former rather for their ideology, the latter for their political weight. As an immediate threat, the Guard was most opposed by them.

<sup>382</sup> Troncotă, SSI *versus* Mișcarea Legionară, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 4, 1997, p. 25

<sup>383</sup> *Idem*, p. 24.

<sup>384</sup> *Idem*, p. 25.

The National Peasant Party, too, was banned by Antonescu in January 1941 and its activity supervised by Romanian secret services throughout the war. Under the leadership of the anglophile Iuliu Maniu and Ion Mihalache, the party refused twice its participation to a pro-German government led by Antonescu, in September 1940 and, respectively, January 1941. As we know already, following the Guard defeat by Antonescu they suggested him, in common with the liberal leaders, the setting up of a military government. However, in contrast to liberal leadership, the peasant leaders denied also the unofficial participation of the party members to Antonescu's administration. Indeed, if we take a look at Lăzărescu's list, we may find, that there was no active peasant personality among the officials used by Antonescu between 1941 and 1944. The only exception was that of a former peasant politician, Prof. Petre Strihan ( in Law and History of Law ), acting under Antonescu's military regime as the Secretary of State for Administration at the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>385</sup>

So, what was the wartime activity of the Peasant Party in contrast to that carried out by the Liberal Party, as it is seen by mainstream historians?

The general stand that the peasant leaders had towards Antonescu and his wartime military regime is best revealed by a secret services synthesis document of that time, dealing with the activity carried out by the Peasant Party and his leader Iuliu Maniu, between September 1940 and May 1943. Thus, according to the SSI Report of May 1943, to Maniu's mind Antonescu Government was " a simple instrument in German hands ", and Romania " virtually occupied by the military forces of the Third Reich."<sup>386</sup> He called the Nation " to oppose the German protectorate, and join the victorious Britain and America."<sup>387</sup> Neverthelss, advised by his peasant fellows to calm down his " anti-German and pro-Allied action ", in order not to add troubles to the government, Maniu had to agree in principle that Antonescu Government " was corresponding to a national necessity " so far German supremacy was obvious in that area of Europe, and that " it was preferable to any government directly set up by the Germans."<sup>388</sup> Thus, although being against the authoritarian and pro-German character of Antonescu Regime, the peasant leadership saw it, even after the Stalingrad

<sup>385</sup> Lăzărescu, O chestiune de drept: sare pe rana deschisă, Aldine, Nr. 93, 6 decembrie, 1997, p. III.

<sup>386</sup> 1943, mai. Concluzii ale raportului Serviciului Secret de Informații asupra activității Partidului Național Țărănesc și a președintelui său Iuliu Maniu pe perioada 1 septembrie 1940 – mai 1943. In Arimia & Ardeleanu & Cebuc ( edit. ), 1994, p. 214.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid

<sup>388</sup> Idem, p. 215.

defeat, as the only viable political formula in the given situation.

The interpretations by mainstream historians go in the sense above, too. According to Troncotă the peasant leaders, too, were concerned during the whole summer of 1942 over Antonescu's health condition, that is, about what his physical disappearance might have meant for Romania in those wary circumstances. Troncotă emphasizes, that Maniu's comments on that occasion were exactly reproduced by the SSI report of July 8th, 1942: "Despite the existing fundamental differences between us and Antonescu Regime, we have always considered that it is necessary in the present circumstances. We didn't oppose it actually, and all our statements have been made rather for the outside world, and in order to deter the government from taking some initiatives in collaboration with the Germans. Marshal's eventual disappearance would be in the present situation a real catastrophe for the country."<sup>389</sup> As for Georgescu, she suggests that Ion Mihalache, in dispute with Maniu, was the one among the peasant leaders who had backed most Antonescu a year later. According to Georgescu the SSI Note of April 12th, 1943, is eloquent on Mihalache's stand: "We don't know yet to which extent the final victory would be obtained by the Anglo-Saxon Powers, and what would be the Soviet participation to it. Because of this, all plans for the future are premature. German military force is still powerful, so that the mission is not finished for Antonescu Government, on the contrary, it should be assisted, because it is the best political formula as far as the Germans are strong."<sup>390</sup> Romanian historian points out that, according to the SSI Note of July 15th, 1943, thus three months later, the majority peasant leaders, including Maniu, were sharing Mihalache's stand that Antonescu Government was still a necessity. Thus, the peasant leaders agreed to take no action against the regime, because its removal would have meant in those circumstances, "whether a German attack on Romania, or a combined Hungarian-Bulgarian attack on her supported by the Germans, so that, the right moment was not there yet."<sup>391</sup> Georgescu emphasizes, that another SSI Note, dated December 17th, 1943, pointing out a statement by Maniu, reveals no change of attitude: "For the present, we must continue our policy, and we should not create difficulties to Marshal Antonescu in his policy close by the Germans. That shouldn't be understood as our support to his policy, but as our determination to avoid additional troubles for the country."<sup>392</sup> Georgescu points out, that a change of attitude by peasant leadership could be observed

<sup>389</sup> Troncotă, *SSI versus Mișcarea Legionară*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 4, 1997, p. 24-25.

<sup>390</sup> Georgescu, *În vizorul organelor de informații: Opoziția*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 44.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*

only in the spring of 1944. Thus, Molotov's statement of April 2nd, 1944, that Soviet Union was intending neither to annex territory from Romania, nor to change her social system, and the moderate terms of the Soviet armistice proposals of April 12th, rejected by Antonescu, did encourage Maniu and the Opposition to prepare themselves "for immediate talks with the Soviet Government in order to leave the war."<sup>393</sup> Georgescu emphasizes that, according to SSI notes of June 1944, Maniu and the other leaders of the National Democratic Bloc were still believing by then, due to the dramatic situation on the front, that Antonescu would ultimately sign up the armistice himself and step down. By August, the same year, it became obvious, Georgescu concludes, for both Maniu and other Opposition leaders that, despite the presence of the Red Army in the north of Romania, Antonescu had no intention to surrender, or to leave power, so that they had to suggest and support King Michael I in removing him, on the 23rd of August 1944.

We can suggest that mainstream historians are unanimous in their interpretations on the general attitude that the Peasant Party and its leaders had towards Antonescu and his regime. The Peasant Party leadership neither actively supported, nor directly opposed Antonescu and his regime. The anglophile Maniu and his peasant fellows protested indeed against the authoritarian rule of Antonescu, but, nevertheless, they saw his wartime regime as a national necessity for most of the time. It was not until the spring of 1944, when the Red Army was already at the Romanian eastern borders, that the peasants seriously thought about the possible removal from power of Antonescu Regime. In contrast to Liberal Party, which directly supported Antonescu (with the exception of Dinu Brătianu and his anglophile liberals) through both its pro-German wing led by Gheorghe I. Bratiănu and the liberal technocrats present within the wartime governments, the Peasant Party provided no active support to the *Conducător*. Nevertheless, by having limited own opposition to mere harmless protests, the peasant leaders, as the representatives of the biggest Romanian political organization, did actually enable Antonescu and his regime to stay in power for over three years.

We believe that post-communist historians are right in putting under quotation marks also the wartime activity unfolded by Iuliu Maniu and his party colleagues. Thus, despite the fact that they were more active in their actions than the liberals, as we shall see next, Maniu's peasants can be seen as having represented rather the "Opposition" than the Opposition to Antonescu and his wartime regime. Other documents confirm that mainstream historians are right in their approach.

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<sup>393</sup> Georgescu, *În vizorul organelor de informații: Opoziția*, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 45.

If they shared in common with the liberals the same views on the territorial issues, the peasants were, nevertheless, more critical on the anti-Soviet war in general. The fact is revealed by many documents of the period brought in by mainstream historians. According to Georgescu the two peasant leaders, Maniu and Mihalache, decided on the 24th of June 1941, that is a couple of days following the Axis attack on Soviet Union, to suspend the party activity but, at the same time, ” to provide their support at home to the State Ruler in his military action of regaining the boundaries in the East.”<sup>394</sup> Georgescu suggests that, in conformity with reports by the secret services, the peasant attitude changed once Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine were freed from Soviets, in late July 1941, and it was to remain a critical one for the whole period of Romania’s war across the Dniester. Thus, the notice of August 9th, 1941, by the Police Headquarters was making known about Maniu’s fears, expressed to his friends, on ” the danger of carrying on with the military actions across the Dniester by the Romanian Army.”<sup>395</sup> Georgescu emphasizes, that Maniu’s concern was the loss of the whole province of Transylvania to the Hungarians, in exchange for territories in the East provided by the Germans. The notice by the Police is revealing: ” Mr. Maniu considers that General Antonescu will oppose by the time Germany would openly rise this issue, but < he’s not aware of the trap he’s moving in >, and that’s why he believes that Romanian public opinion, or at least traditional political parties, should be prepared in due time to resist such an eventuality.”<sup>396</sup> Georgescu’s suggestions on the critical stand by the peasants towards the anti-Soviet war are confirmed in a more condensed form by the already mentioned SSI Report of May 1943:

” ... Although hostile to the Axis, he [ a.n., Maniu ] couldn’t oppose from the beginning the war for the liberation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine supported with an open heart by the entire Romanian public opinion. After the reoccupation of the provinces by our army Maniu found the most important theme for his agitation activity: he started to ask for the troops withdrawal on the Dniester line, though it is obvious that from a technical military point of view it is impossible, and to demand the cessation of the collaboration with the Axis before the eastern military campaign came to an end. He motivated his demands by the imminent danger for us to get involved in an aggression war, and to bear close by the Axis a defeat which to his mind is certain. While our troops were moving farther east together with the German ones, Maniu intensified his action and used any occasion to sustain with increasing determination his point of view – through memorandums and all kind of manifestations. He’s still asking for the troops withdrawal, by arguing that our losses serve only for a foreign cause, and that an eventual Hungarian-Bulgarian attack, or a possible domestic turmoil caused by the post-war realities, both demand to have in place a strong military capacity...”<sup>397</sup>

<sup>394</sup> Georgescu, *În vizorul organelor de informații: Opoziția, Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 41.

<sup>395</sup> *Idem*, p. 43

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>397</sup> *1943, mai. Concluzii ale raportului Serviciului Secret de Informații asupra activității Partidului Național Țărănesc și a președintelui său Iuliu Maniu pe perioada 1 sept. 1940 – mai 1943. În Arimia & Ardeleanu & Cebuc (edit.), 1994, p. 217.*

In conclusion, the study of the archive documents by mainstream historians makes them suggest that, in comparison with the liberal point of view, the peasant attitude *vis-à-vis* the anti-Soviet war was more critical. Thus, the peasants didn't oppose the liberation of the eastern provinces, but they manifested however their disagreement with the continuation of the military actions across the Dniester River, that is on the proper Soviet territory. Romanian historians suggest two main reasons why Maniu and his Peasant Party were against Romania's war on the Soviet territory: because of their concern on the post-war tragical consequences for Romania of having been involved in an aggression war won by the Allies; and because of their fears that, Romanian Army being involved on the Eastern Front, Revisionist Hungary and Bulgaria would have find the right occasion to occupy the whole of Transylvania and, respectively, Dobrougea. Nevertheless, according to mainstream historians the notes and reports of that time by the Romanian secret services reveal the fact that there was no active opposition by the Peasant Party to the anti-Soviet war. The peasants were more critical than the liberals only in their manifestations and notes of protest addressed to Antonescu.

As for us, we may suggest that, by having limited their opposition to war to mere actions of protest, however energetic they might have been, the Peasant Party, too, did provide Antonescu and his wartime military regime the opportunity to stay in power until the summer of 1944.

Mainstream historians suggest in their latest writings that there was a differentiation between the liberals and the peasants also in their stance on the Communist and Legionnaire Movements. As we already know, the liberals openly opposed both extremes and did avoid any contacts with them, with the communists until the spring of 1944. On the other hand, although officially opposing the two movements because of their totalitarian ideology the peasants didn't hesitate to have contacts with both of them during the war.

Georgescu suggests that, in conformity with many reports by the secret services, the peasants had contacts at different levels with the communists during the whole war, all of them in order to set up a large front of all Romanian democratic forces ready to challenge an eventual Soviet hegemony in the area. Thus, according to the SSI Note of January 29th, 1942, pointed out by Georgescu, it was an earlier idea by Maniu to bring together the Opposition, " in order not to be surprised by the events in the case that the Soviets would be in the position to have a decisive word at an eventual



peace conference presided by the Allied Powers.”<sup>398</sup> According to Georgescu the initiative to set up an all-party patriotic front was taken over by the Communist Party in late 1942, but without success. Thus, in conformity with the SSI Report of February 12th, 1943, all consultations ” led to no result ” , because the democratic party leaders maintained themselves ” in a deep reserve.”<sup>399</sup> What was the reason of that reserve, not only on the part of the peasant leaders but of all other democratic ones, can be found within the letter of December 20th, 1942, addressed by the communist leadership to the peasant leaders, letter dealt with in the beginning of this chapter. The peasants set two pre-conditions before considering to join an eventual all-party patriotic front: a ” public declaration ” by the Communist Party in favor of the 1939 borders; and the Soviet ” official consent ” to restore those boundaries.<sup>400</sup> According to Georgescu all further efforts to build an united front of the Opposition remained dead letter. It was not before the spring of 1944, when the Soviet danger was imminent, that the bourgeois leaders forgot their reserve towards the communists and joined them against Antonescu and his regime. For Georgescu, the SSI Note of June 7th, 1944, is revealing on this aspect. In conformity with the note, the Allied landing in Normandy, the withdrawal of many German divisions from the Soviet Front, and the conviction in an imminent Soviet offensive, all of them ” produced a deep worry among the Opposition forces.”<sup>401</sup> That is why, it is said in the note, Maniu saw the agreement concluded with the communists as ” a success for the Democratic Opposition.”<sup>402</sup> According to Georgescu that led to the setting up of the ” National Democratic Bloc ” , on the 20th of June the same year.<sup>403</sup>

Thus, both the archive documents investigated and commented by Georgescu and other documents, presented but less commented by mainstream historians, all reveal the wartime continuous contacts between the peasant and communist leaderships. The purpose was the setting up of a political alliance to face an eventual Soviet threat to Romania’s independence. The main obstacle in the way was, from June 1941 until June 1944, the different stand by the two parties on the Bessarabian issue. It was not before the Soviet threat became imminent that the peasants, liberals , social-democrats and the communists set up the National Democratic Bloc against Antonescu Regime.

<sup>398</sup> Georgescu, În vizerul organelor de informații: Opoziția, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 45.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid.

<sup>400</sup> 1942 decembrie 20, București. Scrisoarea C.C. al P.C.R. adresată lui Iuliu Maniu, președintele P.N.Ț., indemnând la adoptarea unei atitudini comune față de problemele păcii și războiului implicând România. In Arimia & Ardeleanu & Cebuc ( edit. ), 1994, p. 205.

<sup>401</sup> Georgescu, În vizerul organelor de informații: Opoziția, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 46.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

<sup>403</sup> Idem, p. 45.

Archive documents of the time brought in by mainstream Romanian historians reveal a rather similar peasant attitude towards Iron Guard. Peasant Party was officially against the eventual return to power of the Guard, but on the ground the peasants were all the time in touch with its members. Thus, according to Troncotă a Guard return was not at all welcome by the peasants. Troncotă emphasizes Maniu's official stand on the Legionnaire Movement as it is revealed by the SSI Report of July 8th, 1942, time when Antonescu's health condition was very bad:

"... Marshal's eventual death would be in the present situation a true catastrophe for the country. We have decided to support him, of course to the extent and in the way we could do it, because of his recent position towards the Germans [ a.n., among other things, the limitation of the German control over Romanian economy and a more fair mutual trade]. A legionnaire solution is not possible. No sacrifices would be in vain in order to avoid any adventure, whether a legionnaire one, or of other kind."<sup>404</sup>

In other words, Troncotă's suggestions can be reinterpreted in the sense, that Maniu and his Peasant Party saw in Iron Guard during the war, due to its total German orientation, a greater danger for Romania than that represented by Antonescu himself.

In reality the peasant stand towards the Guard was more conciliatory, as it is revealed in the SSI Report of May 1943:

"... According to Corneliu Codreanu's political testament, any time the Movement was in difficulty, or was going to take important decisions, Maniu was to be consulted first. Horia Sima didn't care about it, but after the collapse of the Legionnaire Regime many representatives of the Movement have started to contact Maniu. This one reproached them with the grave errors they had done previously. Although Maniu would want to use the dynamics of the legionnaires for the revisionist cause [ a.n., the issue of Northern Transylvania ], the existing differences on the foreign policy are blocking the collaboration between them. He's facing both the legionnaires' reserve and the opposition of the youth within his own party. Maniu himself, Ghiță Popp, Mr. Solomon, Zaharia Băilă and other local party leaders are in permanent contact with the legionnaires. Attacked by the party left for these relations, he motivates them through the need to be informed with what's happen in all political circles. He's advising now the legionnaires not to serve as a German instrument against Antonescu, and not to cause through their attitude new concessions of military and economic order..."<sup>405</sup>

<sup>404</sup> Troncotă, SSI *versus* Mișcarea Legionară, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 4, 1997, p. 25.

<sup>405</sup> 1943, *mai*. Concluzii ale raportului Serviciului Secret de Informații asupra activității Partidului Național Țărănesc și a presedintelui său Iuliu Maniu pe perioada 1 septembrie 1940 – mai 1943. In Arimia & Ardeleanu & Cebuc ( edit. ), 1994, p. 218-219.

The SSI report reveals, thus, two main reasons why the peasants maintained their contacts with Iron Guard during the war. First, the Guard members were seen as potential assistants in an eventual action to take back Northern Transylvania. Second, Maniu and his party wanted to persuade the Legionnaire Movement's members not to cause by their actions against Antonescu new economic and military concessions to Germany.

Thus, the interpretations by mainstream historians and the informative data provided by the wartime secret services documents make us suggest that, although Maniu's peasants were against the eventual political comeback of the Legionnaire Movement, they were, nevertheless, in touch with the Guard members. They did it in order to stop eventual actions by the Guard against Antonescu, seen as serving the German interests, and to ensure its support in an eventual revisionist action.

We believe, in our turn, that Antonescu obviously knew about all the contacts which the peasants had with both the communists and Iron Guard members, the information provided by the wartime secret services documents suggesting such an assumption. We may go even further, by asserting that the *Conducător* had all reasons not to block such contacts. On the one hand, the communists were the sole link to Soviet Union, that is the only "official" channel through which the reactions, intentions and eventual Soviet proposals of any kind might have been made known to the Romanian wartime leadership. On the other hand, all means to temper Iron Guard's intended actions, serving only to the strengthening of the German interests in the detriment of the Romanian State, must have been welcome by Antonescu himself. More than that, Antonescu never gave up his intention to take back Northern Transylvania at a certain point in time. Despite their mutual mistrust, the mass potential of the Guard might have played an important role in such an eventual endeavour. For us, it is obvious that Antonescu was properly informed about Maniu's contacts with both political extremes. But, by having instructed all Romanian secret services just to supervise and not to interfere, he actually allowed Maniu and his peasants do the job for him, and prepare themselves to take over the power eventually. Antonescu might have done occasional mistakes, but contrary to what some of his contemporaries and present historians thought, or are thinking about his political abilities, he left room for all eventualities. For us, by having acted so Antonescu turned to be not only an able political strategist, but he also manifested his deep concern and genuine responsibility *vis-à-vis* the Romanian People's fate. Antonescu was the one who had to choose sides for Romania and act in conformity with the immediate objective realities. He didn't do it blindly, however.

Antonescu showed wisdom also as regards to the contacts abroad of the anglophile Peasant Party, about which he knew and let them continue during the war. On the one hand, he did close his eyes on Maniu's contacts with the Anglo-Saxon Powers until the Stalingrad defeat because these were the main channel to explain Romania's difficult position, the fact that the ongoing participation to the anti-Soviet war was for Romania her own war against Soviet Union who had been the aggressor in the summer of 1940. On the other hand, since February 1943, when the final victory by the Allied Powers started to look more likely, and until his own fall in August 1944, Antonescu did actually encourage, though indirectly, the peasants to use all their influence besides the Anglo-Saxons and, later, the Soviets for eventual armistice talks.

Mainstream historians suggest that informative reports and notes of the period by the secret services confirm the existence of all these links, which were more dense in contrast to the liberal ones. The same SSI Report of May 1943 informed best through whom, and why, Maniu and his Peasant Party, as the representatives of the "so called Free Movement in Romania", had maintained by then their connection with the Western Allies.<sup>406</sup> At home, the contacts with the Anglo-Saxon governments were carried out directly through the high officials at the British and American Legations in Bucharest, until their departure in late 1941 caused by the warfare situation. Thereafter, the links were carried on through the Swiss, Portuguese, Swedish and, especially, Turkish officials in Romania who made the link with the British and American secret services in Ankara, Istanbul and Cairo. The contacts abroad were carried out through: Citta Davilla in Washington (Romanian Ambassador there before September 1940), who assured the link there with the White House, British Legation, Soviet Ambassador and other governments-in-exile; Cornel Bianu, Maniu's own man, in London; British and American secret services in Istanbul, Ankara and Cairo charged to deal with the Romanian Free Movement. According to the SSI document Maniu carried out his diplomatic action for three reasons. First, he wanted to initiate direct contacts with both the British and the American government. Second, for Maniu such contacts were needed in order to enlighten the Anglo-Saxons about Romania's political and territorial problems. Third, and most important, the peasant leader wanted to obtain the British and American assurances and guarantees over both Romania's territorial order and her position within the eventual confederation of states planned by the Western Allies. Maniu was still waiting, in May 1943, "that British and American governments

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<sup>406</sup> 1943, *mai*. Concluzii ale raportului Serviciului Secret de Informații asupra activității Partidului Național Țărănesc și a președintelui său Iuliu Maniu pe perioada 1 septembrie – mai 1943. In Arimia & Ardeleanu & Cebuc ( edit. ), 1994, p. 220.

should get from the Soviets clarifications and guaranties concerning Romania, and that they should agree upon a clear policy in connection to all territorial and political problems.”<sup>407</sup>

Thus, the SSI synthesis report of May 1943 enables us suggest that Peasant Party didn't cease its contacts with the Anglo-Saxon Powers after the beginning of Romania's attack on Soviet Union, on the 22nd of June, 1941. The contacts were first carried on directly through the British and American officials in Bucharest. After their departure in late 1941 due to the warfare, the links between the two sides were carried out, on the one hand, through the diplomats of the neutral countries in Romania ( Switzerland, Sweden, Portugal and, especially, Turkey ) and, on the other hand, through Maniu's own men in Washington, London, Lisbon, Stockholm, Istanbul, Ankara and Cairo. The reading of the entire document makes us also suggest, that they were two main reasons why Maniu wanted to maintain the links with the Western Allies. Maniu wanted first to enlighten the western governments on the political and territorial problems of Romania: the country was virtually occupied by Nazi Germany and, as such, irresponsible of its policy; the war for the liberation of the eastern provinces was a legitime one sustained by all Romanians; the war on the proper Soviet territory was imposed on Romania under pressure by Hitler; Northern Transylvania was yielded to Hungary under German pressure and must be returned; Romanian Opposition was pro-Allied and ready to act at the right time. Second, the peasant leader wanted from the Anglo-Saxons a clear policy towards Romania before the Opposition could properly act against both Antonescu and the Axis: to persuade, or to make pressure on the Soviets to guarantee Romania's territorial integrity as it was by 1939; to open a new front in the Balkans, that is, the landing of the Allies there; to guarantee Romania's place within the confederation of states possibly envisaged by the victorious Western Allies after the war, one ranging eventually from Poland down to Turkey ( the so called *Tardieu Plan* ).

The contacts and their purposes are confirmed by other SSI documents commented by Georgescu in her article. Thus, according to the SSI Note of July 23rd, 1941, Maniu met several times Gunther Mott, the American Ambassador, in order ” to determine the United States Government to make the difference between the Romanian Government < enslaved by Germany > and the Romanian State

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<sup>407</sup> 1943, mai. Concluzii ale raportului Serviciului Secret de Informații asupra activității Partidului Național Țărănesc și a președintelui său Iuliu Maniu pe perioada 1 septembrie 1940 – mai 1943. In Arimia & Ardeleanu & Cebuc ( edit. ), 1994, p. 222.

which was under German occupation.”<sup>408</sup> On the other hand, Maniu’s hope to get Western Allies’ understanding on Romania’s difficult situation after the Stalingrad defeat was not shared by all within the Peasant Party. Even Ion Mihalache, the other peasant leader, was skeptical about the goodwill of the Allied Powers towards Romania, Georgescu suggests. She emphasizes that the SSI Note of March 11th, 1943, is revealing on the different stand by the two peasant leaders: ” In contrast to Maniu and his advocates, Mihalache doesn’t believe that any political promise made to Maniu by the Englishmen could provide security for our borders, neither that a mere diplomatic arrangement between Britain and Soviet Union would deter the Red Army from marching forwards beyond an eventual arbitrary diplomatic line decided in London.”<sup>409</sup> For Georgescu, the unfolding of the events was to prove Mihalache was right, though the ” transaction ” place was not London.<sup>410</sup> She certainly means by that Moscow, where, between October 9th and 18th, 1944, Churchill met Stalin and agreed upon the percent division of Eastern Europe ( 90% of Romania to the Soviets ).<sup>411</sup> We can interpret, thus, Georgescu’s suggestions in the sense that Maniu, as the recognized leader of the Romanian Opposition, was in continuous touch with the Anglo-Saxon representatives, both at home and abroad, since the beginning of Romania’s anti-Soviet war and until the defeat at Stalingrad. The purpose was to explain Western Allies that Romania, at war with them too, was an occupied country irresponsible of its foreign policy. Maniu was still believing by early 1943 that Romania was not abandoned by them to the Soviets.

According to mainstream historians the realities on the ground, and not the goodwill, were those which ultimately determined the actual actions by the Peasant Party, on the one side, and Anglo-Saxon Powers, on the other. According to Georgescu a SSI document of July 1943 informed about Maniu’s change of attitude on the ongoing events: ” Romania’s interest is that the war should be fought far and wide from her borders, because the Balkans and the oil fields as operational war targets would lay waste the country, on the one hand, and, on the other, would set Romania in a difficult position both to the Germans and the Allies, because she would have to decide for, or against the intervention by the Anglo-Saxons.”<sup>412</sup> Maniu was hopping in an Allied landing in Norway, France, or Italy, which would ease military pressure on Romania and grant her ” the time

<sup>408</sup> Georgescu, *În vizorul organelor de informații: Opoziția, Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 42.

<sup>409</sup> *Idem*, p. 43.

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>411</sup> See for more details: V. F. Dobrinescu & I. Constantin, *Basarabia în anii celui de al doilea război mondial ( 1939 – 1947 )*, 1995, p. 289-290.

<sup>412</sup> Georgescu, *În vizorul organelor de informații: Opoziția, Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 44.

and the possibility to decide over the best stand to take.”<sup>413</sup> Thus, in conformity with another SSI document brought in by Georgescu, after the meeting in Moscow, in October 1943, between the Soviet, British, and American foreign ministers, the attitude for Romania to take became clear for both Maniu and his party: ” The only wise policy to follow is to find the way to get into direct contact with the Soviet Government, since the British and American ones still have an undecided position towards Romania. ”<sup>414</sup> For Georgescu, direct armistice negotiations with the Soviets had to wait, however, the spring of 1944. In other words, Georgescu’s interpretation is, that by the end of 1943 Maniu and his party did acknowledge the fact that Romania was already abandoned by the Anglo-Saxons to the Soviets.

The fact that the objective realities did matter most also for the Western Allies, after the defeat of the Axis at Stalingrad, is well suggested by Ion Constantin. Revealing are the words by the British Foreign Minister of the time, Anthony Eden, quoted as such by Constantin from two authors. A month after the defeat at Stalingrad, Eden said: ” Our policy towards Romania is subordinated to our relations with the Soviet Union, and we don’t want either to accept an arrangement, or to carry out any action without the full acknowledgement and consent of the Soviet Government.”<sup>415</sup> Moreover, on the occasion of the same meeting in Moscow, already mentioned above, British Foreign Minister, among other things, declared: ” British Government believes that Soviet Union has the right to decide alone over the matters concerning Romania, Finland, and Hungary, since the Red Army alone is still fighting against them.”<sup>416</sup> According to Constantin, after the Teheran Conference of ” The Big Three ”, the Romanian Minister in Ankara, Alexandru Cretzianu, informed Bucharest, on December 15th, 1943, that it meant ” the sealing of the full solidarity between the Anglo-Saxons and the Russians, the former being ready to make great concessions to Soviet Union in order to persuade her to carry on at the maximum the war efforts.”<sup>417</sup> Constantin points out that the Americans were ” more nuanced ” in their official stand.<sup>418</sup> Although recognizing the Soviet interests, in March 1943 they were still in favor for the maintenance of Romania as ” an independent state, with a proper territory enabling such a thing.”<sup>419</sup> In conformity

<sup>413</sup> Georgescu, În vizorul organelor de informații: Opoziția, Dosarele Istoriei, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 44.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

<sup>415</sup> Dobrinescu & Constantin, 1995, p. 257. Quotation from: Paul Quinlan, Clash over Romania: British and American Policies toward Romania 1938 – 1947, Los Angeles, 1977, p. 84.

<sup>416</sup> Idem, p. 265. Quotation from: Nicolae Baci, Agonia României 1944 – 1948, Ed. Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1990, p. 95-96.

<sup>417</sup> Idem, p. 266. Citation from: Arhivele Ministerului Afacerilor Externe, fond 71/Turcia, 1943, vol. 5, f. 200.

<sup>418</sup> Idem, p. 257.

<sup>419</sup> Idem, p. 258. Quotation from: Quinlan, 1977, p. 89.

with other archive documents the American attitude remained quite the same by the end of 1943, Constantin emphasizes. Thus, with Antonescu's consent, Maniu's envoys contacted several times the American Ambassador in Madrid, Carlton Hayes. He said to the Romanians in October 1943 that, in contrast to the British Government, his government "made no commitment to Russia concerning Romania", because the American Senate was reluctant to any agreement allowing the strengthening of the Soviet supremacy in Europe.<sup>420</sup> Hayes also added that President Roosevelt was willing to "preserve Romania's independence", and even ready to threaten Soviet Union with the refusal of the intended economic assistance for her post-war reconstruction, with the only condition that Marshal Antonescu himself should desert the Axis and sign up the armistice.<sup>421</sup> A month later, on November the 14th, Hayes told the Romanian envoy that the Allies had agreed on the "unconditional surrender" formula for the Axis countries and, thus, Romania could be "no exception."<sup>422</sup> However, for Romania that would have meant "the avoidance of her total occupation by the Russians, and even in Bessarabia and Bukovine the occupying authorities would have to work under the control of an Inter-Allied Commission."<sup>423</sup> Constantin points out, that the same formulation was ventilated by the Anglo-Saxons also in Lisbon both to Antonescu's official representative there, Minister Victor Cădere, and to Maniu's own man, Ion Pangal. According to Constantin direct official contacts between Romania and the Soviet Union were initiated in late December 1943 in Stockholm. Romanian Minister there, Frederic C. Nanu, met several times Alexandra Kollontai, the Soviet Ambassador. After many negotiations the Soviets renounced the "unconditional capitulation" term and, accordingly, offered Marshal Antonescu armistice "conditions."<sup>424</sup> Thus, Constantin's interpretation is obvious. During the whole year of 1943 there was a quite clear difference between the two Anglo-Saxon Powers in their position towards Romania: Great Britain seems to have abandoned her to the Soviets already from early 1943, while, by the end of the same year, the United States was still seeking to preserve her independence, though in a reduced shape. Maniu himself, as chief of the Romanian Opposition, did acknowledge the necessity for direct talks with the Soviets by mid-1943. Despite his increasing skepticism he maintained, nevertheless, his links with the Western Allies until the summer of 1944 because he saw himself, and his party, as the most likely political alternative to Antonescu Regime.

<sup>420</sup> Dobrinescu & Constantin, 1995, p. 267. Quotation from: Documente și memorii privind alăturarea României la coaliția antihitleristă (1943 – 1947), vol. I, Institutul Superior de Înalte Studii Politice, p. 10-11.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.

<sup>422</sup> Idem, p. 268. Quotation from: idem, p. 17.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid. See more details in: N. Baciú, *Agonia României 1944 – 1948*, Cuj-Napoca, 1990, p. 38.



We can promote some conclusions now on the activity abroad by the Peasant Party. According to mainstream historians the anglophile Iuliu Maniu and his party were in continuous contact with the official British and American representatives both in Romania and abroad since the beginning of the anti-Soviet war and until the fall of Antonescu, that is, from June 1941 until August 1944. The Soviets were contacted in their turn towards the end of 1943. By seeing themselves as the representatives of the Democratic Opposition to Antonescu Regime, and thus as the governing alternative, Maniu and his party fellows spared no effort in order to plead their own and Romania's cause beside Western Allies, seen by them as the final victors of the ongoing war. These contacts can be divided in three phases in conformity with their purposes, as they are revealed by archive documents and accordingly interpreted by mainstream historians. During the first phase, from the outbreak of war and until the defeat at Stalingrad, that is, between June 1941 and February 1943, the peasant leader Iuliu Maniu tried: to get for himself and for his party Western Allies' recognition as the main force within Romanian Democratic Opposition; to explain that Romania was virtually occupied by Nazi Germany and as such irresponsible of her official foreign policy; to explain that Antonescu Regime was not representing the Romanian People, being a government imposed by the circumstances; to explain that Romania's war on the very Soviet territory was imposed on her by Hitler and that it was not welcome by the majority Romanians. The second phase, between February and December 1943, was full of uncertainties for Maniu and his party, driving them from hope to despair. Maniu expected a massive Allied landing either in the Balkans or, better, elsewhere in the occupied Europe, enabling thus Romanian Opposition to rise to power and Romania to desert the war along by the Axis. Neither happened, and Maniu acknowledged that the Anglo-Saxons had already renounced to have a say on the Romanian problems on behalf of the Soviets. The contacts were however maintained. Peasant Party and his leader understood towards the end of 1943 that direct talks with the Soviet Government were unavoidable. In other words, during the whole year of 1943, by taking advantage of a relative stabilization on the Eastern Front, Maniu sought to gain time for further maneuvers by accepting the *status quo*, that is, by providing the peasant indirect support to the *Conducător*. The third, and last phase, from December 1943 until August 1944, was that of the *real politik*. Peasant Party's contacts with the Western Allies increased in number towards the spring of 1944, as well as those with the Soviets. Maniu wanted from the Anglo-Saxons to use their persuasive power beside the Soviets, on the one hand, for better armistice conditions for Romania and, on the other, for ensuring the participation of the Peasant Party in an eventual post-Antonescu national-unity government. According to mainstream Romanian historians

Peasant Party's wartime contacts with the Western Allies were more dense and close than those of the liberals. Antonescu was well-informed about all these links by his secret services. Surprisingly enough, he did nothing to stop them. On the contrary, after the defeat of the Axis armies at Stalingrad, beside his own links abroad, Antonescu directly encouraged Maniu's contacts with the Anglo-Saxons. He did it for the simple reason that he wanted, and believed until the end, the eventual armistice to be signed up whether with the Anglo-Saxons only, or with "The Big Three", but not with the Soviets alone.

So, did, or didn't they oppose Antonescu and his regime, the peasants? As we've seen point to point in the last pages, Peasant Party and his leader, Iuliu Maniu, were more critical to the regime than the liberals. However, for mainstream historians, the peasants, too, did provide their support, though less actively and more indirectly than the liberals did, to the *Conducător* almost until his fall, in August 1944. Thus, for the same historians, also the wartime activity by the Peasant Party can be put, in its turn, under quotation marks. There was no real peasant opposition to Antonescu, Maniu and his party representing the "Opposition."

Now, what general conclusions can be drawn on the party life under Antonescu Military Regime, as it is suggested by mainstream Romanian historians in their writings? First, all parties were officially banned by Antonescu on the occasion of the setting up of his new military regime in late January 1941, following his victory over Iron Guard. Second, all parties' activity was set under the supervision of the police and military secret services, which promptly and accurately informed the *Conducător* about all actions, both at home and abroad, by the party leaders. Third, the actions by the two political extremes, Iron Guard and Communist Party, were carefully supervised by the intelligence services. Despite the numerous wartime sabotage acts by the communists, they were, however, the Guard members who had been worse treated by Antonescu and his regime. Why? Because, although defeated, the more numerous and well-organized legionnaires continued to keep in touch with the masses in the countryside, and as such they were still representing a potential danger for both Antonescu and Romanian State; because of the mutual mistrust and revenge feelings. Thousands of Guard members, in their majority young men, were whether interned, or sent on the Eastern Front to fight. Romanian communists were also interned for sabotage acts, but rather individually than as a group. Antonescu had a more understandable stand towards them in order to get eventual political capital beside the Soviets. Bessarabian communists were interned as enemies.

Fourth, although closely supervised in their turn by the intelligence services, the two bourgeois parties, Liberal and Peasant, as well as the Social-Democratic Party ( the so called *Romanian Democratic Opposition* , joined also by the Communist Party since early 1944 ) were granted more freedom of maneuvering. Antonescu did actually allow the bourgeois leaders to carry on their political activity, though unofficially and as far as it was not in open contradiction with Romania's official position as an ally of Nazi Germany. Despite his military background, his manifest disgust towards the traditional Romanian political class, and his nationalist stand, Antonescu was however a western-oriented, bourgeois and rather liberal individual in his beliefs. He saw his own dictatorial rule as a transitory one in the turmoil in which Europe was by then. According to mainstream historians, by having granted them freedom of action both at home and abroad, Antonescu consciously allowed traditional parties to get ready themselves for the eventual comeback to power. No communist, or legionnaire future governing solution for Romania was envisaged by him. There was a non-spoken agreement between Antonescu and the bourgeois party leaders: he was to carry on *sine die* the official policy close by the Germans, while peasant and liberal leaders were to prepare themselves as the most likely governing alternative for the future. It was also the reason why Antonescu not only allowed, but did actually encourage the contacts of the liberals and peasants with the wartime governments of Great Britain and the United States. So, there was no real political ban set by the *Conducător* on the Liberal and Peasant Parties, and no real opposition by the latter against Antonescu Military Regime. Antonescu's wartime administration actually relied to a great extent directly on technicians with a liberal background, or sharing liberal values, and indirectly on the responsible attitude by Maniu and his Peasant Party on the difficult position in which the Romanian State was by then. According to mainstream historians that could be also an explanation why bourgeois party leaders waited for so long before really thinking to overthrow Antonescu. They expected the *Conducător* conclude himself the armistice with the Soviets and leave power. Thus, the main finding by post-communist Romanian historical writing is that, contrary to what was thought until recently, there was a real and quite lively party life under Antonescu Dictatorship, but, however, more or less obstructed and supervised according to the *Conducător's* own will.

As for us, that makes Antonescu's 1941 – 1944 rule in Romania so interesting. To our mind his rule is a singular case in both Romanian and Universal History. It was made possible by the circumstances in which both domestic and external factors played an equal role. That makes so challenging to define the real nature of his wartime regime. It obviously had some dictatorial

and nationalist features, but they were common places in the majority European countries that time. Was it a dictatorship of the Far Right? No, since it was the very political right extreme, represented by Iron Guard, which was worst treated by Antonescu. Moreover, hundreds of communist activists were set free by Antonescu. Was it a dictatorship of the Right? We doubt this too, since under the corporate system introduced, the state, the entrepreneurs, and the workers shared responsibilities under war conditions. Compulsory work was introduced to a large extent and the strikes forbidden, but the clerks and workers in towns and, especially, in the countryside were better paid. Besides the traditional bourgeois parties, Peasant and Liberal, Antonescu allowed also the Left, represented by Social-Democratic and Communist Parties and Ploughmen's Front, large freedom of maneuvering. Was it really a genuine military dictatorship? We have some reserves in this case, too. On the one hand, despite the presence in top offices of many generals, there was a great number of liberal and independent technocrats holding the essential economic posts within the wartime governments. On the other hand, although Romania was at war, the share of her national industry working for the civilian economy was the highest in Europe, that is over two thirds. The generals had rather the task of supervising and coordinating the needs of the army within the government, and that of maintaining the peace at home, but not genuine administrative functions. Was it a fascist dictatorship? Such a term is arguable in its turn. The fact that Antonescu maintained, or introduced new nationalist laws ( the so called *Romanianization Laws* ) in the social and economic fields cannot be denied. However, realities within the Romanian society were those which had obstructed their application on a large scale, and which in the end forced Antonescu to ask for their calling off. Native Romanian Jews were denied certain professional posts, or forced to pay financial contributions, but they were physically spared by Antonescu despite his manifest anti-Semitism. To which extent all these happened is still an open question for Romanian historiography. Certain is, that Romanian economy was largely dependent on the domestic and foreign Jewish capital, and that Antonescu had to come to terms with that economic reality. Despite all efforts made, the native Jewish big capital, in majority liberal, couldn't be effectively replaced either by the genuine Romanian one, or by the German one. Tens of thousands of Bessarabian Jews were either deported for their own security, because to the war operations in the region and eventual revenge feelings by the Romanian population, or interned ( communist Jews ) as declared enemies of the Romanian State. Thus, was it a dictatorship at all? Hard to say. Though banned, all parties were allowed to act excepting Iron Guard and its members, who were the only ones politically interned. To our mind, one can rather speak about Antonescu Regime as an authoritarian regime of war, with a capitalist command economy adapted to the needs of warfare, but overwhelmingly civilian in its essentials.

#### 4.4 . Romania's Anti-Soviet War and Antonescu's Armistice Talks

At Antonescu's command, on the 22nd of June 1941, Romanian Army joined the Axis forces in attacking Soviet Union. Romania's anti-Soviet war, 22 June 1941 – 23 August 1944, is referred in national historiography as *The Eastern Campaign*. The offensive phase lasted until the surrender of the Axis armies at Stalingrad, in February 1943. It was followed by a defensive phase until Antonescu's own fall, in August 1944. The disastrous defeat of the Axis made Antonescu open his eyes, on the one hand, on the fallibility of the *Wehrmacht's* operational plans, and, on the other hand, on Red Army's capacity not only to resist, but also to carry out massive offensive attacks. Although still firmly committed to fight close by Hitler until the end, Antonescu's trust in the invincible *Wehrmacht* received a serious backlash. That made the *Conducător* allow and encourage both Romanian Opposition and his own official representatives abroad to contact the Allies, that is the enemy, for eventual peace talks. Officially, armistice negotiations between Antonescu's men and Soviet representatives abroad took place from December 1943 until August 1944, with no success, leading ultimately to the *Conducător's* removal from power by King Michael I.

Present thesis is neither war, nor diplomatic history. It is political history. However, we are dealing here with a period of war in a country's political history. Thus, the two extreme components of the foreign policy, war and diplomacy, should be also taken into consideration, if not largely, at least in their main coordinates. Romanian historians have written in earnest, since 1990, on Romania's war against Soviet Union, a very delicate subject though not entirely banned under the communist regime ( see Appendix 4 ). They have also published many studies on Romania's wartime foreign relations with both the Axis countries and the Allied Powers. The most remarkable works published in recent years on the two subjects above consist in the careful study by their authors of the documents of the period preserved by the military and diplomatic archives, both in Romania and abroad. A second main feature of the studies published on the same topics is the large using, as primary sources, of the wartime memories by former Romanian diplomats and army officers. However, a thoroughgoing study by Romanian historians can be undertaken only if Russian authorities allow them at least a reasonable accessibility to their wartime archives. In the next pages we shall briefly point out the main orientation by post-communist Romanian historical writing on the anti-Soviet war and armistice negotiations.

According to mainstream Romanian historians at the origins of Romania's anti-Soviet war close by the Axis was the occupation of by the Soviet Union of the eastern Romanian provinces of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine, following the ultimatum of June 26th, 1940. The Soviet action was seen by the entire Romanian People as an aggression act, which was to be rectified in the near future even by war. According to historian Ion Constantin the same attitude had from the very beginning the new ruler of Romania, Ion Antonescu, and his legionnaire regime set up in September 1940. For Constantin, Antonescu's own words sent through a September 1940 letter to Grigore Gafencu, the Romanian Minister in Moscow, are revealing on Romania's official position by then: "It is preferable that the occupation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine should remain an act of force, which Romania had to accept as such... We have no interest in legalizing this act, offering this way the Soviets the judicial title of holding these provinces... Romanian Government considers it isn't the right moment to proceed for the establishing of our borders with the Soviet Union."<sup>425</sup> Thus, mainstream historians suggest, that Romania's attack of June 1941 on Soviet Union originated in the Soviet aggression on her a year before, the country being internationally isolated and incapable to defend itself by arms.

According to same historians, once in power, Antonescu made no secret about his own and Romania's new place in Europe, that is, close by Hitler and Nazi Germany. Despite widespread dissatisfaction among Romanians over the role played by the Germans in the Transylvanian problem, Antonescu saw Hitler as the only person whom he could rely on in facing the continuous Soviet threat on Romania. According to Constantin, the *Conducător* was aware that the eventual taking back of the two Romanian provinces from the Soviets was impossible without the support of "a strong ally, which could be only Germany, the only state capable and willing to help Romania by then."<sup>426</sup> Antonescu's letter of September 20th, 1940, addressed to the same Gafencu in Moscow, leaves no comments: "... Here, we are not indifferent on what's going on in the East, openly, or on the backstage. We are doing everything in our power to prevent and face any eventuality, together with the Axis, and by relying faithfully and totally on it. At the same time, and in the middle of the domestic and international turmoil, I have to push the State out of the present general chaos, to reorganize and rebuild its forces and prestige. That's my endeavour of every moment..."<sup>427</sup> Thus, for mainstream historians, Antonescu wanted Hitler's assistance from the start.

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<sup>425</sup> Dobrinescu & Constantin, 1995, p. 224.

<sup>426</sup> Idem, p. 226.

<sup>427</sup> Idem, p.4.

Mainstream historians suggest that Antonescu's first measures, once in power, were taken for the reorganization and modernization of the Romanian Army with the German assistance. In their opinion, by the time Soviet Union was attacked by the Axis, despite some organizational achievements, Romanian Army was somehow ready for a defensive war, but far of being modernized. Antonescu wanted "a small, but powerful army", with a perfect structure, disciplined, instructed, and adapted to both Romanian realities and modern technique conditions.<sup>428</sup> According to Otu, Antonescu's army reorganization plan, drawn during his first weeks in power, was based on his own 1934 study as chief of the Romanian High General Staff but adapted to the post-1940 Romanian territorial, population, financial and political realities. Otu points out, that Antonescu set no deadline to its implementation, but did confine it to a short period of time, because, "by not giving away her rights, Romania must be ready to face quite serious eventualities."<sup>429</sup> Thus, Otu indirectly suggests, that Antonescu had in mind the war against Soviet Union already since September 1940. According to same historian the military programme was envisaging: the reduction of both peace and mobilization troops to meet the demographic and material resources after the territorial losses; the adaptation of the organizational structures to the financial resources of the state; the supply of big military units with modern warfare devices ( tanks, antitank and anti-aircraft armament, motor vehicles etc.); the elimination of all headquarters with no use in war; the creation of homogeneous big units very mobile tactically; the improvement of the programme for military personnel formation and troops instruction in conformity with the German doctrine.<sup>430</sup> Otu emphasizes, that Nazi Germany became since September 1940 the main source of supply with armament and warfare technique for the the Romanian Army, but the German deliveries remained, despite serious demands by the Romanians, insignificant until the outbreak of war in the East. For Otu, two reasons were behind the German attitude. First, Hitler gave priority to his own troops supply once he signed the "Barbarossa Plan", on December 18th, 1940. Second, by wanting no additional difficulties in preparing his anti-Bolshevik campaign, the Führer sought to maintain the military balance between his two potential allies, though mutual enemies, Hungary and Romania. The German support was, however, more effective in instructing and preparing the Romanian Troops and officer staff in conformity with the *Wehrmacht's* methods. That was done by the personnel of the German Military Mission arrived in Romania in October 1940. By June 1941, Otu concludes, Antonescu "did realize few things from his ambitious military programme conceived in

<sup>428</sup> Otu, "Ostași, vă ordon: treceti Prutul!", *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 17.

<sup>429</sup> *Idem*, p. 18.

<sup>430</sup> *Idem*, p. 17-18.

the beginning of his rulership... and all shortcomings were to become obvious during the first weeks of war.”<sup>431</sup> In conclusion, for mainstream historians, the Germans provided indeed their support to Antonescu’s army reorganization and modernization plan. Nevertheless, Hitler sent in Romania rather his own military instructors and troops than modern armament and technique of war for the Romanian Army, and the latter mainly for the protection of the Romanian oil fields.<sup>432</sup> That made Romanian historians suggest, that Hitler reserved Romania the role of raw material supplier and to Romanian Army a quite limited function within his envisaged anti-Soviet campaign.

Mainstream historians emphasizes, that the definite shift of Romania onto the Axis camp took place during Antonescu’s 21 – 24 November 1940 visit to Berlin, when he officially joined the Axis by signing up the *Tripartite Pact*. As Constantin puts it, that meant for the Romanian State ” a guarantee against an eventual aggression from the East and assistance for its military strengthening.”<sup>433</sup> According to Chirnoagă, Molotov, visiting Berlin a week before Antonescu, refused to sign the pact because of Hitler’s rejection of the Soviet claims on Finland, Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey. Chirnoagă suggests that, besides the eventual Japanese-American conflict, ” the perspective of a German-Soviet war ”, especially wanted by Romania for national reasons, ” made Antonescu sign up the pact.”<sup>434</sup> We may suggest, that the military strengthening of the Romanian State occurred indeed, but through the deployment of German Troops in Romania and not by the very strengthening of Romanian National Army. Thus, according to post-communist historians Antonescu’s Romania became *de jure* and *de facto* a military and political satellite of the Axis and Nazi Germany in October – November 1940. The continuous Soviet threat and the desire to get back the lost eastern provinces with German assistance, through a war against Soviet Union seen by him unavoidable, were the two reasons which made Antonescu decide to fully join the Axis.

According to post-communist historians Antonescu’s conviction that Hitler’s anti-Soviet campaign was a matter of months became clear during his meeting with the Führer in mid-January 1941, his

<sup>431</sup> Otu, ” Ostași, vă ordon: treceti Prutul!”, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 20.

<sup>432</sup> The German Military Mission, arrived in Romania in October 1940, included besides officer staff instructors, a Luftwaffe mission, and the 13th Tank Division strengthened with a tank regiment and a motorcyclist-gunmen battalion. Under the name The Big Instruction Unit R-1 these troops were deployed east and south-east of the Carpathians. They prepared the Romanian big military units in the area ( the 5th, 6th and 13th Romanian Divisions, and a motor brigade ) to participate to the Barbarossa operation. See more details in: Klaus Schönherr, *Wehrmachtul în marș demonstrativ pe străzile Bucureștilor*, *Magazin Istoric*, Nr. 1, 1996, p. 11-14; 19.

<sup>433</sup> Dobrinescu & Constantin, 1996, p. 225.

<sup>434</sup> Chirnoagă, 1986, p. 78.



talks with Herbert von Neubacher, the Reich's envoy, in January and February 1941, his meeting with Herrmann Göring in March, the same year, and his numerous meetings with the new German Minister in Romania, Manfred von Killinger, between January and June 1941. In all these meetings Antonescu suggested the participation of the Romanian Army to an eventual anti-Soviet war. According to Constantin, Antonescu's determination and Romania's commitment to the ongoing events were made clearly known to the Germans during the *Conducător's* meeting with Göring in March 1941. He told Göring: "The Romanian State refuses to get back the historical provinces unless they are taken back through the battle fire, and Romanian blood leaks out to cleanse the People's honor and cement forever our right over Bukovine and Bessarabia."<sup>435</sup> Thus, for Romanian historians, Hitler and his generals knew for sure, even six months before its beginning, in June 1941, and despite their reserves on the Romanian military capacity, that Antonescu's Romania would join the anti-Bolshevik crusade at least for the liberation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine.

According to mainstream Romanian historians Hitler was the one who had informed Antonescu face to face in Munich, on the 12th of June 1941, about the imminent German attack on Soviet Union. On that occasion Antonescu assured the Führer about Romania's full military and economic commitment to the coming war. In his turn, the *Conducător* received Hitler's consent for the Romanian Troops participation, actually prepared for a defensive war only, to the attack between the Rivers Pruth and Dniester.<sup>436</sup> Romanian historians are unanimous over the true nature of the German-Romanian cooperation against the Soviet Union. That is best revealed by Constantin. According to him the military-strategical and political cooperation between Nazi Germany and Romania "was not conceived, or realized, through a written alliance against Soviet Union", but it was reglemented on the occasion of the meeting between Hitler and Antonescu on June the 12th, 1941.<sup>437</sup> As Constantin puts it, "because it was not a judicial act, this alliance was ostensibly giving Romania a large freedom of maneuvering, and thus open to all eventualities at any time."<sup>438</sup> Thus, for mainstream historians, Antonescu made clear few days before the Axis attack on Soviet Union that, though allied against a common enemy, Romania would lead her own national war. Hitler not

<sup>435</sup> Dobrinescu & Constantin, 1995, p. 226. Citation by Constantin from: Arhivele Ministerului Afacerilor Externe, fond 71 / U.R.S.S., 1941 – 1943, vol. 129, f. 101.

<sup>436</sup> See on Romanian Army's pre-war preparations: Mihai Chiriac, *Cercetarea trupelor la începutul Campaniei din Est*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 26-29.

<sup>437</sup> Dobrinescu & Constantin, 1995, p. 227.

<sup>438</sup> *Idem*, p. 227-228.

only agreed on that, but he actually confined Romanian Army's role in the coming conflict only to the liberation of eastern provinces, lost by Romania to the Soviets in the summer of 1940.

Mainstream historians suggest that all Romanian Army Headquarters were informed, a day before, by the High General Staff about the beginning of warfare between Romania and Soviet Union on June the 22nd at 0.00 local time. According to them Romania actually entered the war few hours after the beginning of the German attack on Soviet Union. Buzatu suggests that it happened through Antonescu's, from now on famous, Order of the Day to the Army of June 22nd, 1941:

" Soldiers, I command to You, pass the Pruth! Crush the enemy in east and north! Free our brothers enslaved by the Bolshevik red yoke! Reunite to Homeland's body the old land of the Bessarabs and the princely woods of Bukovine, your fields and regions!" <sup>439</sup>

According to mainstream Romanian historians, represented here by Buzatu, Antonescu proclaimed from the start his anti-Soviet campaign as a " Holy War ", having as purposes not only the regaining by Romania of her historic rights in the East, or the crushing of Communism, but also " the defending and preservation of the Christian faith."<sup>440</sup> Buzatu emphasizes, that this was not only the official purpose of the military campaign, but " as such it was perceived by all those who fought in the East."<sup>441</sup> Thus, for mainstream historians, Antonescu knew from the start that the lost provinces couldn't be reunited to Romania unless Soviet Communism was definitely crushed. In other words, the *Conducător* was ready to fight until the end close by Hitler in the anti-Bolshevik campaign, because in his mind, despite Nazi Germany's own power interests, it was about a crusade of the civilized world against the barbarians. Although they thought it initially as a short campaign, animated by faith and the logic of war, Antonescu and his soldiers didn't hesitate in joining Hitler's armies deeper into the Soviet mainland, as we shall see.

Mainstream Romanian historians, especially the military ones, have seriously worked in recent years also on the statistical dimension of the anti-Soviet war. We know already that Antonescu's intended modernization plan of the army was not achieved by the outbreak of war due to the lack of time and means. He ultimately compensated the lack of modern war technique by increasing the

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<sup>439</sup> Buzatu, *Mareşalul Antonescu şi războiul din Est*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 53.

<sup>440</sup> *Idem*, p. 54.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*

number of infantry divisions, though he initially wanted them reduced. Thus, for mainstream historians, Romanian Army was hardly prepared for a defensive war, not to speak about a major offensive attack. Moreover, its offensive plans were drawn in a rush a week before the beginning of war and with the German consent.<sup>442</sup> So, which are the main statistical figures for June 1941 on the Romanian Army, as they are suggested by post-communist historians?

In his article, mentioned by us before, Otu also promotes a detailed statistical view on Romania and her army at the eve of war.<sup>443</sup> Thus, in conformity with the official census of April 6th, 1941, Romania had within her 1940 borders 13,535,757 inhabitants, of whom 49.3%, that is 6,674,248 individuals, were males. According to military analysts the mobilization potential was ca. 2,200,000 men, who represented 32.9% of the male population, and 16.2% of the total. Within the mobilization plan for 1941, valid on the 22nd of June, the total number was 1,139,604 soldiers, of whom 39,476 were officers, 57,002 non-commissioned officers, and 1,043,126 troops. The structure of the Romanian Army included: its High General Staff ( The Army General Headquarters ); three Army Headquarters; 11 Army Corps Headquarters; 214 operational formations; 24 operational services formations; 41 big units and interior formations Headquarters. The Land Army was made up, including its reserves, of 41 big military units: 27 infantry divisions; 13 special brigades ( Mountain Troops, Cavalry, Fortifications, Coast ); an armored division. Its combat force was secured by: 191 infantry battalions; 11 machine-gun battalions; four tank battalions; 364 light and heavy field artillery batteries; 68 light and machine-gun cavalry squadrons; 25 pioneer battalions; 34 antitank companies; 20 antiaircraft companies; 54 heavy armament companies. The Air Force, accounting for 60,548 soldiers in total, had at its disposal, besides the antiaircraft artillery with its 119 heavy and light batteries, a number of 1,061 planes ( 450 for school ) shared in 50 squadrons: 17 for attack; 15 for bombardment; seven for surveillance; six for liaison; five for school and other purposes. The Navy was divided into the Sea Division ( Sea Fleet; Coast Artillery Group; Constanța Port and Area Headquarters; Hydroaviation Fleet; Submarine Section ) and the Danube Division ( River Fleet; ” Tulcea ” Tactical Group; Submarine Group ). The Navy had 39 more important battle ships ready to fight, 22 on the sea, and 17 on the Danube ( i.e., four destroyers, three torpedo vedettes, the submarine ” Delfinul ”, three mining ships, seven monitors, eight river vedettes ). At the outbreak of war Romanian Navy accounted for 15,113 soldiers in total.

<sup>442</sup> See more on this in: Mihai Chiriac, *Cercetarea trupelor la începutul Campaniei din Est*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 26-29.

<sup>443</sup> Otu, ” *Ostași, vă ordon: treceți Prutul!*”, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 19.

For Otu, Romanian big military units had a battle capacity by far inferior to the Germans ones, the Land Army lacking mechanical means, the Air Force being characterized by a great diversity of planes, and the Navy being structured and endowed rather to defend the Romanian borders on the Black Sea and Danube River. Otu emphasizes, that also the transportation system was remote, " horses being used almost exclusively by the army services."<sup>444</sup> The diminished population, industrial, agricultural, and financial potential of Romania, caused by the 1940 territorial losses, had also its negative impact on the operational capacity of the Romanian Army, the same historian suggests. The operational and combative preparedness of the big military units was, notwithstanding, superior to previous year at the outbreak of war, the units being " better instructed and endowed with infantry armament."<sup>445</sup> Romania was, however, unprepared for an offensive campaign, fact which turned to be during the war the very cause of death for tens of thousands of Romanian soldiers. In Otu's opinion, guilty for the army shortcomings were all the interwar Romanian authorities who didn't stick to the principle, that " a well-prepared army in time of peace saves lives in time of war."<sup>446</sup> According to Otu the entire Romanian Army was mobilized on June the 22nd, 1941, at 0.00 local time, but the decree was materialized only to the forces in Moldova, the 3rd and 4th Romanian Armies, and Dobrougea, the 2nd Romanian Army Corps, while the 1st Romanian Army was left with peace troops south of the borderline with Hungary in the Transylvanian Tableland. They were 27,500 officers, 35,390 non-commissioned officers, and 623,524 soldiers under arms by then. The *Conducător* began his " Holy War " against Soviet Union on the 22nd of June 1941, around 3.00 a.m. local time. He threw in battle, besides the whole Air Force and Navy, almost 400,000 warriors of the 3rd and 4th Armies and 2nd Army Corps or, more precisely, " 10,361 officers, 15,990 non-commissioned officers, and 354,005 soldiers."<sup>447</sup> Thus, for post-communist historical writing represented here by Otu, statistical documents of the period, recently brought in, reveal the painful truth: Romanian Army was not at all prepared in June 1941 for an offensive war, Romanian soldiers having to compensate during the whole war the army's lack of technical endowment with their own bravery, blood, and lives.

Thus, Romanian Army started its *Eastern Campaign* in the dawn of 22nd June 1941 ( see Appendix 6 ). Its offensive phase lasted until the defeat at Stalingrad, in February 1943, being followed by a

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<sup>444</sup> Otu, " Ostasi, vă ordon: treceti Prutul!", *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 20.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid.

<sup>447</sup> Idem, p. 19.

defensive one until the 23rd of August 1941, the day of Antonescu's fall. We shall point out briefly next the unfolding of the *Eastern Campaign* and its major objectives as they are statistically seen by post-communist historical writing.

According to mainstream historians Antonescu's military participation to the anti-Soviet war took place close by *The German Group of Armies " South "* commanded by Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt.<sup>448</sup> Operationally, the effective command of the entire 3rd Romanian Army was passed by Antonescu to the German Headquarters at the beginning of the offensive attack for the liberation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine, on the 2nd of July 1941, and that of the 6th Army Corps belonging to the 4th Romanian Army in late January 1942, that is, three months after the conquest of Odessa. In other words, all Romanian Troops heading east were passed under direct operational German control once the military operations on the so called *Romanian Front* came to an end.<sup>449</sup> Thus, Romanian Army carried out its military operations to the right of the southern flank of the German-Soviet Southern Front. In fact, during their anti-Bolshevik campaign Romanian Troops had the mission of covering and assisting The Reich's armies operating on that front.

According to mainstream historians the first mission was for the Romanian Army the liberation of Bessarabia, Northern Bukovine, and Herța Region, which occurred between June 22nd and July 26th, 1941. In a recent article Vasile Bărboi makes a chronologically and statistically detailed presentation of the campaign.<sup>450</sup> According to Bărboi the mission was carried out by *The Group of Armies " General Antonescu "*, which was made up of the 3rd and 4th Romanian Armies and the 11th German Army, with seven Romanian and three German army corps Headquarters. Under their command were 24 divisions ( 16 Romanian and 8 German ), 9 Romanian special brigades, and other units of different arms. All these units were assisted from the air by the 4th German Air Fleet and Romanian Air Group of Attack, on the ground by four antiaircraft artillery groups, and on the waters by Romanian Navy. The real offensive on the Romanian Front started on July 2nd, 1941, after a strategical, but active, period of waiting of ten days. Northern Bukovine and Herța Region were liberated by the 3rd Romanian Army through its offensive of 2 – 7 July. Northern and central parts of Bessarabia were freed by the 11th German Army with the support of the Romanian Troops

<sup>448</sup> See for details in: Platon Chirnoagă, *Istoria politică și militară a războiului României contra Rusiei Sovietice 22 iunie 1941 – 23 august 1944*, Madrid, 1986, p. 128-131.

<sup>449</sup> See for details in: idem, p. 136-139; 171.

<sup>450</sup> Bărboi, *Eliberarea Basarabiei, a Bucovinei de Nord și a Ținutului Herța*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 20-25.

under its direct command ( the 4th Army Corps with five infantry divisions, the Cavalry Corps with two brigades, the 1st Armored Division ), which were also assisted by troops belonging to the 3rd Romanian Army, through their offensive attack between the 8th and 16th of July 1941. The southern part of Bessarabia was liberated between July the 17th and 26th by the 4th Romanian Army, which was assisted from north by *The Group "General Mattenkloth "* ( the 5th and 15th Romanian Infantry Divisions, the 1st Romanian Armored Division, the 72th German Infantry Division ). The southern Bessarabian town of Cetatea Albă ( a.n., the former Akkerman in Turkish, or the present Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiyi in Ukrainian ), situated on the right bank of the Dniester near its Mouths, was captured on the 26th of June, 1941, by the 1st Romanian Frontier Guard Division, which put, thus, successfully an end to the military campaign for the liberation of the historic Romanian eastern provinces. Bărboi suggests in the end of his article that, nevertheless, the heroic Romanian Army had to pay the highest price in human losses for the entire period of war during those 35 days of the liberation campaign, that is, a daily mean of 697 soldiers ( in comparison to: 540 men for each of the 1,159 days of the Eastern Campaign; 648 men for each of the 262 days of the Western Campaign; and 559 men for each of the 1,421 days of the entire war period ). The actual losses augmented to 24,396 men, or 5,011 dead, 14,898 wounded, and 4,487 missing in battle. They were caused, according to Bărboi, " mainly by the lack of technical means and fighting experience among Romanian Troops, but also by the extremely strong resistance of the enemy."<sup>451</sup> In his opinion, Romanian Army's participation close by the German Troops to the liberation of the eastern regions was " a legitimate and unquestionable act " approved by all Romanians, which brought back to Homeland's body " 50,762 sq.km. and 3,776,000 inhabitants, in majority Romanians."<sup>452</sup> We can add only, that the interpretation above by Bărboi represents at the same time the main orientation on this aspect by post-communist historical writing.

But the offensive march was not stopped by Antonescu on the Dniester line. On the contrary, he allowed Romanian Troops under German command to pass the historic Romanian eastern boundary and continue their offensive eastwards on the proper Soviet territory. The *Conducător* took himself the operational command of the 4th Romanian Army in the beginning of August 1941, and headed it towards Odessa. According to mainstream Romanian historians Antonescu's decision, no matter which were the reasons behind it, had serious repercussions on Romania. Even today, as it was by

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<sup>451</sup> Bărboi, *Eliberarea Basarabiei, a Bucovinei de Nord și a Ținutului Herța*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 25.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*

then, Romanian society continues to be divided on this matter. We know already that both left and right party leaders contemporary to the events criticized Romania's war on the Soviet territory, but, with the exception of communists, they did practically nothing for years to stop it. Moreover, the passing of the River Dniester by the Romanian Army in July 1941 represents one of the most controversial subjects of debate among mainstream Romanian historians, and this, strange enough, rather irrespectively of their political views.

The two existing extreme viewpoints on this matter are best revealed by two outstanding Romanian historians. Thus, for Buzatu, "the war in the East was a right one from the beginning and until the end, between the 22nd of June 1941 and 23rd of August 1944, and which was carried out for the crushing of Communism and the liberation of the historic provinces of Bessarabia, Northern Bukovine, and Herța Region occupied by the Soviet Union in the summer of 1940."<sup>453</sup> In his turn, Romanian historian Alex Mihai Stoenescu suggests, in a recent article, that Antonescu should remain a war criminal not only for the political responsibility he had for the death of many Jews during the war, "but, first of all for his irresponsible war across the Dniester in which he killed tens of thousands of Romanians."<sup>454</sup> Thus, for Buzatu it was about a right war of liberation and defence, while for Stoenescu it was about a criminal one killing thousands of Romanian soldiers.

Between the "right" and the "criminal" war, there is a series of other explanations, whether of a "voluntary", or an "imposed" war. For Chirnoagă, animated by "the trust in the German military power, the conviction in a short and victorious war, and the hope for a revolution against the communist regime to be caused by their march deeper into the Soviet territory", Antonescu and Romanian Army carried on with enthusiasm the military campaign close by the Germans also across the Dniester, especially until the battles for Stalingrad. As Chirnoagă puts it: "The war was wanted and demanded by the entire Romanian People, because all Romanians were seeing it as the only way to save the Nation from the permanent Russian threat."<sup>455</sup> Thus, for Chirnoagă, Romania's anti-Soviet war in itself, including the passing of the Dniester River, by having been backed by the majority Romanians was rather a voluntary act by both Antonescu and Romanian Army.

<sup>453</sup> Buzatu, *Mareșalul Antonescu și războiul din Est*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 53.

<sup>454</sup> Stoenescu, *Antonescu și evreii*, *Aldine*, Nr. 221, 1 iulie, 2000, p. IV.

<sup>455</sup> Chirnoagă, 1986, p. 134-135.

According to Alexandru D. Duțu, motivating the good previous results on the German-Soviet Southern Front, Hitler directly asked Antonescu, on the 27th of July 1941, to go on with the military actions across the Dniester, the latter having replied the Führer, on July 31st, that " he would go on until the end."<sup>456</sup> For Duțu, it was rather the indirect " blackmail " by Hitler over the still open Transylvanian problem which ultimately made Antonescu hopefully join him across the Dniester.<sup>457</sup> According to Duțu, despite all different existing viewpoints on Antonescu's decision, a fact is certain: " Once the war broke out, Romanian Army's fighting on the Soviet territory was imposed by the exigencies of the alliance with The Reich, by the arguments of strategy and loyalty towards the German ally who had decisively contributed to the liberation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine."<sup>458</sup> Thus, for Duțu, as for other war historians alike, the military involvement of Romania on the proper Soviet territory was demanded directly by Hitler to Antonescu, and thus imposed by the very alliance with Nazi Germany.

Moreover, many military historians, but not only, find the war across the Dniester as having been imposed also by military reasons, and in particular by the realities on the ground, as they are revealed by the military documents of the period. According to Buzatu, Antonescu replied to the judges, during his trial in May 1946, on their question about his march to Stalingrad, among other things, that: "... Search the century-long history and You'll find that nobody stopped at own's frontiers, but went on so far it took to destroy the enemy's armies..."<sup>459</sup> Thus, for military historians, besides all other reasons, behind Antonescu's decision to go on with the offensive on the proper Soviet soil was also the very simple war strategy.

We believe that the intimate feelings of the majority Romanians, both by then and nowadays, on the entire anti-Soviet war are best revealed through the words written by Grigore Gafencu in his *Diary 1941 – 1944*, quoted by Constantin in his book: " The war against Russia, in which we are fighting close by the Germans, has not, and it cannot have for us the same meaning and the same goals as for Germany. For us it means the elimination of an injustice, the reinstatement of our previous boundaries, the reinforcement of our vital position at the Danube Mouths."<sup>460</sup> Our personal view is

<sup>456</sup> Duțu, *De la Nistru spre Volga și Caucaz*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 29.

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>458</sup> *Idem*, p. 30.

<sup>459</sup> Buzatu, *Mareșalul Antonescu și războiul din Est*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 54; See Antonescu's detailed response on this within his Memorandum of May 15th 1946 in: M. D. Ciucă, *Procesul Mareșalului Antonescu Documente II*, Bucuresti, 1996, p. 162-187.

<sup>460</sup> Gafencu, in *Dobrinescu & Constantin*, 1995, p. 227.



that Romania couldn't avoid the war against Soviet Union. The perspective for such a war was already open in November 1940, when Antonescu signed up the *Tripartite Pact* soon after Molotov's refusal of doing it. After Hitler's approval of the *Barbarossa Plan*, in December 1940, the war became more likely for Romania, too. Her participation to the coming anti-Soviet war was sealed during their meeting of June 12th, 1941, by Hitler and Antonescu. When the command of the 3rd Romanian Army was shifted by Antonescu to the German Headquarters, on the 2nd of July the same year, it became obvious for everybody that Romanian Army would be involved, due to military reasons, also in operational missions on the main Soviet territory. Hitler's personal request in this sense made to Antonescu, on the 27th of July 1941, was in our opinion rather a formality. Thus, notwithstanding all adjectives, for or against, used by mainstream historians in describing Romania's war on the proper Soviet territory, for us it was about an unavoidable war. Antonescu himself declared, within one of the autumn 1940 sessions of the Council of Ministers: " We shall fight close by the Germans not for their interests, but for the defense of our boundaries; not we but, on the contrary, they are those who will assist us."<sup>461</sup> Thus, certain about its imminence, the *Conducător* committed himself, and his country, to the Axis war against Soviet Union many months before it actually began. Romania couldn't avoid the war against Soviet Union for two main reasons. First, the very simple political logic demanded Romania and Antonescu not to miss the historic opportunity of getting back, by relying on the assistance from a strong ally as Nazi Germany, the lost territories. Second, in conformity with the military logic of hunting the enemy until its complete defeat, it was clear for Romania that, once military committed, her army would be involved, in one way or another, in military actions on the proper Soviet territory, too. For us, despite its unavoidable feature, the war was not premeditated by Romania, the aggressor having been in the summer of 1940 Soviet Union. Moreover, the anti-Soviet war, including its phase on the main Soviet territory, was wanted and supported from the beginning by the majority Romanians. Antonescu's political and military actions were backed by the majority Romanians through the referendum held in November 1942. That makes us suggest that the whole war was, first of all, a legitimate war of defense, its legitimacy having been provided by the very Romanian People. For the same reasons also Finland, though under a democratic leadership, took the opportunity close by the Germans and attacked Soviet Union. Finnish soldiers, too, went on with their military actions on the proper Soviet territory, although not to the same scale the Romanians did it. Both countries had been previously aggressed by Soviet Union so that their anti-Soviet war was a legitimate one.

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<sup>461</sup> Antonescu, in Dobrinescu & Constantin, 1995, p. 226-227.

According to mainstream historians Romanian soldiers fought, close by the German ones, with bravery during their whole offensive campaign on the Eastern Front. The Red Army put an end to it at the gates of Stalingrad, in November 1942. Thenafter, the troops belonging to the 3rd and 4th Romanian Armies were demobilized and brought home by Antonescu, to be called-up again in March 1944 to participate in the defensive battles in Moldova. Post-communist historians suggest, that Romanian Army registered, nevertheless, important human losses, on the one hand, because of the remote armament at its disposal, and, on the other, due to the fierce resistance provided by the enemy. Which are, briefly, the landmarks and statistical figures of the offensive and defensive phases of the Eastern Campaign, as they are promoted by mainstream historians?

Romanian Army's first mission on the Soviet soil was the occupation of Transnistria ( the Soviet territory between the Rivers Dniester and Bug ).<sup>462</sup> With the exception of the harbor-city of Odessa, by the beginning of August 1941 the whole area was cleared out of Soviet Troops by the 11th German Army assisted, from north and south, by the 3rd and 4th Romanian Armies. After having received the German consent of attacking alone the strategically important Port of Odessa, Antonescu headed the 4th Romanian Army, commanded by Gen. Nicolae Ciuperca, towards it. But the conquest of Odessa was much more difficult than Antonescu thought it initially, while the assistance provided by the Germans turned to be essential. A first assault by the 4th Army, between August 18th and 24th, was rejected by the Soviets. The second attack was carried out with fresh Romanian Troops, assisted by some German forces, between August 28th and September 5th, but it was stopped again by the Red Army. Soviet defense resisted also a third assault, between the 11th and 15th of September, in which the 4th Army was strongly assisted by German infantry and artillery forces belonging to the 11th German Army. According to Chirnoagă the attack, causing heavy losses among the Romanian-German Troops, failed because of the lack of air support from the Germans, " Romanian Air Force having been incapable, due to its previous losses, to oppose the Soviet one."<sup>463</sup> The Soviet defense collapsed only during the fourth Romanian-German attack, this time strongly supported by the Luftwaffe, between September 17th and October 16th, 1941. According to Chirnoagă the 4th Romanian Army lost in battle 119,833 men by then, " at Odessa only 106,561 soldiers!"<sup>464</sup> For Duțu, the losses were only 90,000 men, or, " 21% of the total forces

<sup>462</sup> See for details: P. Chirnoagă, *Istoria politică și militară a războiului României contra Rusiei Sovietice 22 iunie 1941 – 23 august 1944*, Madrid, 1986, p. 139-158;

<sup>463</sup> Chirnoagă, 1986, p. 145.

<sup>464</sup> *Idem*, p. 154.

engaged.”<sup>465</sup> Duțu also points out , that in the battles for Odessa were involved most Romanian soldiers for the whole Eastern Campaign, that is, ” over 300,000 men.”<sup>466</sup> For mainstream historians, although the conquest of Odessa was in first a Romanian victory it was paid, nevertheless, with heavy human losses. The same historians emphasize that, despite all efforts by Antonescu ( Marshal from August 23rd, 1941 ), the victory couldn't be obtained by the Romanians without the German assistance on the ground and, especially, from the air.

Romanian Army didn't stop its offensive on the Soviet territory with the occupation of Transnistria and its major city of Odessa. The 3rd and 4th Romanian Armies continued their march eastwards on the right side of the Southern German-Soviet Front, close by the German Troops acting on the southern flank of the *German Group of Armies " South "*, and under German Headquarters' operational command.<sup>467</sup> According to mainstream historians, besides the battles for Odessa, Romanian Troops participated close by the German ones to six other major offensives. Through the first one, August 20th – September 15th 1941, the troops of the 3rd Army contributed to the occupation of the area limited by the Rivers Bug and Dnieper ( the area between Dniester and Bug was occupied previously, between July 21st and August 10th, with actually no resistance on the part of the Soviet Troops ). According to Duțu in the battles in the area limited by the Rivers Dniester and Dnieper were involved 159,302 Romanian soldiers, while the losses augmented to 6,420 men, or 4% of the total forces engaged.<sup>468</sup> By its second offensive, between September 15th and October 3rd 1941, the 3rd Army contributed to the defeat of the Soviet Troops deployed in north of the Asov Sea, essential before the next step ahead by the German-Romanian Troops: the march on Crimea Peninsula. The 3rd Army engaged in its offensive north of the Asov Sea 75,046 soldiers and lost 7,254 of them in battles, that is, ca. 10%.<sup>469</sup> Through their third major offensive, October 11th, 1941 – July 4th, 1942, Romanian Troops belonging to the 3rd Army contributed to the conquest of Crimea, but not before having faced strong counter-attacks by the Red Army during the whole winter of 1941/1942 and early summer of 1942. The besieged city of Sevastopol fell on July 4th, 1942. According to Duțu the 3rd Army lost 18,900 ( 24% ) of its 78,241 men engaged in Crimea.<sup>470</sup>

<sup>465</sup> Duțu, *De la Nistru spre Volga și Caucaz*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 36.

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>467</sup> See the unfolding of Romanian Army's Eastern Campaign in both its offensive and defensive phases, with maps and statistical data, in: P. Chirnoagă, *Istoria politică și militară a războiului României contra Rusiei Sovietice 22 iunie 1941 – 23 august 1944*, Madrid, 1986, p. 136-271.

<sup>468</sup> Duțu, *De la Nistru spre Volga și Caucaz*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 36.

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*

The fourth major offensive mission by Romanian Army was carried out between January 17th and May 25th, 1942, simultaneously with the battles in Crimea, in north and, in particular, south of Kharkov. Romanian Troops, belonging this time to the 4th Army, participated close by the German Troops of the *Group of Armies "South"* to the rejection of the massive counter-offensives carried out by the Soviets during the winter of 1941/1942 and late spring of 1942 in order to get back the cities of Kharkov and Dnepetrovsk. Through their final offensive, between May 17th and 25th, German-Romanian Troops completely crushed the Soviet ones in north and south of Kharkov. According to Duțu the 4th Army engaged around Kharkov 64,127 men of whom 14,009, or 22%, were lost in battles.<sup>471</sup> During the fifth major offensive, between August 7th and October 28th, 1942, Romanian Troops belonging to the 3rd Army participated close by the German ones, on the eastern and central flanks, to the occupation of the Kuban up to the heights of the Caucasus Mountains. Hitler's purpose, remained unachieved, was the conquest of the oil region of Batum by the arrival of winter, essential in his mind for securing the military actions by the *Wehrmacht* on the Soviet soil. In the fierce battles for Caucasus many thousands Romanian soldiers were lost by the 3rd Army, which engaged there 84,012 men.<sup>472</sup> Mainstream historians point out, that Romanian Troops fought with bravery close by the German ones on the Soviet soil. According to them German military commanders recognized this fact. Thus, on Romanian soldiers' participation to the conquest of Crimea the chief of the German Military Mission in Romania, Gen. Erik Hansen, wrote in a letter addressed, on July 8th 1942, to Gen. Gheorghe Avramescu (at the Romanian General Headquarters): "I'm very happy to acknowledge the fact that all these units, by having fought with bravery day by day, had their share of glory in the conquest of this Black Sea fortress..."<sup>473</sup> In his turn, the commander of the 11th German Army Corps, victorious in the battles around Kharkov, Gen. von Kortzfleisch, recognized through his statement of May 25th 1942 the bravery shown by the Romanian Troops on that occasion: "The participation of the units belonging to the Royal Romanian Army, in clear of the 6th Army Corps under Gen. Dragalina's command, with its 1st, 2nd, 4th, and 20th Divisions, and other units, to this victory will remain forever as a glorious page in Romanian Army's history. Their bravery, power of resistance, and discipline grant them a place of honor among the nations who are defending European Culture from the destructive action of Bolshevism."<sup>474</sup> Thus, for mainstream historians, with the exception of the operational errors

<sup>471</sup> Duțu, *De la Nistru spre Volga și Caucaz*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 36.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>473</sup> *Idem*, p. 33.

<sup>474</sup> *Idem*, p. 34.

committed by the German Headquarters, which caused many losses among Romanian Troops in Caucasus, the German-Romanian military collaboration on the Soviet soil had been, by the eve of the battles for Stalingrad, a rather positive one, fact also recognized by the Germans themselves.

The seventh ( Odessa included ), and largest offensive on the main Soviet territory by Romanian Army, having as purpose the conquest of Stalingrad, took place between mid-August and late October 1942. By having failed, it was at the same time the last offensive mission against the Soviets by Romanian Army. It also meant for the Axis armies the beginning of their defensive phase on the Eastern Front and, as such, the turning point of the Second World War. According to mainstream historians to the offensive participated the bulk of the troops belonging to the 3rd Romanian Army ( eight infantry divisions; two cavalry divisions; one armored division ) and important troops of the 4th Army ( five infantry divisions; two cavalry divisions ).<sup>475</sup> The two armies engaged in battles, according to Duțu, most Romanian soldiers after Odessa ( over 300,000 ), that is ca. 230,000 men.<sup>476</sup> The two Romanian armies had the mission of covering the flanks of the 6th German Army which was attacking Stalingrad. On the left flank, together with Italian and Hungarian units, the troops of the 3rd Army had succeeded, by late October, to take over the area limited by the elbow of the River Don. Romanian commanders demanded German Headquarters armored, artillery, and air support and the permission to liquidate the three Soviet bridgeheads on the river. They were not only refused, but their informations about a massive Soviet imminent counter-attack in the area were neglected by the German Headquarters. The 4th Romanian Army, actioning together with the 4th German Armored Army on the right flank of the 6th German Army, after having succeeded by early September to eliminate the Soviet resistance south of Stalingrad, in the Kalmukian Steppe, reached the city outskirts with some of its troops by mid-September. However, by mid-November 1942, after two months of offensive battles by the Axis armies, the central parts of Stalingrad were still in Soviet hands. According to mainstream historians the conquest of Stalingrad failed because the Axis didn't engage sufficient troops and armored vehicles in its offensive. For them, to blame was Hitler who didn't stick to his previous decision of attacking Stalingrad with the entire *German Group of Armies " South."* While *The Group of Armies B* commanded by Marshal von Weichs was heading towards Stalingrad, Marshal List's *Group of Armies A* was directed by Hitler to Kuban and Caucasus. As Chirnoagă puts it, Hitler's decision was " a capital error, since had he attacked with both army groups Stalingrad, in conformity with the

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<sup>475</sup> Chirnoagă, 1986, p. 182.

<sup>476</sup> Duțu, *De la Nistru spre Volga și Caucaz*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 36.

*Instruction No.41 of April 5th, 1942*, this town would have been quickly, and with less human losses, taken over.”<sup>477</sup>

At the same time when the 6th German Army was facing a fierce Soviet resistance on the streets of Stalingrad, the Red Army started to concentrate massive troops for a counter-offensive in order to get back the city. When it actually began, in the dawn of November 19th, 1942, Soviet offensive was directed against the two flanks of the 6th German Army, that is, against the two front sectors defended by the very 3rd and 4th Romanian Armies. According to mainstream historians Romanian intelligence services had informed in due time both Romanian and German commanders about the imminent massive Soviet counter-offensive, but German Headquarters took no measures of strengthening the front in those sectors.<sup>478</sup> Red Army attacked Romanian positions with massive troops strongly assisted by artillery, tanks, and aviation. As a consequence, the 3rd Romanian Army was almost completely smashed ( five of its eight infantry divisions were whether destroyed or taken prisoner ) by the Soviets in the battles at Don’s Elbow ( in west of Stalingrad ), between November 19th and 25th, where they attacked through the bridgeheads at Dewjatkin, Kletskaja, and Serafimovich. For Chirnoagă, Red Army’s superiority was enormous: ” Five Romanian divisions were attacked by four Soviet armies, with a total of 26-28 marksmen divisions, four infantry brigades, four cavalry divisions, 17 armored brigades, and by two air fleets... Thus, by the evening of November 19th, the center and the right of the 3rd Romanian Army ceased to exist.”<sup>479</sup> The next day, in the dawn of November 20th, 1942, Red Army started the offensive also against the 4th Romanian Army in its sector south of Stalingrad. The three Romanian infantry divisions in the area were attacked by two Soviet armies, between November 20th and 21st, two of them having been almost completely destroyed. By November 21st, the 4th Army was thrown out of its position by the Soviets. The breakthrough of the Romanian front sectors by the Soviets in west and south of Stalingrad led to the complete surrounding of the 6th German Army by November 22nd, when the 5th ( Armored ) and 57th Soviet Armies, coming from opposite directions, made the connection behind it. All subsequent attempts by the 6th German Army itself , or assisted by other German Troops , to break free failed. General Paulus and his troops surrendered themselves on January 31st, 1943. The 3rd and 4th Romanian Armies continued to fight south-west of Stalingrad, within *The Group of Armies Don* commanded by Marshal von Manstein, until the 28th of December 1942.

<sup>477</sup> Chirnoagă, 1986, p. 172.

<sup>478</sup> See on this: Cristian Troncota, *Dezastrul de la Stalingrad în versiunea SSI*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 37-40.

<sup>479</sup> Chirnoagă, 1986, p. 183.

Thenafter, tired and seriously reduced by heavy losses, the entire 4th Army and the bulk of 3rd Army's troops were withdrawn and marched home by Antonescu, to be called-up again in March 1944 for the defensive battles in Moldova. At Stalingrad had to fight until the end two big military units only, which had been pushed from the start by the massive Soviet offensive towards the lines of the 6th German Army: the 1st Cavalry Division and the 20th Infantry Division belonging to the 3rd, and respectively, 4th Army. Chirnoagă emphasizes, that the bravery in battle shown by these troops was appreciated afterwards by Marshal Paulus himself: " Those Romanian soldiers who fought within the ranks of my army deserve a special mention on my part. When these troops had been normally assisted with heavy armament, in the same way the German infantryman was, they fought with bravery under the command of their officers and faced all shortcomings with a remarkable patience."<sup>480</sup> For Chirnoagă, by then himself a superior officer ( General ) at the 3rd Romanian Army Headquarters, the same bravery was shown by all Romanian Troops at Stalingrad. In his opinion, for the defeat of the two Romanian armies there by the Soviet Troops, and its immediate consequences on the Axis, " responsible were German General Headquarters."<sup>481</sup> First, the Germans didn't honor their promises of supplying Romanian Troops with antitank armament and heavy artillery neither before, nor after their arrival on the frontline. Second, the 3rd Romanian Army was denied, between the end of September and beginning of October 1942, to reduce the Soviet bridgeheads in its operational zone. Third, the informations provided by the 6th German and 3rd Romanian Armies about a massive concentration of forces by the enemy at the elbow of River Don were not taken into consideration. Fourth, behind the two Romanian armies were not sent sufficient reserves despite the fact that Soviet offensive was known as imminent. Fifth, it was known for sure, on November 10th, that the Soviets were ready to start their offensive at Don's Elbow. The 6th German Army, made up of considerable forces, was engaged in street battles with the 62th Soviet Army and did nothing to strengthen own flanks. The divisions of the 3rd and 4th Romanian Armies, covering the 6th German Army's flanks, were deployed on large front sectors and were lacking the appropriate armament for a defensive battle against the enemy's strong armored divisions. In Chirnoagă's own words:

" ... It was normal in that situation to renounce the conquest of Stalingrad, to withdraw from there a part of the heavy artillery, troops, and armament of all sorts, and to distribute them whether on the front of the two Romanian armies, or passed in their direct reserve. Such measure was not only avoided by Hitler, the more, he was already convinced, on

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<sup>480</sup> Chirnoagă, 1986, p. 205.

<sup>481</sup> Idem, p. 191.

November 10th, that the Soviets were lacking sufficient forces to carry out an offensive deeper into the German lines. Therefore, he refused to pay attention to the informations sent from the front which he saw as exaggerated. He didn't think even for a second to take the necessary operational measures in order to secure the front on the River Don and in the Kalmukian Steppe..."<sup>482</sup>

Thus, in Chirnoagă's point of view, for the huge defeat suffered in the battles at Stalingrad and around by the Axis armies ( the 3rd and 4th Romanian Armies; the 8th Italian Army; the 2nd Hungarian Army; the 4th Armored, 2nd and 6th German Armies ) responsible were first of all Hitler and the German OKW with their erroneous strategic and operational plans, but also the Soviets themselves by their superiority manifested in men and tanks. Chirnoagă's viewpoints are confirmed by other mainstream historians in their recent writings based on the study of the military intelligence documents of that time. According to Troncotă the SSI's *Mobile Echelon* ( its special section to all Romanian Headquarters during the Eastern Campaign ) informed all the time, between September 20th and November 18th, 1942, about the Soviet preparations on the way for a massive offensive. For Troncotă, the heavy losses suffered by the Romanian Troops on the Rivers Don and Tschir, and in the Kalmukian Steppe, following the combined Soviet counter-offensive launched on the 19th and 20th of November 1942, " cannot be attributed in any way to the lack of information about the enemy."<sup>483</sup> Intelligence notes and reports of that period by the SSI are unequivocal, Troncotă suggests, about the main causes of the disaster suffered at Stalingrad by the two Romanian armies, as well as by all other Axis forces there: the erroneously conceived strategic plan by the German OKW which, by having scattered the Wehrmacht Troops in simultaneous but diverging operative missions had to fulfill the empty space between them with the allied armies unprepared for a modern war; the clear superiority in troops and modern armament ( tanks, planes, heavy artillery ) manifested by the Soviets. Troncotă emphasizes that, in conformity with SSI documents, Antonescu considered the Axis defeated at Stalingrad as early as December 3rd, 1942, that is, two months before it actually happened and blamed for that not only the strategic and operative errors committed by the Germans, but also " the impossibility to overwhelm the Russians."<sup>484</sup> According to mainstream historians the first defensive phase of the Eastern Campaign ( November 19th, 1942 – January 31st, 1943 ) was also the most disastrous one for Romanian Army, which lost ca. 120,000 of the 230,000 soldiers engaged at Stalingrad, thus, more than half.<sup>485</sup>

<sup>482</sup> Chirnoagă, 1986, p. 192.

<sup>483</sup> Troncotă, *Dezastrul de la Stalingrad în versiunea SSI*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 40.

<sup>484</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>485</sup> Duțu, *De la Nistru spre Volga și Caucaz*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 36.



After the defeat suffered at Stalingrad, and under the continuous pressure of the Soviet counter-attacks elsewhere on the Southern German-Soviet Front, Axis Troops began their withdrawal. Thus, those Romanian Troops belonging to the 3rd Army ( seven divisions of which: two infantry, two cavalry, and three mountain troops ) engaged in Kuban close by the 17th German Army had to face, between January and October 1943, strong Soviet counter-attacks. The second major defensive phase ended for the Romanian Troops with their evacuation of the bridgehead in Kuban, between September 15th and October 9th, 1943. Thenafter, two divisions belonging to the 17th German Army were joined by the Romanian ones and passed all of them in Crimea. Although Romanian-German Troops had succeeded in rejecting strong and continuous Soviet counter-attacks during the winter of 1942/1943, their resistance in Crimea ceased by April – May 1944. The troops evacuation there, demanded to Hitler by Antonescu himself already since late February 1943, took place between April 12th and May 13th, the same year. According to mainstream historians, during the third defensive phase of the Eastern Campaign, October 9th, 1942 – May 12th, 1943, Romanian Army suffered again heavy losses. Responsible was Hitler who had postponed the evacuation of Crimea until the last moments. According to Chirnoagă in the defensive battles for Crimea were engaged 230,000 Romanian and German soldiers, of which 151,457 were evacuated by sea and air between April 12th and May 13th, 1943. Chirnoagă points out, that ” 57,500 soldiers died, or were reported missing, while the fate of ca. 20,000 men remained unknown.”<sup>486</sup> Thus, the German-Romanian armies lost during the defence and evacuation of Crimea ca. 80,000 soldiers in majority Romanians, that is, almost a third of the troops engaged there.

The Soviets continued their march westwards by restarting their offensive on the Southern German-Soviet Front in the beginning of March 1944, with their 1st, 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts, ” having as main purpose the conquest of Romania.”<sup>487</sup> The offensive was directed against the German group of armies ” *South* ” and ” *A* ” in Ukraine. The 3rd and 4th Romanian Armies ( the latter remobilized by Antonescu in March 1944 ) participated to the defensive battles for Moldova within *The Group ” A ”*, rebaptized as *The Group of Armies ” Ukraine South ”* ( from Bukovine, in north, down to the Black Sea, in south: the 4th Romanian Army, the 8th and 6th German Armies, the 3rd Romanian Army, the 17th German Army ). Thus, during the fourth major defensive phase, March 17th – April 17th, 1944, Romanian and German armies were driven out of Bukovine, the northern parts of Transnistria, and the northern parts of Bessarabia by the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian

<sup>486</sup> Chirnoagă, 1986, p. 232.

<sup>487</sup> Scafes, *Luptele pentru apărarea Moldovei*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7 1999, p. 49.

Fronts, and out of the central and southern parts of Transnistria by the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front ( see the frontline in Appendix 6 ). After three months of relative calm the Soviets started anew, on August 19th, 1944, with their 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts, the offensive against *The Group of Armies " Ukraine South "* on the entire Romanian Front in Moldova. Within several days German-Romanian Troops were forced to withdraw behind the last but strongest fortified defence line: Eastern Carpathians-Focșani-Nămoloasa-Brăila-Danube River. Thus, the fifth major defensive phase, between the 19th and 24th of August, 1944, turned to be also the last one for the 3rd and 4th Romanian Armies. They were commanded on August 24th, at 0.30 local time, " to cease fire on the Soviet Troops ", following Antonescu's removal from power the previous day.<sup>488</sup> Scafes suggests, that Romanian Army lost 10,797 soldiers during the first phase of the defensive battles for Moldova. However, the 3rd and 4th Romanian Armies suffered most losses during the final battles of the Eastern Campaign, between the 19th and 24th of August, that is, " 8,305 dead and 24,989 wounded, of the total 431,800 soldiers engaged."<sup>489</sup> According to Scafes, " of the total 153,883 missing soldiers, well over 110,000 were taken prisoner by the Soviets after the ceasefire by Romanian Army on August the 24th, 1944."<sup>490</sup> Many of them were set free later and did participate until the end of the Second World War, within the ranks of the Romanian Army and close by the Soviets, to the liberation of whole of Romania by October 25th, 1944, and, subsequently, of Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Austria. According to mainstream historians Antonescu was still believing in August 1944 that the Soviets, occupied on other sectors of the Eastern Front and aware of the difficulty to break through the natural defence line of the Carpathians and Danube, would ultimately agree on armistice conditions avoiding the total occupation of Romania. Antonescu was waiting for the last results of the official armistice negotiations in Stockholm. In case of moderate terms for Romania he was ready to bring the country out of war and even grant German Troops a safe withdrawal but, in the middle of a new offensive by Red Army, he was removed from power by King Michael I on August 23rd, 1944. According to mainstream historians there is no doubt, that had he remained in power and the Soviets rejected fair armistice conditions he would have continued the resistance in the Carpathians until the end and close by the Germans.

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<sup>488</sup> Scafes, *Luptele pentru apărarea Moldovei*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 52.

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.*

So, what was the price in human losses paid by Romanian Army during its Eastern Campaign, as it is statistically suggested by mainstream historians? According to Chirnoagă 22 Romanian divisions in total were set by Antonescu at Hitler's disposal during the military campaign of 1942 on the Eastern Front.<sup>491</sup> On the front remained to fight, from January 1943 until March 1944, only 7 divisions in Crimea, all of them belonging to the 3rd Romanian Army. The soldiers of the 4th Romanian Army were called-up again in March 1944 to fight until the end together with all other Romanian Troops. Thus, we can suggest that, in average, 17 Romanian divisions were engaged on the Eastern Front between June 22nd, 1941, and August 23rd, 1944. According to Otu a Romanian division was made up by that time of 22,042 soldiers.<sup>492</sup> We may conclude, thus, that Romanian Army engaged for the entire period of its Eastern Campaign ( including the occupation troops in Transnistria ) 374,714 soldiers in average. According to Chirnoagă, by the 23rd of August 1944, the total losses suffered by Romanian Army ( dead, wounded, missing soldiers ) were 495,633 men.<sup>493</sup> With the prisoners taken by the Red Army in Moldova, Bessarabia, and Dobrougea, after the August 24th ceasefire by the Romanian Troops, the total losses augmented, according to Chirnoagă, to 624,740 soldiers.<sup>494</sup> A quite similar figure of the total losses is suggested also by Bărboi, that is, 625,860 soldiers.<sup>495</sup> In other words, Romanian Army lost in its anti-Soviet war ( until mid-September 1944 ) almost the double of the average number of soldiers engaged for the whole campaign, or, the equivalent of 28 divisions, that is, 11 divisions more than the average of 17 divisions used in battles. We may suggest that, by having previously worked the statistical data provided by Duțu and other historians, for the whole Eastern Campaign they were generally mobilized around 1,200,000 men in average, and effectively under arms ( both in Romania and the operational zones east of Dniester ) an average of ca. 600,000 soldiers.<sup>496</sup> Thus, Romanian Army lost in its anti-Soviet campaign as much as the average number of soldiers effectively mobilized, and the equivalent of half of those generally mobilized in average. According to mainstream historians ca. 72,000 Romanian soldiers died during the Eastern Campaign.<sup>497</sup> It means, that Romania had to pay for her anti-Soviet war with the lives of one fifth ( ca. 20% ) of her soldiers effectively engaged in battles. For mainstream historians, most losses were caused by the lack of modern armament for the Romanian Troops, the Germans having been reluctant to supply them properly.

<sup>491</sup> Chirnoagă, 1986, p. 189.

<sup>492</sup> Otu, "Ostași, vă ordon: treceți Prutul!", *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 19.

<sup>493</sup> Chirnoagă, 1986, p. 281.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid.

<sup>495</sup> Bărboi, *Eliberarea Basarabiei, a Bucovinei de Nord și a Ținutului Herța*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 25.

<sup>496</sup> Duțu, *De la Nistru spre Volga și Caucaz*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 36.

<sup>497</sup> See: A. Duțu & F. Dobre, *Comandanți și eroi români în Campania din Est*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 57-62.

What was the impact of the Axis defeat at Stalingrad on Antonescu's foreign policy? According to mainstream historians the defeat made Antonescu become skeptical on the Wehrmacht's ability of winning the war in the East. In Troncota's opinion the *Conducător's* skepticism was obvious even before the defeat did actually occur. Thus, close by the conclusion of the SSI Report of December 18th, 1942, that "the 1942 operative missions on the Eastern Front had been in practice a failure of the German strategic plan", Antonescu added with a red pencil: "Much more."<sup>498</sup> Aside the other major conclusion of the report, that one preventing about "new Soviet reserves, attacks, and a continuation of the efforts during the whole winter", Antonescu wrote: "Yes."<sup>499</sup> Troncota's suggestions above could be, thus, reinterpreted in the sense, that the Axis defeat at Stalingrad meant for Antonescu the turning point of the war, the Soviets having already taken the initiative by that time on the Eastern Front in the detriment of the Axis forces. The main orientation by post-communist historical writing is similar. For mainstream historians, although still officially committed to Hitler and the Axis, Antonescu became aware of the fact that the Germans were already losing the war and, thus, Romania must find her way out. Therefore, since February 1943 Antonescu not only encouraged Romanian Opposition, as we have seen previously, to contact Anglo-Saxon governments for eventual peace talks, but he also urged Romanian officials abroad to get in touch with British and American representatives in neutral countries for such talks. When it became clear, by December 1943, that for eventual armistice negotiations the Soviets had to be directly contacted, Antonescu allowed Romanian officials in Stockholm to contact them. Which were then the principal secret peace talks by Antonescu's envoys with the Allied Powers' representatives abroad?

All these talks are presented in detail by Ion Constantin within the Chapter V of his 1995 book written in collaboration with Valeriu-Florin Dobrinescu.<sup>500</sup> According to Constantin since 1943 both Marshal Ion Antonescu and the 'Opposition', represented by Iuliu Maniu and Constantin I. C. Brătianu, agreed on the fact that Romania's way out of war was impossible unless the Anglo-Saxons would secure her integrity and sovereignty, "through the conditions of granting a minimum of guarantees within the framework of a honourable and fair armistice."<sup>501</sup> Constantin points out, that all of them refused direct and bilateral talks only with the Soviets because they couldn't have

<sup>498</sup> Troncota, *Dezastrul de la Stalingrad în versiunea SSI*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 7, 1999, p. 40.

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>500</sup> Dobrinescu & Constantin, 1995, p. 253-294.

<sup>501</sup> *Idem*, p. 266.

trust in an eventual armistice ” which terms were not guaranteed by the Anglo-Saxons, too.”<sup>502</sup> According to Constantin talks for an eventual armistice were carried out simultaneously, especially since December 1943, with both the Anglo-Saxons and the Soviets.

Antonescu’s men had contacts with the Anglo-Saxon representatives in Madrid, Lisbon and, especially, Cairo. Thus, during the talks in October and November 1943, the American Ambassador in Madrid, Carlton Hayes, told Antonescu’s envoys that the Allies had already agreed on the term of ” capitulation without conditions ” for all Axis countries and, thus, ” it was impossible for them to make an exception of Romania.”<sup>503</sup> To the same result led also the talks which the representative of Antonescu Government, Minister Victor Cădere, had during the same period with the Anglo-Saxon officials in Lisabon.<sup>504</sup>

The first contact with the Soviets, though an indirect one, took place in September 1943. According to Constantin the Soviets made known, through a Swiss official, to Romanian Minister in Bern, Vespasian Pella, their minimal claims on Romania for an eventual armistice: Bessarabia, Northern Bukovine, and the Danube Mouths.<sup>505</sup> Another indirect contact took place on the 2nd of October 1943, when Romanian Minister in Stockholm, Frederic C. Nanu, met the Serb Avakumovich, ” a trusted men ” of the Soviet Legation in Sweden. Avakumovich told Nanu that: ” Romania must yield Bessarabia and Bukovine at least, but she might get back in exchange Northern Transylvania whether she immediately proceeds to negotiations with Soviet Union... since otherwise the Allies would start in a month a massive bombardment of the country.”<sup>506</sup> In late December 1943 the same Nanu started direct armistice negotiations with the Soviet Ambassador in Stockholm, Alexandra Kollontai. According to Constantin the Soviets did renounce the term ” surrender without conditions ” and offered Marshal Antonescu armistice ” conditions ”, which were further improved by Minister Nanu.<sup>507</sup> Thus, as a ” compensation ” for the loss of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine the Soviets were ready to support the annulation of the ” Vienna Agreement ” imposed by Hilter and Mussolini, that is, to assist Romania in getting back Northern Transylvania.<sup>508</sup> For Constantin, ” Kremlin was directly interested to own a bigger Romania for exploitation and sovietization, mainly

<sup>502</sup> Dobrinescu & Constantin, 1995, p. 266.

<sup>503</sup> Idem, p. 268.

<sup>504</sup> Ibid.

<sup>505</sup> Idem, p. 260.

<sup>506</sup> Idem, p. 261.

<sup>507</sup> Idem, p. 268.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid.

in the detriment of Hungary, who was already included by that time in the influence zone of Western Europe.”<sup>509</sup> Antonescu instructed his men to reject such armistice terms legalizing the belonging of eastern provinces to Soviet Union.

The situation worsened for Romania by the spring of 1944, when Red Army had already reached in its offensive the north-eastern parts of Romania. Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine, seen as impossible to defend, were previously evacuated at Antonescu's order. In these conditions, Constantin points out, Molotov made a statement on the 2nd of April 1944, one previously approved by the British Government, making known the fact that: "Soviet Union is not keen to occupy any part of Romanian territory, neither to change the social system in Romania, the march of the Soviet Troops onto Romanian territory being exclusively dictated by military reasons and the continuation of the resistance provided by the adversary."<sup>510</sup> For Constantin, Molotov's "initiative" was almost exclusively propaganda directed to Western Allies, "whom Stalin was trying to assure that Soviet Union wouldn't take advantage of the presence of her army forces on territories belonging to other states for imposing communist regimes there."<sup>511</sup> Constantin suggests, that Western Allies saw the Soviet initiative as a positive step ahead despite the fact that the Soviets were considering the River Pruth as the real borderline between Romania and Soviet Union, and that Great Britain and the United States had not ever formally recognized by then the yielding of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine. Soon after Molotov's statement Soviet Union presented on the 8th of April, 1944, the armistice conditions for Romania, which the United States and Great Britain agreed upon few days later, on April the 11th. The armistice conditions were sent to Antonescu on the 13th of April the same year through his men in Cairo and Stockholm, Prince Barbu Stirbei and, respectively, Ambassador Frederic Nanu. According to Constantin, among the other ones, they were especially two hard conditions set by the Soviets to Romania: the yielding of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine and the payment of enormous reparations. Antonescu considered the armistice terms as insatisfactory and, due to the gravity of the situation, he contacted Maniu to discuss about "the future problems for the Romanian People whether the conditions set by the Soviets were to be accepted as such."<sup>512</sup> Moreover, according to Constantin, Antonescu was ready to step down and provide military assistance to Maniu, whether the latter would take over and consent to the terms.

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<sup>509</sup> Dobrinescu & Constantin, 1995, p. 269.

<sup>510</sup> Idem, p. 275.

<sup>511</sup> Idem, p. 275-276.

<sup>512</sup> Idem, p. 279.

Romanian historian emphasizes, that the post-war border between Romania and Soviet Union made also the subject of the secret talks that Antonescu's men abroad had during the whole spring of 1944, on the one hand, with the Anglo-Saxon representatives in Madrid and, on the other hand, with the Soviet officials in Stockholm. Thus, in April 1944 the American Ambassador in Madrid, Carlton Hayes, indirectly advised Gheorghe Barbul ( the envoy sent by Mihai Antonescu, the Romanian Vicepresident of the Council of Ministers and Foreign Minister ), that Romania should renounce for a while to claim her two eastern provinces. According to Constantin, Mihai Antonescu realized that Romanian negotiators " should leave aside in their armistice talks with the Soviets their demands for the recognition of the frontiers as they were before August 1940, and to delay the issue until the Peace Conference."<sup>513</sup> According to Constantin, Minister Nanu replied on May 22nd, 1944, Bulgarian Minister Goranov in Stockholm ( the intermediary used by the Soviets in their official secret contacts with Antonescu's representatives ), among other things, that: "... The ethnic principle invoked by the Soviets is valid neither in Transylvania, nor in Bessarabia. The River Pruth is not a strategic frontier, Bessarabia representing for Soviet Union less than 0.5% of her territory, while for us the region represents a quarter of our country."<sup>514</sup> Constantin points out, that Nanu also wondered why the Soviets were not determined to return Bessarabia by then, whether their previously expressed intention in that sense was true. Romanian historian suggests, that the Soviets were already in a strong position by then, due to the presence of their troops in both Bessarabia and north-eastern parts of Romania, to conduct the peace talks with Antonescu's representatives abroad on their own will.

While Soviet Troops were advancing deeper into Romanian territory the armistice talks continued in Stockholm. Thus, on May 29th, same year, Nanu addressed a memorandum to the Soviet Ambassador Kollontai which was demanding the inclusion in the armistice terms of a stipulation postponing the final decision on the fate of Bessarabia and Bukovine until the Peace Conference. According to Constantin the Soviet response came through the same Bulgarian Minister, Goranov, who told Nanu that: " It is useless to rise anylonger the problem of Bessarabia, since Soviet Union is uncompromising on this issue."<sup>515</sup> Constantin emphasizes, that Antonescu, unwilling to talk only with the Soviets, tried through his representatives in Madrid, Ankara, and Cairo to obtain assistance

<sup>513</sup> Dobrinescu & Constantin, 1995, p. 280.

<sup>514</sup> Idem, p. 281; Quotation by Constantin from: Dosar S. 1, Stockholm, vol. I, f. 182, Arhivele Ministerului Afacerilor Externe, Bucuresti.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid; Idem, f. 215.

and guarantees from the Anglo-Saxon Powers. Thus, in June 1944 Antonescu demanded through his military attaché in Ankara "the presence of an Anglo-American Mission whether the Soviets would occupy Romania."<sup>516</sup> Constantin suggests, that Western Allies advised Antonescu to consent to the Soviet armistice terms. For him, the Allies had already renounced to have a say in Romania on behalf of the Soviets. Great Britain was worried about the eventual occupation by Red Army of Greece, "who's position was essential for the protection of the Suez, a strategic point the more important, the more vulnerable."<sup>517</sup> In other words, as Constantin puts it, "in the summer of 1944, when only country's northern part was occupied by the Red Army, Great Britain offered Romania to Soviet Union in exchange for the British control over Greece."<sup>518</sup> Thus, the armistice talks carried out by Antonescu's representatives in Stocholm and Cairo with both the Soviets and Anglo-Saxons stagnated in July and August 1944. For Constantin, the Soviets remained uncompromising on their armistice terms of June 2nd 1944, by taking advantage of the Soviet Troops presence on Romanian soil and by enjoying free hands in Romania on the part of the Anglo-Saxons. The same view is also suggested by other Romanian historians.<sup>519</sup>

Chirnoagă suggests, that Antonescu was still unwilling during his meeting with Maniu, in the evening of August 22nd 1944, to conclude the armistice, that is, two days after the starting of the new offensive on the Romanian Front by the Soviets. Nevertheless, the next morning, on August the 23rd, Antonescu was convinced by the liberal leader Gheorghe Brătianu to conclude the armistice, but not before the latter had assured him about "the full political support" on the part of the Liberal and Peasant Parties.<sup>520</sup> Consequently, Antonescu allowed, the same morning, Foreign Minister Mihai Antonescu ( a.n., the two Antonescu were not relatives ) to send an envoy to Minister Nanu in Stockholm with a document enabling the latter to get in touch with Ambassador Kollontai. Nanu was to asked Kollontai the place and date of the beginning of new negotiations, "whether the conditions accepted by Moscow on the 29th of May and 2nd of June, 1944, were still valid."<sup>521</sup> Antonescu was ready again to step down if necessary, and let this time Mihai Antonescu to conclude the armistice. As Chirnoagă puts it, "when the envoy arrived in Stockholm, on August the 24th, it was too late."<sup>522</sup>

<sup>516</sup> Dobrinescu & Constantin, 1995, p. 280.

<sup>517</sup> Idem, p. 281.

<sup>518</sup> Idem, p. 283.

<sup>519</sup> See for example: Chirnoagă, 1986, p. 282-283.

<sup>520</sup> Chirnoagă, 1986, p. 283.

<sup>521</sup> Ibid.

<sup>522</sup> Ibid.



Why did Antonescu repeatedly refuse to conclude the armistice with the Allied Powers? The answer to this question, which can be also seen as the main orientation by post-communist historical writing on this aspect, is suggestively provided by Constantin:

” The present state of research enables us assert, that the main reason why Marshal Ion Antonescu refused the proposals by the United Nations Coalition to get out of war, by the time he was convinced that it was already lost by Axis Forces, was that he couldn't do an act recognizing the loss of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine. That would have implicitly meant the rejection of the Atlantic Charter, which was not recognizing the territorial changes done during the war excepting those freely consented between the contracting sides.”<sup>523</sup>

According to mainstream historians it was not until the day of his own fall, the 23rd of August 1944, that Antonescu even considered he might conclude the armistice with the Soviets, but not one which would have diverged from the terms accepted by them on June the 2nd, 1944. Thus, according to Chirnoagă, leaving aside their uncompromising stand on Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine, the conditions accepted by the Soviets in May and June 1944 were:

” 1) Romanian Government allow German Army a 15-days term to leave Romania; whether German Government refuses to withdraw its troops, Romanian Army would fight close by the Soviet Troops against the German ones in order to throw them out of Romania. 2) The value of reparations is to be fixed in relation to the financial burdens of Romania and to her economic situation. 3) A free area within which Romanian Government could function aloof from foreign troops is to be respected.”<sup>524</sup>

The same historian also emphasizes, that Antonescu took at the same time the necessary measures, in common agreement with the German-Romanian Headquarters in Romania, to oppose a new resistance on the line: Eastern Carpathians – fortified position Focșani-Nămoloasa-Galați – River Danube down to the Black Sea. As Chirnoagă puts it, ” Antonescu took all measures to continue the war and stop the enemy on the Romanian military operative field, whether Soviet Union would not be anylonger disposed to negotiate the armistice on the conditions already known.”<sup>525</sup> We can reinterpret Chirnoagă's suggestions above in the sense that, though considering such a last possibility, Antonescu was rather skeptical on the Soviet readiness of concluding any armistice by August 1944, and therefore he took all measures to resist military on the last fortified defense line.

<sup>523</sup> Dobrinescu & Constantin, 1995, p. 279-280; See more on this in: Gheorghe Buzatu, *Mareșalul Ion Antonescu în fața istoriei*, vol. I., Iasi, 1990, 234.

<sup>524</sup> Chirnoagă, 1986, p. 283.

<sup>525</sup> Idem, p. 283-284.

As for us, Antonescu didn't conclude the armistice himself simply because he entered the anti-Soviet war in order to liberate Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine and not to seal with his own name their belonging to Soviet Union. His pride and honor as a Romanian soldier were at stake. He understood that the war was lost at Stalingrad and allowed, since early 1943, both Romanian Opposition and his own representatives abroad to contact the Anglo-Saxons, later the Soviets, for secret peace talks. He expected until the end to conclude the armistice with the Allied Powers as a whole, but only such a one in which the fate of the two eastern Romanian provinces would have been decided at the Peace Conference. Since early 1944 he was ready to step down as a political leader and provide military assistance to the eventual peasant-liberal leadership. The bourgeois leaders refused to take responsibilities and suggested Antonescu conclude himself the armistice. Well informed by his secret services and men abroad, Antonescu must have known by June – August 1944 that the Allies had already deserted Romania, and that the Soviets were not any longer interested in armistice talks but just to enter victorious in Romania. The proof was the new offensive started by Red Army on the 20th of August 1944. Antonescu understood that he had to fight until the end and took all measures in that sense. In consequence, we believe that his last minute consent of concluding himself the armistice was rather a formality on his part, because it was not even necessary to be an experienced soldier as he was to acknowledge the fact that, due to their superiority on the Romanian Front, the Soviets were unwilling to conclude any armistice by that time.

As a general conclusion of this chapter, what is the main orientation by post-communist historical writing on Romania's 1941 – 1944 anti-Soviet war, on the one hand, and on Antonescu's wartime contacts with the Allied Powers, on the other hand?

The majority Romanian historians see Antonescu's anti-Soviet war, including its phase on the proper Soviet soil, as a legitimate war of defense carried out for the liberation of the eastern Romanian territories under Soviet yoke. For them, the aggressor was Soviet Union, who had annexed by force in the summer of 1940, through an ultimatum, the Romanian Eastern Regions of Bessarabia, Northern Bukovine and Herta. Once risen to power in September 1941, Antonescu changed from the start the course of Romanian foreign policy towards Nazi Germany and the Axis. The reasons behind were the continuous Soviet threat at Romania's eastern borders and Antonescu's own belief in an imminent German-Soviet conflict, enabling thus Romanian Army to

participate and liberate the eastern provinces. The reasons above were also those which made Antonescu start the implementation of his army modernization plan, with German assistance, soon after he took over power. By the time war broke out in June 1941, Romanian Troops were better prepared for a defensive war, but the army as a whole was not yet ready for a modern war. The Germans limited their assistance to instructors assigned beside the Romanian officer staff and troops, and to the sending in Romania of a Military Mission with German Troops. The German delivery of modern armament to Romanian Army was very modest. The main cause of the huge material and human losses suffered by the Romanian Army on the Eastern Front was the lack of modern armament, in particular armored vehicles, antitank weapons and artillery guns. That was also the reason why the 3rd and 4th Romanian Armies were smashed so rapidly at Stalingrad by the Soviet Troops. For majority mainstream Romanian historians, for the Axis defeat at Stalingrad responsible were the Germans with their erroneous strategic and operative plans. The modern armament promised by them to the Romanian Troops engaged there arrived neither before, nor during the battles. The majority mainstream historians see Romania's anti-Soviet war as her own war, having differed in purposes from the German one, and which was rather similar to that carried out by the Finns against the same enemy. The war across the River Dniester, on the proper Soviet territory, was openly criticized but indirectly supported by the Romanian Opposition. The majority Romanians supported the war until the Stalingrad defeat, thereafter the pressure on Antonescu to get out of war increased among both the common people and political class.

The majority mainstream historians see the Axis defeat at Stalingrad not only as the turning point of the war in the East, but also as the turning point in Antonescu's foreign policy. Antonescu not only allowed, since February 1943, the Opposition to contact Western Allies for eventual peace talks, but he actually did instruct his men abroad to contact them and start such talks, though in secret. Since December same year, he allowed Romanian officials abroad to start armistice negotiations with the Soviets, too. Antonescu wanted to conclude the armistice whether with the Anglo-Saxon Powers alone, or with all Allied Powers, but not with the Soviets only. For post-communist historians, Eastern Europe was already shared by the Anglo-Saxons and the Soviets by the spring of 1944. Romania was deserted by the Anglo-Saxons in exchange for Greece. That was the reason why the Allies were unwilling to conclude the armistice with Romania and suggested Antonescu to negotiate it with the Soviets only. Antonescu refused until the end to conclude the truce because he couldn't seal an act legitimizing the loss for ever of the Romanian eastern regions to Soviet Union.

#### 4.5. The 23rd August 1944 Coup by King Michael I – Antonescu's Fall

Later in the same day of August 23rd, 1944, after having been persuaded by the liberal leader Gheorghe Bratianu to conclude an eventual armistice on the terms accepted by the Soviets on June the 2nd, 1944, and after having sent an envoy to Minister Nanu in Stockholm to restart if possible new negotiations on those terms with Ambassador Kollontai, Antonescu went in audience to King Michael I at the Royal Palace in Bucharest. Arrived in Bucharest on August the 22nd, Antonescu was intending to go back on the front, on the 24th of the same month, to reorganize the defense of the German-Romanian Troops on the last defensive line of the Carpathians, Danube, and Black Sea together with the commander of *The Group of Armies "Ukraine South"*, General Hans Friessner. After a couple of hours of discussions Michael I dismissed and arrested Marshal Antonescu. He was accused by the King for his refusal to immediately conclude the armistice and for his intention to continue the war close by the Axis. Antonescu was taken in custody by the Romanian communists who, short after, sent him and his closest collaborators to Soviet Union, to be sent back by the latter in May 1946 to face trials as war criminals. In the same day of August 23rd Romania unilaterally ceased her war against The United Nations and, the next day, she turned the arms on her former ally following the bombardment of Bucharest by the Luftwaffe. In their turn, the Soviet Troops marched on the streets of Bucharest on August the 31st after having faced no armed resistance.

Why, and how, Antonescu was removed from power by King Michael I in August 1944? What happened to him until his trial of May 1946? What happened in Romania in the aftermath of his fall? The answers provided by mainstream historians to the questions above make, briefly, the subject of the next several pages.

The study of the period documents and of the memoirs written by those involved in the events by mainstream historians makes them suggest, that Antonescu was removed from power by King Michael I because, on the one hand, of his refusal to immediately conclude the armistice with Soviet Union and, on the other hand, because of his determination to continue the resistance close by the Germans whether the Soviets would reject peace talks. Antonescu was ready to renegotiate the armistice on the Soviet terms of June 2nd, 1944, and intended to conclude it after the Soviet offensive was stopped by the German-Romanian Troops in Moldova. He intended to inform the Germans, whom he believed would understand the difficult position of his country, before such an

was taken, in order to allow them leave Romania without fight. Antonescu told his intentions to King Michael I during the 15.30-17.00 p.m. audience at the Royal Palace, on the 23rd of August 1944. Michael I previously intended, in common agreement with the leaders of the Opposition and with the knowledge of the Allied Powers, to receive Antonescu in audience, on the 26th of August, and ask him to immediately conclude the armistice and desert the Axis. Because Antonescu was intending to return on the front on the 24th, the King rescheduled the audience for the day of August 23rd. Michael I believed, as all Romanian political leaders alike, that Antonescu would consent in the end to immediately conclude the armistice and leave the war, but he didn't.

How the event occurred on the 23rd of August 1944 was seen by the two key figures involved, Antonescu and King Michael I? We can briefly suggest that, for Antonescu, his own removal from power by Michael I that day was a thoughtless act, which was to have grave consequences in the future for Romania's territorial integrity and independence. For King Michael I, the removal of Antonescu saved the lives of tens of thousands Romanian soldiers and civilians, and did preserve the being of Romanian Nation State, although in a reduced shape and less independent.

According to Vladimir Alexe, by fearing an immediate death Antonescu wrote down for the posterity, during his arrest in the improvised cell at the Royal Palace, his thoughts " on the ongoing war, Romania's destiny, and on the controversial problem of the armistice."<sup>526</sup> Alexe suggests, that Antonescu wrote them within an 1930 agenda belonging to King Charles II. For Alexe, the commander of the Guard subunit in service at the Royal Palace, Captain Gheorghe Teodorescu, had the extraordinary intuition of searching and finding the next day, on August 24th, among the ruins caused by the German bombardment to that palace wing, the dark red agenda. Antonescu was seen writing by the guarding soldier during the evening of August 23rd. The next day he informed Teodorescu about that and searched together for the agenda among the ruins. Teodorescu had been quiet for many decades when, suddenly, in 1980 he decided to hand over the document to Ceausescu together with an explanatory note on the circumstances in which the agenda was found. For Alexe, the notes in the agenda represents Antonescu's " political testament ", its extraordinary importance mainly consisting of the fact, that " it conserves his thoughts and political perspective in that dramatic day of 23rd August, his impressions on people and events subjectively expressed."<sup>527</sup>

<sup>526</sup> Alexe, *Ultimele note ale Mareșalului Antonescu din camera " Fichet "*, arestul de la palat, *Dosare Ultrascrete*, Nr. 119, 19 august, 2000, p. I.

<sup>527</sup> *Ibid.*

Buzatu emphasizes, in his turn, the extraordinary importance of this document in the article dedicated to the 23rd August 1944 event.<sup>528</sup> For Buzatu, Antonescu was certainly aware of the value for future generations of his thoughts. It was the reason why, "in order to keep them safe from a possible 'loss', from an undesirable publicity and interpretation by then, or from a misguided political and scientific use, Antonescu didn't hand over the agenda to King Michael's men, but he found for it an original hiding place."<sup>529</sup> Both historians point out, that the access to the document is open, since 1990, both to the large public and researchers at the Romanian National Archives in Bucharest. Briefly, what wrote Antonescu about his own removal:

"...Because the King wanted negotiations to start at once, Mr. Mihai Antonescu told him that he was waiting for the answer from Ankara and Bern, in order to obtain the consent of Great Britain and The United States to negotiate with the Russians. This, because Churchill's last statement on Romania, that 'this country will be soon at Russia's total mercy', was a warning that we would be attacked in force, we would be at their mercy, and that we should treat with the Russians first. This 'first', connected to other threads from serious channels, made Mr. M. Antonescu suggest the King, that it was necessary a delay of 24 hours in order to get the answers he was waiting for, and only thereafter to go on with the negotiations. I confirmed my agreement on those conditions, and even on M. Antonescu's eventual departure to Ankara and Cairo to start direct talks. At that moment, by excusing himself, the King left the room while the discussion went on for some time with General Sănătescu, who reassured me that he would bring the written consent of Mr. Maniu, Mr. Brătianu and Mr. Titel Petrescu... The King came in again accompanied by a major from the Palace Guard and six, seven soldiers. The King moved to my back followed by the soldiers, and one of them took my arms from behind while General Sănătescu was telling me: 'Marshal Sir, You are under arrest because You didn't want to conclude the armistice at once.' I told the soldier to take his hands of me and, in the King's presence who was heading to other room with his hands back, General Sănătescu: 'Shame on You, these are acts of dishonour for a general.' I looked straight to his eyes and repeated the apostrophe several times... History should judge. I pray God to protect the country from the consequences of an act the more thoughtless the more I never clung to power. Many times I told the King, both face to face and in Mr. M. Antonescu's presence, that whether there was within the country another man more able than me to serve it, then I would give him my place, but with one condition: to be reliable, but not ambitious or venturesome."<sup>530</sup>

Antonescu went in audience determined to immediately conclude the armistice with the Soviets, but he finished by refusing the King's demand in that sense. For Buzatu, Antonescu's highly inexplicable attitude might find the reason in his words addressed to his wife through the letter sent from the arrest: "Another way wouldn't have been mine."<sup>531</sup> Buzatu maintains his viewpoint, that

<sup>528</sup> Buzatu, 23 august 1944: *Metamorfozele unei lovituri de stat*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 1, 1999, p. 35-40.

<sup>529</sup> *Idem*, p. 40.

<sup>530</sup> *Scris în celulă. Mareșal Antonescu 23. VIII. 1944*, *Colecția Manuscrise*, nr. 2183, filele 33-47 r, 49-67 v, *Arhivele Statului București*. Here from: Vladimir Alexe, *Ultimele note ale Mareșalului Antonescu din camera "Fichet"*, *arestul de la Palat, Dosare Ultrascrete*, Nr. 119, 19 august, 2000, p. I.

<sup>531</sup> Buzatu, 23 august 1944: *Metamorfozele unei lovituri de stat*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 1, 1999, p.40.

always determined to remain "himself", Marshal Antonescu didn't agree with the King, "simply because he considered that the option should have been his own, and not one suggested, or even imposed."<sup>532</sup> We can suggest, that Buzatu's point of view is shared by the majority mainstream historians.

The main post-communist orientation is confirmed in a large and detailed August 2000 article by King Michael I himself ( returned home in late 1990s after many years of exile ), who provides his own version over Antonescu's removal:

"... I discussed with Marshal Antonescu and the Foreign Minister for over a hour. Mihai Antonescu agreed with me and General Sănătescu to ask the armistice, but he was waiting for Marshal's decision. This one was tired, even ill-tempered. Obviously, Molotov's statement couldn't be taken as satisfactory because of the political conceptions by Moscow. On the other hand, nobody could get the guarantees for the intact preservation of our borders. However, the Marshal continued to reject, sharply, the armistice conclusion without such guarantees. He was certainly disappointed by Hitler, maybe by himself too, and by the belief he had in the German victory. How could he desert the word of honor to the Führer given by him, the Marshal?! I tried to persuade him that above all of us was the fate of our land. He listened no more, but just repeated his refusal. I proposed him to resign then, in conformity with the plan established by me with the party leaders, in order to allow the new government ask immediately the truce. Hearing my proposal he got angry... Certain is, that he didn't want to hear about resignation and shouted at me, that he'll fight until the end in the Carpathians and that he won't leave the country in the hands of a child... Our plans included also the solution in case that Marshal Antonescu would have rejected both the armistice demand and his resignation. That extreme solution was his arrest... When I told Antonescu that he left me one last solution, the captain and the soldiers entered the room. I still have the scene in front of my eyes, a dramatic scene with all of us, the protagonists, on the brink of despondency. I knew very well that I had no other alternative, that in order to save a man, no matter how much respect he deserved, the Homeland couldn't be sacrificed..."<sup>533</sup>

Thus, King Michael's version on that day event doesn't essentially differ from Antonescu's one. Michael I just emphasizes the fact that he did offer Antonescu the opportunity whether to ask immediately the armistice or to resign. In his "testament" Antonescu mentioned nothing about the resignation proposal. Why he refused the opportunity when he had previously expressed several times his readiness to step down? As we know already, for mainstream historians it was rather his pride who forced him to do so. As for us, we believe that behind his refusal was also his profound spirit of duty towards his people, that is, to fight until the end in the Carpathians as his ancestors did

<sup>532</sup> Buzatu, 23 august 1944: *Metamorfozele unei lovituri de stat*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 1, 1999, p. 40.

<sup>533</sup> *Regele Mihai I, Actul de la 23 August 1944 – povestit de M. S. Regele Mihai I*, *Aldine*, Nr. 228, 19 august, 2000, p. III.

for centuries.

That day event is referred in Romanian historiography as *The Act of 23rd August 1944*. Buzatu summarizes best, in the article already mentioned by us, how the event has been perceived until recently. For him, "there is a common feature for both totalitarian and democratic countries to write, think, measure anew, if not directly to distort some major events in their recent past once the 'heroes' have passed away."<sup>534</sup> That has been the case until recently with the Act of 23rd August, too. From the start and for everybody, including those who did actually carry it out, this act has been perceived as a classical *coup*. From 1945, 1946 and for some years ahead, it has been forgotten. After their installment in power the communists and their people's democracy began to use this act as a propaganda tool. Thus, between 1948 and 1955, the act has been labeled in turn as: *The Turn of the Arms; The Turning Point; The Liberation of 23rd August 1944*. Romanian communist leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej spoke in 1955 on the event of August 1944 as *The Armed Insurrection*. The syntagme was to remain in use for the following twenty years. In mid 1970s Nicolae Ceaușescu labeled the act as *The Antifascist and Antiimperialist Revolution of National Liberation of 23rd August 1944*. Buzatu points out that, despite the allowed changes concerning the event itself, the chronological distortions, the place and role of some key actors, former communist censorship has been really concerned that the official label of the Act of 23rd August 1944 be published and referred as such. Buzatu concludes his article's introduction by suggesting that, "since December 1989, this historic event is perceived as it really was, that is, *The Coup of 23rd August 1944*, with King Michael I playing the main role."<sup>535</sup> Thus, for mainstream historians, represented here by Buzatu, Antonescu was removed from power on the 23rd of August 1944 by King Michael I through a coup.

As for us, Antonescu was *de jure* and *de facto* the Ruler of Romania, having been granted with full powers in September 1940 by both King Charles II and King Michael I, the former's son and successor. So, his dismissal and arrest in August 1944 can be seen actually as a coup. However, as the American historian Keith Hitchins well suggests, in King Michael's Decree of September 6th, 1940, the king was the person who was holding the right "to appoint" the prime-minister.<sup>536</sup> As Hitchins puts it, "the difference was not acknowledged by that time, but four years later these few

<sup>534</sup> Buzatu, 23 august 1944: *Metamorfozele unei lovituri de stat*, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 1, 1999, p. 35.

<sup>535</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>536</sup> Hitchins, 1996, p. 485.



words provided Michael the legal basis for dismissing Antonescu and appointing a new chief of the government.”<sup>537</sup> Hitchins’ viewpoint makes us suggest, that one can speak indeed about a coup, but rather about a ” legal ” one. Romania was a monarchy, Antonescu having been actually removed from power by her King and not by the banned political Opposition, neither by a military plot. It is true that King Michael I had the consent of both party leaders and some military circles to remove Antonescu as an extreme solution, but, as a last resort, the decision was to be his own. He had to dismiss and arrest the *Conducător* because the latter didn’t accept to resign. Antonescu could have abolished the monarchy as early as 1940, or thereafter, had he really wanted it. The fact that he didn’t do it makes us suggest, that Antonescu intended not to cling to power forever but just for the *sine die* period of the domestic and international crisis in which Romania was finding herself those years.

What happened to Antonescu after his arrest and until his trial in May 1946? According to Ciucă, after his arrest on August the 23rd, and until September the 1st, 1944, Antonescu was kept together with his closest collaborators ” by a *patriotic fight squad* made up by communists within a underground building in the Vatra Luminoasă district.”<sup>538</sup> Ciucă suggests that, in conformity with a report addressed to Stalin on the 2nd of September 1944 by the Generals R. I. Malinovski and I. Z. Susaikov, Antonescu and the other Romanian prisoners were handed over to *The 2nd Ukrainian Front’s* Headquarters at its request, on the 1st of September same year.<sup>539</sup> Ciucă points out, that it followed the Soviet detention period, ” extremely scarce in informations.”<sup>540</sup> According to same historian some informations were provided by Constantin Pantazi, one of the prisoners, to his son Ion Pantazi who wrote them down within a book.<sup>541</sup> Thus, on September 2nd, a truck carried the prisoners across the border into the Soviet Union, which arrived in Moscow three days later. They were first sheltered within a castle near Moscow enjoying free movement within its park. Antonescu told his collaborators to blame him for all and tried to commit suicide by hanging himself. He was stopped in due time by his detention fellows. Romanian prisoners were separated and sent to Liubianka Prison in Moscow on May the 10th, 1945. They didn’t see each other until April 1946, on the occasion of their delivery back to the Romanian authorities to face trials as war criminals in accordance to the special clause of the 1944 armistice agreement. Ciucă suggests, that

<sup>537</sup> Hitchins, 1996, p. 485.

<sup>538</sup> Ciucă, 1996, Vol. I, p. 17.

<sup>539</sup> *Idem*, p. 18.

<sup>540</sup> *Idem*, p. 19.

<sup>541</sup> *Ibid.* See: Ion Pantazi, *Am trecut prin iad*, ed. II-a, Sibiu, Editura Constant, 1992, p. 307-310.

there is still more to know about Antonescu's Soviet period of detention, in general, and about his whole testimony made under pressure in Soviet Union, in particular. According to same historian Russian archives have made public since 1990 until the present only a small share of the inquiry documents. As Ciucă puts it, this fact " makes considerably more difficult the clarification of some aspects of the 1946 trial of Marshal Antonescu by the Romanian authorities."<sup>542</sup> Ciucă emphasizes that, nevertheless, two assertions by Antonescu about his talks with Hitler, made by him to the Soviets during the detention period, seem to have been the reason why he was charged in first in 1946 " for Romania's participation to the anti-Soviet war close by Nazi Germany."<sup>543</sup> Thus, we can reinterpret Ciucă's suggestions in the sense, that Antonescu was handed over by Romanian communists to the Soviets at their request, and that he knew about his own fate of having been already sealed once handed over to them. He suggested his collaborators to set the whole blame on him and tried to commit suicide thereafter. He was stopped by them. Antonescu spent most of his Soviet detention period in Moscow at Liubianka Prison, seemingly in decent conditions, where he was often interrogated by Soviet authorities. There are still many question marks about Antonescu's detention period in Soviet Union, mainly due to the fact that Russian archives are still reluctant in making public all the documents in case. Some assertions made by Antonescu to the Soviets seem to have been the reason way he was trialed in 1946 especially for his " premeditated " war against Soviet Union. We can suggest, that Ciucă's interpretation represents at the same time the main orientation on this aspect by post-communist historical writing for the time being.

What happened after the *Conducător's* fall? The unfolding of the events, following Antonescu's removal on the 23rd of August 1944 by King Michael I, is best shown by Constantin in his book mentioned before.<sup>544</sup> Constantin suggests, that the jump by Romania into the United Nations' camp created the conditions for the conclusion of the armistice with Soviet Union, The United States, and Great Britain. He points out that, in conformity with archive documents, on the 25th of August 1944, Romanian representative in Ankara, Alexandru Cretzianu, informed both the Soviet Ambassador there, Vinogradov, and the Anglo-Saxon ones about the decision taken by the new Romanian Government of National Unity " to immediately conclude the armistice and throw away the German Troops from Romania."<sup>545</sup> Molotov reassured, by a same day statement as regards to

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<sup>542</sup> Ciucă, 1996, Vol. I, p. 21.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid.

<sup>544</sup> Dobrinescu & Constantin, 1995, p. 283-294.

<sup>545</sup> Idem, p. 283-284.

events in Romania, that Moscow had no intention ” to annex any piece of Romanian territory, whatever it might be, nor to change the political and social system.”<sup>546</sup> That made, according to Ciucă, Romanian Government ask, on August the 28th 1944, the Soviet one ” for the recognition of the quality of co-belligerent and for the acceptance by the Soviet Union of an exchange of diplomatic missions.”<sup>547</sup> Romanian delegation assigned to conclude the armistice and made up of official representatives, military experts, and the negotiators in Cairo arrived in Moscow on the 30th of August 1944. Ciucă suggests, that the negotiations were postponed several times under the pretext invoked by the Allies of their unfinished preparatives in that sense. According to Ciucă the real motive behind the postponements was for Soviet Union to occupy the whole of Romania before the beginning of discussions. Armistice Convention was signed by the Romanian representatives during the night of 12th / 13th September 1944. On the part of the United Nations the document was signed by the head of the Supreme Soviet Allied Headquarters, Marshal R. I. Malinovski. According to Ciucă the document ” was regulating the international position of Romania for the immediate period following the Act of 23rd August 1944 and was including twenty articles, a protocol, and six appendices.”<sup>548</sup> Through Article 10 the ” Arbitration ” of Vienna was declared null and the right of Romania over Transylvania recognized. Article 4 reinstated the border between Soviet Union and Romania in conformity with the ” agreement ” of 28th June 1940, sealing for the second time the loss of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine by Romania. Ciucă suggests, that the Soviets refused to negotiate on this by having considered the matter accepted by the Romanians in advance as a *sine qua non* condition for the armistice conclusion. Articles 5, 6, 7, 8 and 11 established war reparations towards the Allies. Romania was to return all Allied assets on her territory and to pay reparations of 300 mil. US Dollars to Soviet Union. On the Danube’s Chilia branch, in the Delta, the border between the two states remained unclear, the same the future status of the Danube Mouths. Romania bound herself to cooperate in the arresting of former officials suspected of crimes to be tried. For Ciucă, the armistice should have been a ceasefire in conformity with the international law. Instead, and from all viewpoints, the document was not at all an armistice convention ” but a dictate, an unconditional surrender.”<sup>549</sup> Moreover, for Ciucă, the Armistice ” sanctioned not only a great injustice for the Romanian People but also huge historic untruths.”<sup>550</sup> Main orientation by new historiography is similar. The same is also our point of view.

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<sup>546</sup> Ciucă, 1996, Vol. I, p. 284.

<sup>547</sup> Idem, p. 285.

<sup>548</sup> Idem, p. 285-286.

<sup>549</sup> Idem, p. 288.

<sup>550</sup> Idem, p. 294.

## 5. THE 1946 TRIAL OF ANTONESCU AND THE PRESENT DEBATE AROUND HIS CONTROVERSIAL FIGURE

In April 1946, after having been kept in custody and interrogated for almost two years, Antonescu and his collaborators were returned by Soviet Union to the Romanian authorities to be trialed by them as war criminals in conformity with the special stipulation in that sense of the Armistice Convention, signed up by Romania in Moscow on September 12th, 1944. After the setting up of the so called "The People's Tribunal of Bucharest" by the pro-Soviet Government of Dr. Petru Groza, in power by then, Antonescu and his closest collaborators were trialed and condemned to death penalty by the former, in May 1946. Antonescu's trial and his controversial figure constitute the main topics of the strong debate which is taking place among both politicians and historians as regards to the events occurred during and after the Second World War in Romania.

Which were the reasons behind the trial of Antonescu? What was he charged with? What kind of trial was it really? Which are the landmarks of the present political and historical debate in Romania around the controversial figure of Ion Antonescu? How mainstream Romanian historians address all the questions above make the topic of this last chapter.

The best documentary study on Antonescu's trial, recognized and often referred by mainstream historians, is the already mentioned 1996 work by Ciucă. In the introduction Ciucă comments chronologically and critically all aspects related to the trial of Antonescu by The People's Tribunal of Bucharest in 1946.<sup>551</sup> The merit of Ciucă's study is that of being the first one which presents the trial in its entirety, by transcribing word by word the recordings on the discs made on that occasion instead of relying entirely on the official written documents, often résumé or abridged in their final form. Although not excellently preserved, these recordings reveal through their written transcription more details on what really happened during the trial of Antonescu. According to Ciucă the reading of the entire text clearly reveals the fact, that Antonescu was not given the possibility to properly defend himself and his regime during the trial. It was the reason why he had to address the People's Tribunal with a memorandum on May 15th, 1946.

Ciucă suggests that, among other things, in his memorandum Antonescu wrote: "In Moscow I was

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<sup>551</sup> Ciucă, 1996, Vol. I., p. 9-42.

forced to sign, in June 1945, a protocol asserting that 225,000 Russians have been killed. In January 1946, in Moscow again, I was compelled to sign another protocol asserting that 100,000 individuals have been massacred.”<sup>552</sup> According to Ciucă, in their turn, some Soviet documents reveal the fact that Antonescu made declarations also about his meetings with Hitler. Thus, during the January 1941 meeting, Antonescu told the Führer that he couldn't allow the passing of the Wehrmacht through Romania, because "Romanian Army was not mobilized" to face eventual Soviet military operations.<sup>553</sup> He also told the Soviets that Hitler proposed him, in June 1941, "to allow the German Troops concentration on the Romanian territory and to directly participate to the attack against Soviet Union."<sup>554</sup> Thus, within two years, The People's Tribunal gathered the incriminatory material largely provided by the Soviets on war premeditation and war crimes in the sense above. For Ciucă, they were the Soviets themselves those who had decided the trial of Antonescu by the Romanian authorities. Thus, according to the American representative in Romania by then, Burton Y. Berry, Soviet Government proposed on April 5th, 1946, through the Soviet Embassy in Washington, to the State Department the handing over of Antonescu and his collaborators to the Romanian authorities. The State Department replied by advising the Soviet Government to ask the prosecutors in Nürnberg whether the presence of former Romanian officials was needed there. In their turn, the Soviets replied, that there was no need to ask the prosecutors about the presence of the majority former officials there, because it was to them to decide "in this case."<sup>555</sup> It means, as Ciucă puts it, that in the case of Ion Antonescu, Mihai Antonescu, Constantin Pantazi and Constantin Z. Vasiliu "both The United States and Soviet Union did previously address the prosecutors in Nürnberg to find out whether their presence there was needed."<sup>556</sup> Ciucă suggests that, as well-known, the presence of Antonescu and his closest collaborators at Nürnberg was not needed by the prosecutors there. According to Ciucă, in full agreement with the Americans, the Soviets returned on April 9th, 1946, all former officials imprisoned in Soviet Union to be trialed by the Romanian authorities themselves in conformity with the Article 14 of the Armistice Convention of September 12th, 1944: "The Romanian Government and the Supreme Headquarters are bounding themselves to collaborate with the Supreme Allied Soviet Headquarters for the arrest and trial of the persons accused of war crimes."<sup>557</sup> The People's Tribunal trialed them between May 6th

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<sup>552</sup> Ciucă, 1996, Vol. I, p. 20.

<sup>553</sup> *Idem*, p. 21.

<sup>554</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>555</sup> *Idem*, p. 22.

<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>557</sup> *Idem*, p. 23.

and 31st, 1946. Ciucă suggests that, in conformity with Burton Y. Berry's telegram of May 3rd 1946 to the State Department, the trial was organized by the Soviets in Romania " in order to obtain electoral capital for Romanian Government, by discrediting Iuliu Maniu and Dinu Brătianu on the basis of their own testimonies."<sup>558</sup> According to same Berry, Molotov himself, in Paris by then, promised " a more gentle sentence " for the two Antonescu whether the two bourgeois leaders " would be involved " by them during the trial.<sup>559</sup> Antonescu and his closest collaborators were trialed, ultimately, for the premeditated war against Soviet Union, the economic disaster of Romania, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and for genocide. For Ciucă, the trial of the former Romanian officials was already decided by the Soviets by September 1944. In his point of view, shared also by the majority mainstream historians, Antonescu and his four ministers were the victims of a " political trial ", in which the death sentences had been decided before both the administration of proofs and the hearing of the witnesses and accused persons.<sup>560</sup> They were executed by shooting on the 1st of June, 1946, at Jilava Prison. According to Ciucă the trial was a farse making easier the solid implantation of the Soviet system in Postwar Romania, which was seen as such by many that time, both at home and abroad.<sup>561</sup> Thus, we can reinterpret Ciucă's suggestions above in the sense, that the fate of Antonescu was sealed within the September 1944 Armistice Convention, and that the Soviets decided to send him to be trialed in Bucharest, and not in Nürnberg, in order to strengthen the pro-soviet Romanian Government in a time when the former Allies had already entered the *Cold War*. The declarations made by Antonescu under pressure in Soviet Union were used against him in May 1946 by The People's Tribunal of Bucharest, which condemned him and his closest ministers through a farse of a trial, political in all its dimensions, to death penalty.

Buzatu has rather a similar approach. For him, by the trial of Antonescu the Soviets and their Romanian advocates didn't seek for " legality ", because the Soviet system was by then already implanted in Romania, while the " iron curtain " was fixed far westwards from the Romanian borders.<sup>562</sup> They wanted to erase from the order of day a disturbing issue even through a spectacle, to which Antonescu and his ministers " did fully cooperate " by having shown how to die.<sup>563</sup> It was

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<sup>558</sup> Ciucă, 1996, Vol. I, p. 22.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid.

<sup>560</sup> Idem, p. 25.

<sup>561</sup> Idem, p. 25-27.

<sup>562</sup> Buzatu, *Mareşalul Ion Antonescu, Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 3, 1999, p. 30.

<sup>563</sup> Ibid.

a "massacre", Buzatu suggests by making reference to the videocassettes publicly released some years ago, and not an execution, the shooting of Ion Antonescu, Mihai Antonescu, Constantin Picky Vasiliu and Gheorghe Alexianu at Jilava on June 1st, 1946.<sup>564</sup> According to him, for most contemporaries those killed must have appeared as "the victims of the Soviet barbarism and of its advocates in Romania."<sup>565</sup> In Buzatu's own words, "some of the Romanian prosecutors who did present during the trial fabricated charges ( the country's total subordination to Nazi Germany, the Holocaust, etc. etc. ) acknowledged the eventuality of a ' posthumous trial ' of Antonescu."<sup>566</sup> Nevertheless, Buzatu emphasizes that, especially for historians, this expression " doesn't represent the essence " of the *Antonescu Case*.<sup>567</sup> Thus, Buzatu's suggestions can be interpreted in the sense that, also for him, the trial of Antonescu was political, a farse from the beginning until the end, and which had no other purpose but to strengthen the Soviet system already in place in Romania by 1946. We may just add, that the main orientation by post-communist historical writing on this aspect is similar to the interpretation above.

Which are the landmarks of the current dispute around Antonescu's controversial figure? They are best revealed and summarized by Buzatu in his already mentioned article on this topic.<sup>568</sup>

For Buzatu, the assertions and writings in recent years, according to which the beginnings of Antonescu's "rehabilitation" should be set in Communist Romania while its accomplishment in the first years of the New Power in Bucharest, are not true.<sup>569</sup> The opinion that, in its turn, the rehabilitation campaign abroad should be set on Ion C. Drăgan's account ( a.n., Italian historian of Romanian origin ) is not true either. According to Romanian historian, "tried" and executed in Bucharest at Moscow's order, Antonescu was the first victim by the red terror, having been since his death, in 1946, and until 1989 a forbidden historic figure in his own country.<sup>570</sup> For Buzatu, Antonescu cannot be "rehabilitated", but, first of all, he should be discovered or rediscovered.<sup>571</sup> He emphasizes in this sense, that Antonescu's writings were "in head" on the list banning the 1938 – 1944 works by the former communist regime.<sup>572</sup> Thus, for Buzatu, Antonescu needs to be known

<sup>564</sup> Buzatu, Maresalul Ion Antonescu, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 3, 1999, p. 30.

<sup>565</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>566</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>567</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>568</sup> Buzatu, Maresalul Ion Antonescu, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 3, 1999, p. 30-34.

<sup>569</sup> *Idem*, p. 31.

<sup>570</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>571</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>572</sup> *Ibid.*

and not rehabilitated.

According to same historian the interest in Antonescu's figure has increased, after many years of silence, not because communist authorities wanted it, but " in a natural way and in conformity with the developing necessities of Romanian historical writing ", once more sources became available for researchers whether in Romania, or abroad.<sup>573</sup> In this context, Buzatu emphasizes the fact that several works were published before 1989 both at home and abroad ( see Appendix 3 ). For him, it is about " a continuous process ", which nobody could stop as in the cases of Hitler, Stalin, Churchill, or King Michael I.<sup>574</sup> Antonescu was not, and he cannot remain the same with that one presented to the Romanians and outside world in 1946 by the " judges " and " the Allied Commission " in Bucharest.<sup>575</sup> In Buzatu's very words: " Who could assert today, after the publishing of such many monographs and documentary collections, that Marshal Antonescu was a fascist, or that he ` threw ' without reasons Romania ( Sic! ) into the ` criminal war ' against Soviet Union, on June the 22nd 1941. Moreover, who can be taken seriously with such ` arguments ', that Antonescu did conclude the alliance with Hitler having been animated by racist feelings / reasons, or that he intended to extend the Holocaust orchestrated by the Nazis also on the Romanian territory?"<sup>576</sup> Thus, for Buzatu, the interest for Antonescu has developed even since communist times among both ordinary people and historians, and rather in a natural way as in the case of other historic figures, in particular after the archives have been opened to free research. We may suggest that this is the case since late 1970s. It was not the case before. We still remember that, as a young secondary school student, it was impossible to get both Antonescu's own writings and those on him, as well as all those on the anti-Soviet war from the libraries. They were all them forbidden for both students and the majority researchers.

For the Romanian historian, the pretended rehabilitation campaign has begun, curiously, with the very Coup of 23rd August 1944. Buzatu emphasizes that, leaving aside Antonescu's former collaborators ( Gen. Ion Gheorghe, Gen. Platon Chirnoagă, Col. Ion V. Emilian, Amb. Gheorghe Barbul ), the very coup authors Grigore Niculesc-Buzăști, King Michael I, and Iuliu Maniu began to prize the former regime, after having faced the " realities " of the Soviet occupation of Romania.<sup>577</sup>

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<sup>573</sup> Buzatu, *Măreșalul Ion Antonescu, Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 3, 1999, p. 31.

<sup>574</sup> Ibid.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid.



According to Buzatu the peasant leader, Iuliu Maniu, even avowed within a September 1944 Government Session, that " had he knew in advance the conditions of the Armistice Convention he would have persuaded King Michael I not to dismiss and arrest Antonescu."<sup>578</sup> It was the same Maniu who, in the booings of the selected crowd and risking his own arrest on the place, didn't hesitate to shake hands with Marshal Antonescu during the latter's " trial ", in May 1946.<sup>579</sup> In other words, for Buzatu, the so called " rehabilitation " of Antonescu has been initiated not only by his former collaborators , but also by King Michael I and Romanian bourgeois leaders, and in some cases even before Antonescu's trial, in 1946. We can suggest that, indeed, some of the former collaborators did write on Antonescu, on his regime, and on Romania's anti-Soviet war ( see Appendix 3 ). But, for instance, Chirnoagă's book, used many times within this thesis, is critical enough on Antonescu and his wartime policy. In his turn, King Michael I avowed two years ago, in the same article used by us before, that he never ceased to see in the person of Ion Antonescu a great Romanian patriot. Antonescu was arrested by King Michael I following his refusal to resign, and not because of his refusal to immediately conclude the armistice with the Soviets in August 1944.

During the *Cold War* period they were some other authors, Romanian and foreign alike, who dealt with the figure of Antonescu. Buzatu suggests, that they were not labeled as " rehabilitators."<sup>580</sup> According to him the well-known German historian, Andreas Hillgruber, has been among the first ones " to remark ", by 1954, the role played by Antonescu during the Eastern Campaign of 1941 – 1944.<sup>581</sup> In Buzatu's point of view, Hillgruber did underline with objectivity, within his 1954 work, " the qualities and the shortcomings " of Antonescu's policy, seen by the German historian through the latter's relations with Berlin. For Buzatu, the Hillgruber's words are revealing: " ... The personal relationship of trust and mutual esteem between Hitler and Antonescu couldn't move beyond an ordinary coalition of war... In fact, the two countries carried out a ` parallel war ', one having resembled to that carried out together by Germany and Finland. Hitler's political intentions and his military plans were not even told to Marshal Antonescu. On the other hand, the leading Romanian economic elite, who was willing to preserve for times of peace the economic reserves of Romania, did provide a strong opposition to the total drainage of country's economic potential during the

<sup>578</sup> Buzatu, Maresalul Ion Antonescu, *Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 3, 1999, p. 31.

<sup>579</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>580</sup> *Idem*, p. 32.

<sup>581</sup> *Ibid.*

common war.”<sup>582</sup> For Buzatu, Hillgruber’s point of view on the so called ” Holocaust ” attributed to Antonescu is also revealing: ” Romanian Government’s policy towards the Jewish question, as it comes out through a retrospective look, was based during the entire war on tactical and commercial reasons. It didn’t take into consideration any moral obligations towards the Romanian citizens, nor was it inspired by the anti-Semitic doctrine. It rather followed the main lines of the Romanian foreign policy.”<sup>583</sup> Buzatu suggests, that the aspects above, defined by the great German historian over forty years ago, seem to be unknown and unclear both to some improvised specialists and to certain imaginary politicians in Nowadays Romania. He mentions, that also the Romanian historian Constantin I. Kiritescu wrote in 1956 a book on Romania in WWII, in which he saw Antonescu’s policy with objectivity . The manuscript was published only in 1995, after having been confiscated by the communists until 1990 ( see Appendix 3 ). Thus, we can suggest that, for Buzatu, foreign and Romanian authors who wrote objectively on Antonescu’s policy were not labeled as ” rehabilitators ” , the more that some of their viewpoints were in total contradiction with the ” official ” portrait of Antonescu launched in 1946 by the victors in WWII.

Gheorghe Buzatu contests also the viewpoints according to which Ceausescu would have ordered the worship of Antonescu’s figure during his last years in power, by considering them ” unsubstantial.”<sup>584</sup> According to Buzatu within two studies of the 1980s ( see in Appendix 3: Fătu, 1994; Ceaușescu, 1989 ) Antonescu Regime is seen as one of ” national treason ” , while Antonescu himself ” as putting an end to the bourgeois democracy ” and setting up his personal ” totalitarian regime ” , one characterized by ” excessive anti-Semitism and Chauvinism.”<sup>585</sup> Buzatu points out, that Aurică Simion’s 1979 monography, dealing with the events in Romania previously to August 1944, was withdrawn from circulation after having caused a historiographic ” tempest ” in Bucharest, because within its pages there was ” a different Antonescu ” to the official line.<sup>586</sup> In other words, for Buzatu, there was no prizing of Antonescu during Ceaușescu’s last decade in power, although the access to archive documents was freed for researchers. The 1946 ” official ” portrait of Antonescu remained in use. On the other hand, the studies by those who wrote objectively on Antonescu and his regime, though published, were banned.

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<sup>582</sup> Buzatu, *Mareșalul Ion Antonescu, Dosarele Istoriei*, Nr. 3, 1999, p. 32; Quotation by Buzatu from: Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitler, Regele Carol și Mareșalul Antonescu. Relațiile germano-române, 1938 – 1944*, București, 1994.

<sup>583</sup> Ibid.

<sup>584</sup> Idem, p.33.

<sup>585</sup> Ibid.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid.

According to Buzatu the scientific investigation on both Antonescu and all other wartime political and military leaders became a "necessity" for post-communist Romanian historiography.<sup>587</sup> He points out, that *Antonescu File* did enrich itself with thousands of pages during the 1990s. For the Romanian scholar, essential is the continuation of research in both Romanian and foreign archives. According to Buzatu "the politicization" of Antonescu's role and "the festive" approach on the case should stop both among politicians and historians alike.<sup>588</sup> The honorable historian fully agrees with the viewpoints expressed, in 1992, by King Michael I: "Antonescu belongs to history and to his actions one cannot give interpretations which might discharge or, on the contrary, fully charge him with sins. History doesn't deal with such things. Antonescu, as he really was, remains a great figure."<sup>589</sup> Thus, for Buzatu, the research on Antonescu and his regime is to be continued because it constitutes a necessity for new Romanian historiography, but some historians should set themselves within the limits of an objective and balanced research, one based on the scientific interpretation of sources and not on their own political sympathies.

In our opinion, Buzatu's general conclusion about the current political and historical debate in Romania as regards to the figure of Ion Antonescu and his 1940 – 1944 authoritarian regime is revealing: "Antonescu became in this way a case not only for historians, but for politicians, too. It is said with too much facility that every discussion about the Marshal would obligatory tend to rehabilitation, though as already shown, Antonescu doesn't need such a thing. He was a dictator of his time. He needs to be known."<sup>590</sup>

Indeed, Antonescu needs to be known. All Romanian historians present within the pages of this thesis have tried their best after the fall of Communism in 1989, in particular since 1995, to bring more light on the figure of Ion Antonescu and his 1940 – 1944 regime. They are all serious historians. None of them could be suspected of attempting to rehabilitate Antonescu and his regime. According to own's system of values and political sensibilities each of them is focusing here and there whether on the qualities or on the deficiencies of Antonescu and his regime, but with objectivity and within the limits of the common sense and scientific approach. In their studies Antonescu remains a dictator, but not of the kind depicted in 1946 by the victor powers in WWII.

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<sup>587</sup> Buzatu, *Mareașalul Ion Antonescu, Dosarele Istotiei*, Nr. 3, 1999, p. 34.

<sup>588</sup> Ibid.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid. Quotation by Buzatu from: *Regele Mihai I-ul, Cuvinte către Români*, Iași, 1992.

<sup>590</sup> Ibid.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Three main conclusions result from this thesis. First, the challenge set by Dan Amedeo Lăzărescu to mainstream Romanian historians to rewrite themselves own country's history has been addressed by the former in recent years. This is also valid for the 1940 – 1944 period, time when Romania and her inhabitants were shepherded by the authoritarian regime of Ion Antonescu. In our view, the two exigencies suggested by Lăzărescu to mainstream historians, to stick in their writings to Dilthey's *verstehen* and Collingwood's *reenactment* methodological principles, have been observed by them, especially in the last five, six years, and that despite their different political orientation and system of values. To our mind, their interpretations on Antonescu and his regime have been done on scientific criteria, and have been mainly promoted only after the careful study of the primary sources preserved by the Romanian and foreign archives. It seems that, as in all other civilized European countries, in Romania, too, things ( historical facts and events ) have started to quarrel, while individuals ( historians ) have restrained themselves in doing so. One can observe in the approaches of post-communist Romanian historians less prejudices and more impartiality, and that is also a general feature of their interpretations on Antonescu and his regime.

Second, the researches that mainstream Romanian historians have undertaken in recent years are not only confirming, but they are also adding the missing parts to the post-communist official portrait of Antonescu, as it is painted within the academic *Dictionarul enciclopedic* ( 1993 ) prized by Buzatu in his 1999 article: 1) Previously to his rise to power, in 1940, Antonescu was a reformist military and political leader; 2) Antonescu and his regime planned and carried out during the war also the deportation and the internment of tens of thousands of local Jews to Transnistria.

Third, it seems that the particular aspects of our reconstituted series of events do match quite well those mostly analyzed in recent years by mainstream historians. In other words, and with all limits included, the research problems of this study, as they are pointed out in the beginning, do correspond in general to the guidelines of post-communist historical writing on Antonescu and his regime. Thus, by having properly identified the different aspects constituting the main topics of the current historical debate, and by having dealt with them as such, this study can be seen as a research on new Romanian historiography about Antonescu and his 1940 – 1944 authoritarian regime. Present thesis might lack a more nuanced approach, but, nonetheless, it provides the main orientation by post-communist historical writing on each major aspect under analysis.

The results of our research problems can be summarized now as general conclusions. So, how mainstream Romanian historians have addressed since 1990 as a group the different aspects related to Ion Antonescu and his 1940 – 1944 authoritarian regime in Romania, or, which is the answer provided by post-communist Romanian historical writing to each of the twelve initial basic questions of our study for the time being?

Post-communist historians suggest, that behind Antonescu's rise to power in September 1940 were both the general European crisis and the domestic Romanian one. The League of Nations failed in its main purpose of maintaining the peace in Europe. The appeasement policy manifested in late 1930s by the two colonial powers victorious in WWI, France and Great Britain, towards the totalitarian big powers, Nazi Germany and Fascist Italia, encouraged the latter to start a new general war in Europe by 1939. The political incompetence showed by the interwar Romanian bourgeois parliamentary system led to the introduction of dictatorship by King Charles II in 1938. All interwar Romanian governments relied on both the international treaties and the eventual neutral status in securing the independence of Romania, but not on the modernization of her national army. The consequences were to be tragical for Romania in the summer of 1940, when she found herself unable to resist the pressure on her from both Nazi Germany and Soviet Union, that is, to defend by arms her territorial integrity against the surrounding revisionist states. Aware of the fact that he was seen by the majority Romanians as the principal culprit for the territorial losses, and after having been advised by his counselors that General Ion Anonescu was the only man able both to calm down the anarchy on the streets by the far right Iron Guard and receive the German approval, King Charles II tried to save his reign by appointing Antonescu Prime Minister with exceptional powers on September 4th, 1940. Antonescu asked for more prerogatives concerning the military institution on September the 5th, fact which made King Charles II believe the General would leave him completely aside in the running of state affairs. Wanting to preserve own prerogatives Charles changed his mind and plotted Antonescu's removal for the next day, September 6th. Antonescu found out in due time and arrested all plotters. Early that day Antonescu forced Charles to abdicate on behalf of his son Michael I, but not before having been granted by Charles with all power prerogatives as *The Ruler of the Romanian State*. The same day of September 6th King Michael I confirmed within a royal decree Antonescu's new political position and his exceptional powers. Thus, Antonescu was brought to power legally on September 4th, 1940, by King Charles II and, because he was not given enough prerogatives while a plot against him was on the way, he took all

power in state through a coup against the same king two days later, on September 6th. Also former communist historiography saw the context in which Antonescu rise to power had occurred in its two dimensions, international and domestic, but in accordance with the marxist ideology. It was the contradiction within the capitalist system in itself, the struggle for spheres of influence, which ultimately had threw the imperialist big powers, totalitarian and democratic alike, one against each other in a new general war. On the other hand, the reactionary forces of Interwar Capitalist Romania set the country onto the German orbit in late 1930s. Antonescu's rise to power in September 1940 was nothing more but the final victory of those forces over the incapable and corrupted Romanian bourgeois parliamentary system of the time. At the same time it was also the attempt by local big capitalists to maintain their economic interests within the new shape of Romania and to eventually regain those lost to the neighboring states in the summer of 1940. Only towards late 1970s and early 1980s historians in Ceausescu's Romania began to set the national reasons rather the ideological ones behind Antonescu's rise to power, path which has been also walked by the new historiography since the fall of Communism in 1989 and until today.

Despite Antonescu's expressed will, and although having agreed and supported the removal of Charles II, the bourgeois Romanian traditional parties, National Liberal and National Peasant, denied due to their anglophile orientation any official participation to a new pro-German government. Mainstream historians suggest, that because he lacked a party of his own Antonescu had to chose between a genuine military government and a government set up with Iron Guard, the only pro-German political organization within the country. Although skeptikal about the ability by the Guard to govern, and more to please the Germans, Antonescu declared Romania a "*legionnaire state*" on September 14th, 1940, and set up the new government with this political organization the next day. Romania became a totalitarian state. The reason behind Antonescu's decision was that of allowing Iron Guard the necessary time to compromise itself once for all in both Romanian and German eyes before taking any actions against it. The collaboration Antonescu – Iron Guard became tense soon after the setting up of the "*new regime*." It became a mere struggle for power between the two sides. Iron Guard used, since October 1940, its power position mainly for revenge acts directed against its former enemies, socially, economically and politically. In November the same year it proceeded to the physical elimination not only of its former political rivals but also to that of the most prominent representatives of the Romanian science and culture. At the same time the Guard incapacity to administrate the economy and its attempts to subordinate the national army

became obvious not only to Antonescu, who lost his patience towards the Guard by December 1940, but also to Hitler. During their meeting in early January 1941 in Berlin, by having in mind his *Barbarossa Plan* with the important role reserved to Romania as the most powerful potential ally against Soviet Union, Hitler gave Antonescu free hands in getting rid of the Guard as soon as possible. Former communist historiography saw the bringing of Iron Guard to power by Antonescu as having been done by the latter rather deliberately, from own conviction, than dictated by the circumstances. Otherwise, new historiography rather confirms and strenghtens the totalitarian image of *Legionnaire Romania* depicted by the former one.

Antonescu decided to get rid of the Guard in mid-January 1941 after his meeting with Hitler. The reasons behind his decision were: the incapability shown by the Guard in governing the country; its violence and policy of revenge manifested towards large categories of population ( bourgeois politicians, Jews, scientific and cultural personalities, army officers ); and, most decisive, its repeated attempts ( written and verbal propaganda within the rank and file of the army ) of subordinating the military institution. For Antonescu, the Guard was the main obstacle, by its continuous interference, in the way of the implementation of the plan for the modernization of the army envisaged by him in September 1940. Antonescu was preparing the army to meet, on the one hand, the continuous Soviet threats at Romania's borders and, on the other, to join the Axis in a war against Soviet Union seen by him as unavoidable. Iron Guard proved to be the main obstacle once in power, by its social and economic anarchy, in the way of the army modernization. Not only Antonescu but also Hitler wanted social and economic order in Romania, and an organized Romanian Army, before the launching of the anti-Soviet crusade. Mainstream post-communist historians see the events occurred between January 19th and 23rd, 1941, in Romania rather as a coup by Antonescu against Iron Guard, the legal party in power. Thus, the so called *Legionnaire Rebellion* was premeditated by Antonescu on the 19th of January, when he saw in the assassination of a German officer on the streets of Bucharest the pretext for removing the legionnaire interior minister and other high officials of the Guard. These one refused to resign and barricaded themselves within the official buildings, while ordinary Guard members went on the streets asking Antonescu to leave power. Assured by Hitler of his support, and enjoying the assistance of the German Military Mission in Romania, Antonescu commanded, on January 21st, Romanian Army to stifle the uprising. Post-communist historical writing sees, as the former communist one before, those days events as the final act of the struggle for absolute power between Antonescu and Iron

Guard. The difference is that, for mainstream post-communist historians, the 19 – 23 January 1941 events can be rather seen as a coup by Antonescu against the party in power, and not *viceversa*.

After the victory over the Guard, Antonescu called again traditional parties to join him in the setting up of a new government. Both bourgeois parties refused once again to officially join a pro-German government and suggested Antonescu the setting up of a military government. Nevertheless, the bourgeois leaders assured Antonescu of their indirect support. Mainstream historians suggest, that the attitude manifested by the liberal and peasant leaders made Antonescu ban all political parties and set up a military government on the 27th of January 1941. The new political system introduced was in fact a military dictatorship in its essentials. Antonescu gave free hands, however, to the liberal technocrats, coopted within the government as individuals and not as party members, to administrate the economy following the guidelines of Romanian National Liberalism adapted to warfare conditions. The approach by former communist historiography was that Antonescu, persuaded by Hitler who was already preparing the aggression on Soviet Union, deliberately introduced in January 1941 the military dictatorship in order to have the complete control over Romania and to prepare her army for the imminent war close by Nazi Germany.

According to mainstream historians the policy carried out by Antonescu and his new military regime was directly approved by the majority Romanians through the two referendums held in March and October 1941, that is, both before and during Romania's anti-Soviet war. For mainstream historians, all political parties having been officially banned in January 1941, Antonescu and his military regime received the needed legitimacy for their domestic and foreign policy directly from the Romanian People. It was a less democratic but, doubtless, representative way to get it in the circumstances Romania was finding herself by then. Post-communist historians suggest, that Antonescu Military Regime not only maintained the anti-Semitic laws in the social and economic fields introduced by the former governments but also passed new similar laws. They were called by Antonescu himself as "*the romanianization laws*." To which extent they were actually introduced is still an open question for mainstream historians, who are still working on this aspect at the present. According to them certain is that Romanian Jews, especially the entrepreneurs, were forced to pay all kind of financial contributions to the state, while the access of Jews in universities and their right to liberal professions were substantially limited. By his anti-Semitic laws Antonescu intended first of all to replace the local big Jewish capital mostly with the



native Romanian one and, to a certain extent, also with the German one. According to mainstream historians Antonescu failed to do that on a large scale whether because he acknowledged in due time the importance of the local Jewish capital for the running of the national industry and trade or, more likely, because it turned to be impossible since that capital was one of the main motors of the economy. Many capitalist Jews seem to have covered themselves and their business under Romanian names with the silent consent of the Romanian authorities. Instead, Antonescu did succeed rather in stopping and diminishing the control by the German capital over diverse Romanian economic branches than in allowing it to increase its power. Through a special trade agreement, renewed at times, he got better terms for Romania in the trade with Nazi Germany, especially for her exports of oil and agricultural produces. Antonescu obtained also German loans with a long term pay-off. For the Romanian society as a whole Antonescu's military administration passed a series of social and economic laws which made of Wartime Capitalist Romania a corporate state. The worker's status and working relations between employers and employees were regulated by law, while the state did preserve for itself the ultimate say in working conflict situations between the two sides. Work became, thus, compulsory for everybody according to own skill, but better paid for all in both cities and the countryside. There were no strikes between January 1941 and August 1944. Mainstream historians suggest that, by having in mind that Antonescu gave free hands to the liberal technocrats within his military government to administer the economy, it was about the practical implementation in a warfare situation of the old Romanian national-liberal principle "*forwards through ourselves*", though with an obvious German assistance this time. Nevertheless, the share of the total production by Romanian economic sectors working for war was the lowest among all belligerent countries. That might explain, together with all other reasons above, the economic growth that Romania seems to have registered under Antonescu Military Regime. This aspect, too, is still under the question marks since mainstream historians haven't said yet their final words on it. For them, the regime set up by Antonescu in January 1941 was a nationalist military dictatorship with a national-liberal capitalist economic policy adapted to the warfare situation. According to them Antonescu's Romania should be seen rather close to Ataturk's Turkey, Salazar's Portugal, or Franco's Spain, than to Hitler's Germany, or Mussolini's Italy. However, many aspects related to Antonescu Regime are still open for post-communist historical writing. Former communist historiography saw Antonescu's 1941 –1944 military administration as the most reactionary towards the working class. It said nothing about the fact that actually workers, clerks, and peasants had a better standard of living, that Romania moved forwards

on the modernization path, and that there was no need for Antonescu to command Romanian soldiers against their own countrymen, as they had been used so many times in the past.

Mainstream Romanian historians agree that Antonescu was a nationalist and an open anti-Semite. He was the embodiment of the century-long resentment by the Romanian peasants against all strangers and of the economic and cultural " *Jewish danger* " preached continuously, since the birth of Modern Romania in 1866, by the academic Romanian Nationalism. Post-communist Romanian historians confirm in their studies the viewpoints by their Jewish colleagues, in Romania or abroad, that deportations and internments of Jews to Transnistria, especially from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine, were carried out by the wartime Romanian authorities at Antonescu's express order, and that ca. 100,000 of them died during the war. Romanian historians are disagreeing, by making reference to the present stage of their research still on the way, with the Jewish ones on the reasons behind Antonescu's decision and on the death causes. For Romanian historians, the deportation and the internment of Jews were dictated by the circumstances. They didn't make the object of a systematic plan previously envisaged as in the German case. Bessarabian Jews, seen by the Romanian authorities as belligerent traitors sold to the Soviets in the summer of 1940 and not as an ethnic group, were deported for both state security reasons and their own. Massacres of Jews took place occasionally, having been carried out by Germans and fanatic right-wing Romanians. Also military actions took place occasionally, having been commanded as reprisals for the sabotage acts perpetrated by the communist Bessarabian Jews against Romanian Army. According to mainstream Romanian historians the cause of death for most of the Jews was their transportation to, or from the internment camps in bad war and weather conditions, especially during the winter of 1943/1944, which caused tens of thousands of victims among the belligerent armies on the Eastern Front, too. They also emphasize in their studies that Antonescu preserved almost the entire Jewry, ca. 300,000 individuals, of the Old Kingdom ( Wallachia and Moldova ). Jewish historians are categorical. For them, Antonescu planned and wartime Romanian authorities carried out the physical extermination of the Bessarabian Jews. In their studies the wartime deportations and internments are labeled unequivocally as " *The Holocaust of the Romanian Jews.* " For Romanian historians this was not the case, at least in conformity with their present stage of research. Romania did officially recognize the local Holocaust at the highest level after 1990, though in a rather nuanced manner, through the voices of her two post-communist leaders, the Presidents Iliescu and Constantinescu. Former communist historiography had a quite similar approach, in its stalinist

years, to that of Jewish historians. Antonescu not only killed tens of thousands of Romanian by his anti-Soviet war, but he planned and commanded the physical liquidation of national minorities in Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine, in particular of the Jewish one. Later, during the National Communism of Gheorghiu-Dej and Ceausescu, this tragic piece of Romanian History was deliberately, or not, treated with silence.

According to mainstream historians Antonescu reinstated the ban on all political parties ( Communist Party since 1924; Peasant, Liberal and Social-Democratic Parties since September 1940 ) by January-February 1941, but this time also to include his former governing partner, Iron Guard. He did it after the new refusal by the two bourgeois parties to officially take governing responsibilities in a pro-German administration. It didn't mean that their activity ceased. The actions by the political parties moved underground both at home and abroad, all of them having been carefully supervised and directly reported to Antonescu by the Romanian Secret Services ( the SSI ). Antonescu made a clear distinction in his attitude towards the banned parties. The actions by the militants of the two extremes, Iron Guard and Communist Party, were in particular supervised. On the contrary, to the so called " Democratic Opposition " made up by the liberals, peasants, and social-democrats Antonescu allowed large room for maneuvering both at home and abroad. Antonescu made a distinction even between legionnaires and communists. He saw in Iron Guard a greater immediate danger for his rule. The Guard was defeated and his local leaders, together with thousands of young militants, were interned. Nevertheless, by having escaped to Nazi Germany its main leaders were possible blackmail tools on Antonescu by Hitler, thus a continuous threat to the *Conducător's* rule. On the other hand, the Guard was still organized in the countryside and its influence among the peasants, though diminished, was still there. According to mainstream historians, in order to curb the continuous threat by Iron Guard to his rule at home, Antonescu sent to the frontline as a disciplinary measure, after having been summarily trained in " *special batallions* " , thousands of those interned young militants. To the communists, seen by him less dangerous due to their small number and minor influence among Romanians, Antonescu reserved a better treatment. The majority sabotage acts planned by the communists failed, while those which were actually carried out brought no important damages to the war industry. Antonescu interned only those communist individuals convicted for sabotage acts, while as a group they were left in peace. According to mainstream historians Antonescu had, in fact, a better attitude towards the Communist Party because he saw in it the possible link for eventual peace talks with Soviet Union.

Towards the Liberal and Peasant Parties Antonescu manifested understanding despite their refusal to join his government. Mainstream historians suggest, that there was a non-written agreement between Antonescu and the two bourgeois leaders, Iuliu Maniu and Dinu Bratianu, according to which Antonescu was to lead the country close by the Germans for an indefinite time, while the two bourgeois parties, both anglophile, were to prepare themselves as the more likely political alternative whether the international situation would ask Antonescu to leave power. That explains why the peasants and the liberals did confine their actions against Antonescu Regime to mere letters of protest. The two parties agreed and saluted the military actions carried out by the Romanian Army in liberating Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, but they did disagree with the continuation of war by Romania across the River Dniester on the proper Soviet soil. Nevertheless, the liberals and the peasants considered Antonescu and his military regime a necessity in the given conditions. They tried to explain to Anglo-Saxon representatives abroad the difficult situation of Romania, which was on their mind a country virtually occupied by Nazi Germany and thus irresponsible of her domestic and foreign policy. Maniu and Bratianu tried to obtain Western Allies' territorial guarantees for Romania and assurances on her post-war status, but with no success. Antonescu knew about all these contacts abroad by the bourgeois parties, but did nothing to stop them. After the Axis February 1943 defeat at Stalingrad, Antonescu encouraged the bourgeois leaders to start eventual peace talks with Western Powers. He wanted the eventual armistice to be concluded with all Allied Powers and not with the Soviet Union alone. Since November 1943 and until August 1944 Antonescu's representatives worked hand in hand with Maniu's men in Lisbon, Madrid, Cairo, and Ankara for peace negotiations with the Western Allies. According to mainstream historians there was no real opposition by the bourgeois parties to Antonescu and his regime. In their studies Liberal and Peasant Parties are seen as the "Opposition."

According to mainstream historians the reason behind Antonescu's decision to join Hitler in the war against Soviet Union, on the 22nd of June 1941, was the liberation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina wanted and supported by the entire Romanian People. The aggressor was Soviet Union who had occupied by force in the summer of 1940, through an ultimatum, the eastern Romanian provinces. For mainstream historians, Romania's 1941 – 1944 anti-Soviet war was from the beginning and to the end a legitimate one. The war on the proper Soviet soil by Romanian Army was dictated by both military reasons and Hitler's express demand in that sense. The Romanian-German military cooperation on the Eastern Front turned to be successful until the autumn of 1943.

The 4th and 3rd Romanian Armies participated close by the German Troops to the liberation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine by July 1941. Thereafter, they participated on the right flank of the German-Soviet Southern Front to the German military offensive for Odessa, Transnistria, Crimea, Kharkov, Kuban, Caucasus, Kalmukian Stepe, reaching the gates of Stalingrad in September 1943. The crushing there by Red Army of the two Romanian Armies, by late October the same year, is attributed by mainstream historians, on the one hand, to German OKW's erroneous strategic plan and, on the other, to the failure by the Germans to supply the two armies with the promised modern armament by the time the battle began. Romanian historians suggest, that responsible for the defeat of the 6th German Army there by February 1943 were the Germans themselves. For them, the battle of Stalingrad constituted the turning point of the war, the Soviets moving on the counter-offensive on the whole Soviet-German Eastern Front. Mainstream historians suggest, that the main cause of the human losses registered by Romania in war was her unpreparedness for a modern conflagration.

Antonescu's officials abroad initiated secret peace talks with Western Allies in 1943 in Madrid, Lisbon, Bern, and Ankara. With the Soviets armistice talks started in December 1943 in Stockholm. According to mainstream historians Antonescu repeatedly refused the armistice conditions provided by the Soviets because he didn't want to sign an act legitimizing the belonging of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovine to Soviet Union.

Mainstream historians suggest, that Antonescu was dismissed and arrested on the 23rd of August 1944 by King Michael I because he refused not only to immediately conclude the armistice, but also to resign. According to mainstream historians Antonescu was removed through a coup.

For mainstream historians, the trial of Antonescu in 1946 by The People's Tribunal of Bucharest was decided by the Soviets already in September 1944. According to them it was about a farse, nothing more but a political trial helping to the solid implantation of the Soviet system on Romanian soil. They suggest, that the charges against Antonescu were fabricated in advance during the latter's detention in Soviet Union.

The 1946 "official" portrait of Antonescu has changed in Nowadays Romania and the change is sustained by the present stage of research. We hope that this thesis has succeeded in showing how.

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## APPENDIX 1.

**MEMORIU DEPUȘ ONOR. TRIBUNALULUI POPORULUI LA 15. V. 1946 DE ION ANTONESCU** [ MEMORANDUM ADDRESSED TO THE HONOR PEOPLE'S TRIBUNAL ON THE 15th OF MAY 1946 BY ION ANTONESCU ], Arhivele Statului București, fond Ion Antonescu, România. Xerox from the original in: Ciuca, Marcel-Dumitru, *Procesul Mareșalului Antonescu. Documente II*, Editura SAECULUM I.O. & Editura EUROPA NOVA, București, 1996, p. 162-187 ( a.n., the text is typewritten; it was corrected by Ion Antonescu; each page is down-signed by him; it was written on May the 15th, and corrected and signed up on May the 16th; the underlyings are his own ).

Translation from Romanian of the Memorandum excerpts describing Wartime Romania's economic and financial state as seen by Antonescu:

" ... **THE WAR LOSSES...**

— **I stand accused for having destroyed the National Economy through the onerous concluded conventions,** that I enthralled the country to the Germans by setting all at their disposal.

Honor Tribunal, the economic situation of every country is usually estimated in conformity with:

- the way in which the budget is equalized;
- the way in which the extraordinary expenses, investments, and war expenses are covered;
- the purchasing power of the national currency;
- the degree of functioning of the banking system; the interests rate;
- the business volume;
- the abundance of the market;
- the stocks of raw materials;
- the circulation of goods;
- the volume of savings;
- the trade balance;
- the industrial and agricultural potential;
- the number of close-downs and bankruptcies;
- the social situation: strikes, unemployment, sabotage etc.

So, which was the situation from all these viewpoints? Had I been granted the necessary time and the possibility to do it, I would have been ready to develop this complex problem in my defence within the public session.

As You might remember, on that occasion I confined myself to several figures only.

I plead the Honor Tribunal to check the brochure **Trei ani de guvernare** [ a.n., Three Years of Governing ], which I have the honor to hand You together with this memorandum.

You'll find within this brochure complete and rigorously exact data which show the real situation of the country from this point of view.

In order to make easier Your work, I give You some summary figures:

The overall industrial potential increased after 1940 by 122%. The coal potential increased by 51%; sulphuric acid by 69%; asotic acid by 15%; glycerine by 175%; ammunition manufacturing for artillery by 219%; arm powder manufacturing by 68%; leather items manufacturing by 140% ( it was asserted that it had been destroyed by the massive export to Germany ); hemp manufacturing by 841%; standard waggon manufacturing, for the first time introduced in Romania , by 1000%.

The results of the 2,883 mil. Lei invested in four years in the Army, in comparison to the 800 mil. Lei invested in twenty years between 1920 and 1940, were as follows:

The Arsenal could repair daily 1,000-1,300 guns, instead of 80-120 pieces previously.

Reșița Industries [ a.n., the main Romanian heavy industry centre, situated in South-West Romania ] could manufacture 110 guns monthly, instead of 4 pieces previously.

Steel production increased by 65%; every year 70% went to the general economy, that is from a quantity of 340,000 tons the Army was receiving 100,000 tons only, whilst the rest being channeled to the general economy. It is asserted within the Accusation Act that the country did suffer crass shortages because the Industry worked for war only.

The rubber manufacturing not only appeared in our country for the first time, but it did actually develop. A tractor plant was set up, and it was given a demand for 4,000 tractors.

For Agriculture, on the basis of the credit agreement of December 4th, 1940 ( about which it is said: we gave all for nothing in return ), they were imported and distributed 8,500 tractors ( in 1940 I found within the whole country 3,260 tractors only, whilst on August 23rd, 1944, I left 11,000 pieces).

They were also imported: 14,200 harrows; 5,600 sowers; 70,852 horse ploughs; 3,890 tractor ploughs; 1,300 reapers; 40,230 hoes; 680 threshing machines; 600 disk harrows; 550 selecting machines; 530 engines. In addition, they were also imported 11,000 tons of tools and machines, and a plus of 1,300 tractors imported by particular firms, and sold at double prices.

**The Finances.** The war budget did represent 48.2% of the total ordinary budget, whilst in all other countries it reached 75% of the general budget.

The covering of war expenses was done through budgetary resources only, by some extraordinary resources of the Treasury, and by two loans on the domestic financial market.

That the flourishing state of the economy was real, it would come out if taking a look at the chapter " Incomes ". Thus, for 1942/1943:

The ordinary budget was earmarking as incomes the sum of 112,911,900,000 Lei, that is an increase by 55.7% of the evaluations, and an increase by 75% in comparison to the previous year incomes.

The special budget of the National Defense did realize at " Incomes " the sum of 31,629,900,000 Lei, that is an increase by 50.6% of the evaluations fixed at 21 milliards, and an increase by 75% in comparison to the incomes realized in 1941.

The incomes were standing on: " indirect taxes " - 56.6%; direct taxes - 18%; incomes from the monopolies - 18%. In addition, they were standing on the extra-budgetary incomes made up by the credits for deliveries and armaments obtained from Germany in conformity with the agreements of 4 December 1940 and 17 January 1941, both improved on

January 17th, 1943, when it was established that 50% of the cost of the German deliveries **should be liquidate by the end of the war.**

This enabled the National Bank to reduce at minimum its own efforts. Three quarters of the war expenses were supported by the National Bank during the First World War. During the last war the effort of the National Bank was far below 10%, and during its last three months the effort had been reduced close to zero.

Here's the real situation.

The experts of the International Bank of Regulations declared within an official act that "our National Bank has one of the most powerful monetary positions on the European continent." In order to see which was the real financial situation, please take a look at pages 222 and 230, and especially at **page 234**, in the **Trei ani de guvernare**.

For the consolidated public debt, please see page 239 in the same volume. I emphasize that in 1943 both domestic and external debts were similar to those of 1941, so they didn't increase at all during my three years of governing.

(The Romanian Railways [ a.n., C.F.R. ] did provide 7 milliards profit between 1940 and 1943. Between 1920 and 1940 they had a deficit of 22 milliards, which was covered partially by the State, and partially by an onerous external loan introducing at the same time the foreign control ).

From all these, Honor Tribunal, as well as from the abundance which You well know as having been real, You may reach the appropriate conclusion...

### **CONCLUSIONS...**

— In which concerns the country's wealth enthralling to the interest of the foreigners, the charge is entirely unfair. I gave some explanations which are, I think, sufficient in lighting the reality.

The flourishing and abundant state in all fields in 1942, 1943, and in the spring of 1944, unique in Europe by that time, brings in earnest the contrary proof.

The reality is that, hadn't the Germans been present within the country, I would have abolished the rationalizations and the ration books, with the exception of stuffs, cotton, and leather.

We did actually invest a lot during the war in agriculture, industry, communications, telephones, schools, churches, army, and in social works.

All investments were covered by the ordinary incomes of the state, and by the 80 md. credit granted by the Germans with an interest rate of 3.12% per 7 and 15 years, and with no guarantee. Besides two appeals to public subscription, which provided a total of ca. 30 milliards, I didn't resort to any foreign loan. On the contrary, I bought with 20 and 30% - if my memory doesn't fail - Romanian debt papers.

Thus, I reduced during the war, a unique case not only in the economic history of Romania, with 26 md. stabilized Lei the total inherited debt of 105 md. Lei.

— I brought in, through the superhuman efforts of Mr. Mihai Antonescu, 7 waggons of gold. I emphasize that until 1940, that is during 25 years of peace, the National Bank had succeeded the covering in foreign currencies and gold equivalent to 16 waggons.

In consequence, the National Bank was in the possession of 23 waggons of gold by August 23rd, 1944.

Because of this fact, and due to a careful monetary policy, the covering of the leu [ a.n., the Romanian national currency, pl. lei ] went up to 27.5%, whilst the Statute of the National Bank was stipulating a 25% covering.

Mr. Chairman, there was no strike and no street manifestation during my four years of governing to the honor, allow me to say it, of the Romanian worker who, once more, has proved his wisdom and patriotism. I didn't order ever the Army



against the crowd in four years.

I found the soldiers scattered all over the country, from the secondary schools to the universities, and from the villages to all administrative institutions.

After the liquidation of the legionnaire regime all soldiers were commanded back into the barracks, and they never got out of there until August 1944... ”

## APPENDIX 2.

### MEMORIU DEPUȘ ONOR: TRIBUNALULUI POPORULUI LA 15. V. 1946 DE ION ANTONESCU ( See Appendix 1. )

Translation form Romanian of the main excerpts presenting Antonescu's point of view on his deportation decisions during the war of the communist, Jewish, and Gypsy population:

" ... — In which concerns the treatment of the Jews deported in Transnistria from Bessarabia, Bukovine, and from within the country ( in 1944 ) **I declare that one exaggerate, and that this will be proved later both as regards to the number of dead persons and the treatment**, excepting those interned at Vapniarka Camp the others were free in the towns and boroughs in which they had been interned.

I personally paid a visit in 1942 to those in Mohilev, Rabnita, and in other two localities which I can't remember.

They were working in butter, soap, sausage factories, and so on. They were very fatty, well dressed, and quite cheerful. They were dwelling similar houses as in Bessarabia.

The region was healthy, pitoresque, and very rich, and many of them would have never returned.

The same finding was acknowledged, at their return from the visit there, by the journalists, Pope's ambassador, and by the chief of the Red Cross in Geneva.

Their declarations to me are preserved at the State Archives. The Ministry of the Exterior preserves the copy of the report done and sent to Geneva on that occasion by the chief of the IRC.

**I pass to the dead now.** In this respect one exaggerate most.

Mr. Filderman declared before the Tribunal that only 150,000 Jews did actually return home, whilst 150,000 of them died. Mr. Benvenisti asserted that in Transnistria were killed 270,000 of them.

But, the 1930 census counted for Bessarabia and Bukovine – I give figures from memory – a number of ca. 270-300,000 Jews.

Many Jews, especially from Bessarabia, spread across the country between 1930 and 1940, seeking for more favorable regions for trade and enrichment; in 1940 many of them flead into the country running away from the Russians; during Russian occupation many Jews were deported together with the Romanian population. When we came back, many of the Jews having held administrative posts under the occupation followed the Russian troops in withdrawal.

Finally, when our troops moved into Bessarabia, many Jews, taking advantage of the period of confusion between the ending of the fights and the setting up of the new administration, broke through the troops into the country.

**They were deported** maximum 150-170,000 Jews only, in my accounts.

A number of 15,000 remained in Cernăuți. Many of those declared dead on the lists are alive. I give one example only: A broadcasting set served by a Russian captain and a Jew from Cernăuți, found on the dead list in Transnistria, had been caught in flagrant. The captain shot himself dead. The Jew was arrested.

But, how can Mr. Filderman assert that 150,000 did return, when only the Russians invading the lost provinces could have known it?

And, how can Mr. Benvenisti assert for certain that 270,000 have died?

( What I can say for certain is that, hadn't I sent them to Transnistria no one would have been alive today ).

Here's the aspect of the problem, Your Honor.

Of course, the whirlpool of the 1944 battles, when we were leaving Transnistria and when a bloody confusion was following to the very **violent actions of the partisans**, might have done many victims. The one who runned at the right time into the forest did rescue himself, the region being accidental and very woody...

— **I'm charged with deportations.**

— I did deport the Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovine for **political and military security reasons** and for **their own security**.

— **Political and military security.**

I mentioned before that, taking advantage of the created confusion, many Jews broke through the front.

The security of the state forced us to block their penetration in the country and especially in the capitale city.

Security services informed that many Jews had been previously trained in special spy schools and that they were provided with broadcasting radio sets ( many were found ).

**The High General Staff** was asking for **their internment** on military security reasons.

Facing this situation I ordered the setting up of a ghetto in **Chişinău**, where many Jews from the surrounding burnt boroughs were gathered.

I also did it because in Chişinău was left unburnt the Romanian residential district only, and because the Romanian population there didn't accept to receive them.

The Jews from the Bălţi region were interned by the Germans in a wood near town.

Bălţi was completely burnt. According to Romanian inhabitants there, the fires were set on by **the Jews themselves** who executed the orders of the military Russian commanders, the Romanians refusing to do it. Romanians were very agitated and angry with the Jews because of their taken attitude during the occupation. I remaind You that Bokovine, and the regions Bălţi, Soroca, and Chişinău were the most powerful nazist and anti-Semitic strongholds on which the accomplices of Cuza and Codreanu relied in their actions.

A Romanian St. Bartholemew was on the way in agreement with the Nazis.

That's why, and taking into consideration what actually happened over our will and intentions in Jassy, Tighina, and Floreşti , I decided to **bring them out from the areas through which** the German reserves and troops **were moving to the front**, and to send them in the north of Transnistria.

Their evacuation was demanded by the military commanders, too.

It is well-known that every army evacuates the back front population by 30-40 km. in depth. I did it with the Romanians, too.

**These are the reasons behind the deportations of the Jews.** ( The Germans demanded to give them all the Jews in order to send them at work in Germany. Their demand was rejected by me ).

The evacuation was carried out improperly, mostly because of the negative frame of mind reigning that time.

The early and harsh winter caused many victims, too, and that also among the ranks of the belligerent armies and Russian population, who was fleeing towards the Urals because of the invasion.

The winter was also the cause of the German defeat at Moscow. They died because of this also many Jews from the transports on the way. They weren't sheltered by the peasants in their homes.

To blame are those who were in charge with the execution because they didn't stop at time the convoys.

I ordered an inquiry, and the result is known. **A General Staff colonel was degraded, as well as a captain who, sent on the front, died as a hero.**

They were also imposed other serious sanctions.

Certain is that, had I kept them on the place they would have been all killed by the Germans assisted by some fanatic terrorists among the Romanian population.

#### **THE GYPSY POPULATION.**

Because of the camouflage the population in towns was terrorized by armed gangs and individuals who were committing robberies and, sometimes, killings. Their authors were Gypsy individuals. Everybody was demanding their shooting. I ordered then to be studied the possibility for the setting up of several pure Gypsy villages in the Bărăgan Plain..

Transnistria was lacking in great measure working force.

Then, I decided that the Gypsies with crimes, or more than three thefts on their account, should be deported to Transnistria.

— **The Communist Jews.** A number of 1,120 of them have been deported. We needed peace within the country. The High General Staff was asking the arrest of all those earmarked on their list as communists.

I was aware about the abuses done in the writing of the lists -- police abuses and revenge acts -- and I decided the deportation of the condemned ones only.

I didn't know in which way military operations could develop.

The entire Jewish and communist population would have risked their lives had German-Russian fights reached our soil.

That's the deportation problem ... ”

### APPENDIX 3.

#### ADDITIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY ON ION ANTONESCU

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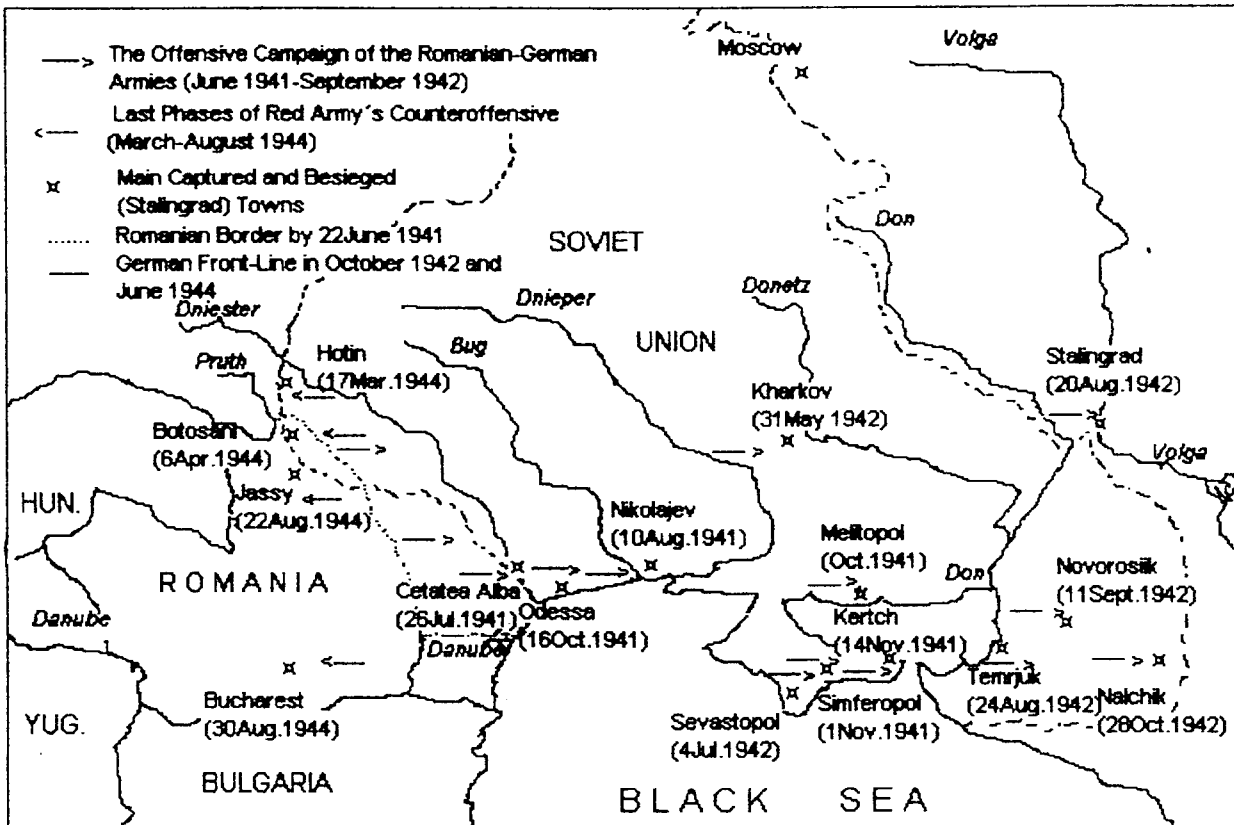
## APPENDIX 5.

### BORDERS OF ROMANIA BETWEEN 1940 AND 1947



**APPENDIX 6.**

**THE OFFENSIVE PHASE OF ROMANIAN ARMY'S EASTERN CAMPAIGN ON THE SOUTHERN GERMAN-SOVIET FRONT, JUNE 1941 – OCTOBER 1942**



## APPENDIX 7.

### ON ROMANIAN PRONUNCIATION

The written Romanian doesn't differ from the spoken one, so that each alphabet letter corresponds always to the same sound. Nevertheless, Romanian Language has some phonetic particularities , as follows:

- ă – as *e* in the English *mother*
  
- â = î – as aprox. the *o* in the English *kingdom*
  
- ce, ci – as *che* and *chi* in the English *chess* and *chick*
  
- che, chi – as *ke* and *ki* in the English *Kent* and *kid*
  
- ge, gi – as *ge* and *gi* in the English *general* and *gin*
  
- ghe, ghi – as *ge* and *gi* in the English *get* and *give*
  
- j – as *j* in the French *jour*
  
- ș – as *sh* in the English *shade*
  
- ț – as *ts* ( second ) and *tz* in the English *tsetse fly* and *tzar*, or as *zz* in the Italian *pizza*
  
- z – as *z* in the English *zoom*