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COMING TO TERMS WITH THE RECENT PAST: HOLOCAUST EDUCATION IN POSTCOMMUNIST ROMANIA

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Introduction

As Israeli historian Leon Volovici pointed out in a recent article (Volovici, 2003, p.65), Romania is facing a point in time marked by the concurrent presence of both a prolific nationalistic media with strong anti-Semitic accents and a swell of events dedicated to the history of its Jews. This remarkable paradox is perhaps just one more example of the originality of Romania's postcommunist transition, the more so since the object of both trends is declining by the day: There are only about 9,000 Jews, most of them elderly, living in contemporary Romania.

After 45 years of "relative silence" imposed by the communists and eight more years of "relevant silence" imposed by the neocommunists, since 1998 the Holocaust has finally been a topic of mention and discussion -- but "in the third person," as it were: It's true, it happened, but not in Romania! "Relative silence" because under communist rule there were rare references to the topic, designed, of course, to deny or minimize Romania's official participation in the so-called tragic events, which were never labeled Holocaust; furthermore, communist historiography even attempted to justify the crimes by turning them upside down and presenting them as evidence of the state's care for its Jews, as Victor Eskenasy rightly points out (Eskenasy, 1994), exemplifying the distortion with Nicolae Minei's preface to a book by Aurel Karetzki and Maria Covaci, *Zile insingerate la Iasi, 28-30 iunie 1941* (Bloody Days in Iasi, 28-30 June 1941, Bucharest, Editura Politica, 1978). The aim of this line of interpretation was to uphold the nationalistic feelings of the population (the Romanians, it was claimed, have always been a hospitable and kind people, and any excess that might have taken place must have been the act of others), particularly under Ceausescu's national communism; at the same time, the authorities sought to prompt a shift in the perception of Marshal Ion Antonescu's policies, and even rehabilitate them, in an attempt to swipe away King Michael's initiation of the palace coup of 23 August 1944, which had undoubtedly changed the course of the war and which the communists had falsely presented as their own achievement. This line was continued under the first mandates of President Ion Iliescu (1989-96), when monarchy was still perceived as a threat to neocommunist power. This explains, at least in part, the sudden explosion of interest and pride in Antonescu's actions and policies, and the emergence of so many organizations seeking to preserve his memory after 1989.

"Relevant silence" for -- unlike the pre-1989 period, when historians could risk presenting reality in a light different from the "party line" only with great difficulty -- after 1989 that

danger had vanished; one's position was now but a reflection of the pursuit of personal interests and courage -- or lack of it -- reflecting the historians' approach to "delicate topics" in the country's remote or more recent history. Though many history-related works have been published of late, few Romanian authors deal with what happened to the Jews of Romania during World War II; even fewer do so in a scholarly manner. It further complicates matters that most of those who do so "happen" to be Jewish. This is happily counterbalanced by the presence of a good number of translations of internationally acknowledged works on the subject. On the other hand, Romania has been flooded by increasingly numerous publications (including newspapers, magazines, brochures, and books) that deny or minimize the Holocaust in general and its Romanian chapter in particular.

Official Approaches To The Holocaust

The first change in the official discourse occurred under the rule of the Democratic Convention of Romania (CDR). Under Law No. 16/1996, Israeli and U.S. researchers were granted access to the Romanian National Archives. The Holocaust appeared on the government agenda in 1998, following the appointment of Andrei Marga as education minister. The need to challenge misconceptions about the conditions and roles played by Jews in the country's past in general, and about the Romanian chapter of the Holocaust in particular, was now officially identified. A joint Romanian-Israeli commission of reputable historians tasked with making observations and policy recommendations for the improvement of elementary-school and high-school history textbooks was appointed, and Holocaust education was introduced in 1999 in pre-university curricula as a mandatory subject within the wider framework of World War II history. A series of ministerial orders and guidelines launched a reform of the education system and made available to editors and authors willing to propose textbooks specific guidelines and various teaching materials about the Holocaust collected from diverse institutions with relevant expertise in the field.

But as the saying goes, the road to Hell is paved with good intentions. Not all textbooks include the subject in their treatment of World War II, although those textbooks were endorsed by the Education and Research Ministry. Teachers were even less willing to address the issue when discussing the last world war. One must take into account that even the most eager history teachers are put in the awkward position of having to teach something about which they know nothing -- or, worse, about which they are misinformed. Under the influence of communist education and a hectic media running from far-right extremism to philo-Semitism and with no expert guidance, they are "lost in transition." A national retraining program is clearly required, although this is admittedly no easy undertaking.

So what has been done so far?

After a bumpy start, with the introduction in elementary-school and high-school textbooks of uncontrolled references to the Holocaust that, as we shall see, have sometimes done more damage than good, things seemed to start moving slowly onto the right track. Sponsored by the Romanian government, an initial group of 20 history teachers and five students of Jewish studies from all over Romania was sent to attend a special course on the Holocaust organized at Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial Institution in Israel in the year 2000.

This trend continued for a while under the newly returned leftist government of the Social Democratic Party, with 25 educators attending a specially tailored program at the Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine (CDJC) in Paris in 2001 and another 23 educators in 2003. Regular training sessions in Holocaust education started being provided to all interested teachers, in cooperation with Yad Vashem, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and CDJC, by the Moshe Carmilly Institute for Hebrew and Jewish History of the Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj as of 2001 and by the Goldstein Goren Center for Hebrew Studies of Bucharest University as of 2002 (as of 2004, such sessions will also be provided by the Center for Research and Study of the Culture and Civilization of South-Eastern European Jewry of the University of Craiova and the Center for Jewish Studies of Al. I. Cuza University of Iasi). In turn, the Romanian Defense Ministry's National Defense College of

introduced in its curriculum for the period 2002-07 a modular course in Holocaust studies. In June 2002, the Romanian Academy of Sciences organized together with the Culture and Cults Ministry a special session intended to forge an official position on the Romanian Holocaust; alas to no avail: Whatever the initial intention, the only common conclusion this elite group of Romanian historians managed to reach was that Antonescu had been a "tragic figure." In July 2002, the Institute of Political Studies of Defense and Military History together with the Goldstein Goren Diaspora Research Center of Tel Aviv University and the Goldstein Goren Center for Hebrew Studies of Bucharest University organized an international symposium titled "The Holocaust and Romania. History and Contemporary Significance," to which messages were sent by the prime minister, the minister, and the state secretary. In October 2002, the Romanian education and research minister participated in a Ministerial Seminar on the Day of Remembrance in Strasbourg. In May 2003, the ministry organized in Bucharest a European seminar on Holocaust education with the assistance of the Council of Europe (which has included Romania in its program aimed at modernizing history teaching). Lectures, conferences, and various one-off events focused on the Holocaust would complete this rather idyllic picture.

Now let us look at the other side of the coin.

In March 2002, to secure Western goodwill before the NATO summit in Prague, the Romanian government issued Emergency Ordinance No. 31, "outlawing organizations and symbols of a fascist, racist, or xenophobic character and the promotion of the cult of persons guilty of crimes against peace and humanity." Article 6 provided for "six months to five years' imprisonment" for "the public contestation or denial of the Holocaust or its effects." Article 2 defined the terms used in this ordinance ("organizations and symbols of a fascist, racist, or xenophobic character," "persons guilty of crimes against peace and humanity") to designate acts prohibited under penal law but did not define the term "Holocaust" itself. Under the circumstances, the enforcement of Article 6 could generate arbitrary exonerations or abusive incriminations, so in May 2002 the Culture Commission of the Senate issued a definition ("the systematic massive extermination of the Jewish population in Europe, organized by the Nazi authorities during the Second World War."), probably aiming to introduce it into the text of the subsequent law during its debate in parliament. But the law has been postponed indefinitely, lest Western chancelleries discover the view of many legislators on such sensitive topics as the Holocaust in Romania, Antonescu's cult, etc. Thus, as Andrei Oisteanu underlines, the government ordinance remains an ineffective document being used only for statements asserting the existence of effective legislation to counter racism in Romania (Oisteanu, 2003, p.147).

In breach of its own ordinance, the Romanian government in June 2003 claimed in a press release issued after its weekly session that there had been no Holocaust in Romania. A week later, as a result of international and domestic pressure, the Romanian delegation to the OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism in Vienna issued a new statement recognizing the involvement of Antonescu's regime in the extermination of Romanian Jews. The delegation stressed Romania's antiracism legislation, as well as the mandated Holocaust education in schools -- introduced, in fact, by the current opposition while in power (in 1998, as mentioned above). Efforts were made by the Romanian delegation to convince its U.S. and Israeli counterparts that the whole matter was the fault of the minister for public information, who was then replaced (only to be appointed president of the Agency for Governmental Strategies). In August 2003, the Israeli newspaper "Ha'aretz" published an interview with President Iliescu, who in turn made a series of controversial statements regarding the Holocaust and Jewish property in Romania (see Shafir, 2003). In early December 2003, during a sports competition in Germany, Alexandru Mironov, former presidential adviser to Ion Iliescu, told the competition's chairman of the referee commission that Jews are guilty over everything that is going wrong in the world today ("Romania libera," 4 December 2003).

The situation seemed to improve toward the end of 2003, however. In October, the Foreign Ministry organized jointly with the U.S. government through USAID and the Goldstein Goren Center for Hebrew Studies of Bucharest University an international symposium titled "Minorities, Cultural Heritage, and Contemporary Romanian Civilization" dedicated to the

promotion of interethnic dialogue, whose central issue was the Holocaust. Also, the Romanian government sponsored the participation of a group of young politicians representing all major political parties in a weeklong seminar on the history of the Holocaust in Romania at Yad Vashem's International School for Holocaust Studies in November 2003.

Moreover, following the international reactions generated by these unfortunate and disturbing actions, President Iliescu decided to initiate several measures meant to mend fences. The first such measure was the establishment in October 2003 of the so-called Wiesel International Commission for the Study of the Romanian Holocaust, which is led by Elie Wiesel and includes historians as well as public figures from Romania, Israel, the United States, France, and Germany. The commission convened in May in Washington, D.C., and is scheduled to meet again in September in Jerusalem and in November in Bucharest, when it is expected to finalize its report and hand it to President Iliescu ahead of the presidential election of November.

It is also worth mentioning that -- following similar actions launched in Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia -- the Simon Wiesenthal Center and the "Targum Shlishi Foundation" in September 2003 finally launched "Operation Last Chance" in Romania. The project offers \$10,000 rewards for information that might facilitate the prosecution and punishment of Nazi war criminals. As the Center for Monitoring and Combating Anti-Semitism in Romania National Director Marco Maximilian Katz shows (Katz, 2003), when presenting the project at a news conference at the Federation of Jewish Communities in Bucharest, the Wiesenthal Center's top Nazi-hunter, Dr. Efraim Zuroff, stressed the importance of the project in Romania, which since becoming a democracy has not investigated, let alone prosecuted, a single Holocaust perpetrator. Besides establishing a special "hot line," the project includes a special advertising campaign asking the public for information and aims to educate the population about crimes committed by the Nazis and their Romanian collaborators during World War II.

An additional step undertaken by the Romanian authorities at the urging of the Israeli government and the Wiesel Commission was to establish a date for the official commemoration of the Holocaust. Several suggestions made by the government were turned down, as they either fell during vacation time, when the event could not be marked in schools, or would have marked the Holocaust in connection with events that had nothing in common with Romania itself. Finally, it was agreed to mark Holocaust Day on 9 October -- the date when the first Jews were deported to Transnistria from Northern Romania proper.

A third measure, still mainly declarative, concerns the return of confiscated Jewish property.

The fourth and last measure refers to Holocaust education, the topic on which this article is focused. In what follows, it is my intention to present several facets of this endeavor. But first, a few words on public perceptions of the Holocaust seem to be in order.

The Holocaust In Public Perception

It is obvious that following 50 years of communist-induced ignorance and/or distortion of the Holocaust, the population might be inclined to perceive the sudden raising of the issue as stemming from an alleged intention to accuse Romanians collectively for its perpetration and might be inclined either to shrug off the issue or speak out contemptuously against it. Also at work are old, popular, and sometimes objectless anti-Semitic stereotypes that need to be overcome ("anti-Semitism without Jews," which is in fact mostly cultural in essence).

That said, one can easily identify the problematic issues that are still the object of endless debate among both the population and a certain category of historians and public figures. To sum those up, they are:

1. The inclination to minimize the number of Jews exterminated in territories administered

by wartime Romania. Although there are no exact figures, Jewish historians' estimates vary between 250,000 (Ioanid, 1997) and 420,000 (Ancel, 2003). Romanian authors usually avoid assuming the Romanian authorities' responsibility for the Jews murdered in Transnistria and Ukraine, especially when they discuss the fate of Jews who were not Romanian citizens. They also prefer to avoid a serious discussion regarding the Romanian Jews who immigrated to France after 1940 and were handed by the Romanian authorities to the Nazis. Instead they prefer to emphasize the fact that, by the end of the war, 300,000 Romanian Jews (about half of the Jewish population of Romania in 1940) were still alive.

2. The inclination to avoid discussing the fate and the suffering of the Jewish population living within the present borders of Romania and to minimize the importance of anti-Semitic and racist legislation, and of anti-Semitic attitudes of the political and cultural mainstream, between 1918 and 1944. Issues such as the loss of citizenship and right to work, forced labor, property confiscation, destruction of synagogues, and so on are barely mentioned.

3. The role of the army and of the national gendarmerie (and in some cases, of parts of the civil population) as perpetrators, the moral guilt of the Orthodox Church and of political parties, and the role of civil population as bystanders are not taken seriously into consideration.

4. With but a few exceptions, the fate of the Romany population does not engender interest among historians and politicians.

5. The definition of the Holocaust proposed by what Shafir (2003) calls the "selective negationists," such as Senate Deputy Chairman Gheorghe Buzatu (himself a historian) exonerates for all practical purposes Romanians from participation in the Holocaust, as it defines the Shoah as having been only Nazi-perpetrated. The same selective negationists, on the other hand, insist on the fact that Romania and Antonescu refused to hand over the country's Jewish population for deportation by the Nazis while barely mentioning deportations by Romania of Jews to Transnistria or pogroms against the Jews on Romanian territory proper.

6. The inclination to leave Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transnistria outside discussion when debating the issue of the Holocaust in Romania (understood in restrictive geographic terms), although at the time (1941-44) those territories were under Romanian military and civilian administration.

7. The issue of the (never implemented) postwar restitution of confiscated Jewish assets and postcommunist restitutions and reparations for the victims of the Holocaust and for Jews whose properties were liquidated under nationalization. As President Iliescu said in his interview with "Ha'aretz," Jews are entitled to compensation for confiscated property, as are all Romanians, but the country is poor and one should not give Romanians the feeling that Jews want to "squeeze it out."

8. The moral and collective responsibility of the Romanians. The debate on the Holocaust, the cataclysmic defining event of our time, which raised new moral imperatives for society and its present immediacy, bothers many as it involves forms of moral condemnation. Thus some historians and politicians admit there might be a case for individual responsibility of Antonescu and his supporters but stop short of admitting that national responsibility (to distinguish from collective guilt) derives from the former.

SOURCES (100% Jewish)

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The Holocaust In Textbooks

In 1999, the Holocaust became a compulsory topic in Romania's history curricula. It must be covered in 1-2 hours in the seventh grade (Romanian History -- references in the chapter on World War II), 11th grade (Universal History -- two case studies and one lesson within the wider frame of World War II) and 12th grade (Romanian History -- references in the chapter on state, society, and culture -- the Jewish Community in 1940-44). In addition, optional courses focusing on the Nazis and the Jewish problem, the Iron Guard regime in Romania, the Antonescu regime, or Romanian solidarity with the Jewish community during the war are being offered for students in all those grades if parents opt for it.

This might not be a lot, but at first glance it looks encouraging -- that is, until one starts examining teaching resources. Except for the textbooks, which are not always accurate or similar in content, no professional teaching support is available in the Romanian language. Although a number of books related to the Holocaust, mostly translations, have been published in recent years, so have a series of Holocaust-denying, negationist tomes; and it is difficult for an uninformed educator to select the most suitable. (Recent projects have undertaken to edit/translate, publish, and distribute in school and high-school brochures and books, in Romanian, designed to serve as supporting materials for teaching the Holocaust. Also, with the assistance of Yad Vashem and other international organizations active in this field, the Universities of Cluj and Bucharest provide teachers who attend training sessions in Holocaust education organized on a yearly basis with new materials and teaching methodologies).

Let us review a few textbooks.

Instead of in the seventh grade, the first reference to the Holocaust appears in a textbook for eighth graders published by Octavian Cristescu at Editura Didactica si Pedagogica in 1998 and reissued in 1999 under the title "Istoria romanilor: Epoca moderna si contemporana" (History of Romanians: The Modern and Contemporary Age). On page 168, one reads: "The nationalism and anti-Semitism promoted by the legionnaires [Iron Guard] led to [the issuance of] decree-laws that were discriminatory against Jews, and the staff in enterprises was 'Romanianized.'" No explanation is given as to what "Romanianized" (i.e., the forceful dismissal of Jews) means. More relevant to the textbook's minimizing presentation of the Holocaust in Romania is a reference made to the pogrom in Iasi, in which some 12,000

Jews perished and which was personally ordered by Marshal Ion Antonescu and carried out according to a blueprint (Ancel, 2003, p.83). That pogrom is presented as an exception to the general rule, and the presentation exonerates the Romanian authorities of any guilt:

**Although measures against the Jews were indeed undertaken, they were not exterminated, as Berlin had stipulated. The pogrom of June 1941 in Iasi, which resulted in 3,233 Jewish victims, was organized without the knowledge of the Romanian government by the Legionnaires and the Nazis. Many Jews were rescued from north-western Transylvania, which was occupied by the Horthysts, and still others were able to leave for Palestine (Cristescu, 1999, p. 171).

This is more than mere reflection of the communist-era treatment of the Holocaust: It is simply its word-by-word reiteration. Postcommunist Holocaust deniers wholly embraced that legacy. That some Jews sought refuge from Hungarian-occupied northern Transylvania and others left for Palestine beyond question, but the circumstances of these exceptional cases -- some of which remain disputable to this day -- are far from reflecting the general situation, as the textbook would have students believe. The eighth graders learning from Cristescu's textbook are bound to conclude that apart from the 3,233 Jews whose misfortune it was to find their ends at the hands of a bunch of Legionnaires and Nazis turned loose, Romanian Jewry in Antonescu's Romania lived happily under the benign protection of the marshal.

Remarkably different from Cristescu's approach is a 10th-grade textbook published in the year 2000 by Alexandru Vulpe, which states that "among the first measures taken by the Legionnaires were a number of decrees pursuing the 'Romanianization' of the enterprises (firing all Jews and foreigners and replacing them with Romanians), the confiscation of Jews' assets, and their exclusion from military service" (Vulpe, 2000, p. 124). On page 126, in a chapter titled "Romania During World War II," the author adds:

**The Jews from Bessarabia, Bukovina, and the Old Kingdom were deported to Transnistria, where many of them were executed or died because of the harsh deportation conditions: lack of food, illness, cold. The order for the extermination of the Jews and Gypsies was given by Antonescu, being prior to, and independent from, the extermination policy practiced by Nazi Germany in the Soviet Union. The deportations ended at the end of 1942, when military developments were showing that Germany was going to be defeated.

Though hardly extensive and not very detailed, the information provided in this textbook is the most accurate, particularly when compared to all other textbooks. This author is the only one who takes a matter-of-fact approach, without attempting to justify or falsify the policies pursued by the Romanian authorities.

Moving on to the 11th grade: Quite interesting is a textbook published by Valentin Balutoiu under the title "Istorie" (History). On page 97, in a chapter dealing with the situation in Germany during World War II, there is a brief entry titled "The Anti-Jewish Policy," which states:

**Anti-Semitism was a permanent feature of the Nazi regime. The state launched a policy of systematic persecution against the Jews. Under the circumstances, many were forced to emigrate. Those who remained behind were subjected to a regime whose aim was the "final solution" -- the extermination of all the Jews in Germany and in Europe.

What is unusual about this textbook is that it mentions, among other supporters of the Legionnaires, Mircea Eliade, Nae Ionescu, and Emil Cioran. This is a highly "sensitive" issue in postcommunist Romania, for despite the fact that the three interwar intellectuals' involvement in politics on the far-right pole of the spectrum has by now been proven beyond doubt, they have to a large extent been fetishized not only (as one would have expected) by nationalists, but also by intellectual groups that would describe themselves as pro-Western and above all democratic.

The textbook speaks about the persecutions to which Hitler started subjecting Jews

immediately after his accession to power, about the boycott imposed on Jewish businesses, about the exclusion of Jews from civil service, and about the "Racial Laws" that stripped them of German citizenship. The author also mentions the 1938 Kristallnacht, which resulted in the death of about 100 Jews and the internment of some 20,000 in concentration camps immediately after those events. Details are given about the confiscation between 1939 and 1945 of Jewish assets and the interdiction of access to state education in all territories under Nazi rule. The text also explains the significance of the yellow-star badge that Jews were forced to display on their clothing, life and death in the Polish ghettos, as well as the special SS troops (Einsatzgruppen) tasked with liquidating Jews behind the advancing Nazi armies marching into the USSR.

More surprisingly and quite singular for that matter, the volume also mentions Jewish resistance, describing the Warsaw ghetto uprising of April 1943. It provides information regarding the emergence of the "Final Solution" plan, decided at a January 1942 meeting of National-Socialist officials, which would lead to the establishment extermination camps at Auschwitz, Majdanek, Treblinka, etc. This obviously is a reference to the so-called Wannsee Protocol, although, as **Michael Shafir** has pointed out, the 20 January 1942 gathering did not "decide" on the Final Solution but was merely convoked to discuss how to make the previously decided and already underway "solution" more rapid and efficient (Shafir, 2003, p.43). Balutoiu also describes in detail the concentration, forced-labor, and extermination camps; the deportation to the camps from all over Europe in cattle wagons in which many died of hunger, illness and cold or heat; the "selection" process upon reaching the camps, in which those strong enough were selected for labor until death of exhaustion, illness, or hunger, while the weaker, the ill, and mothers with children under 14 were sent straight to the gas chambers; the cremation of those exterminated; and the inhumane experiments performed on some of the prisoners.

According to Balutoiu, who apparently takes his figures from Raul Hilberg (1994, Vol. 3, p. 1300), 5 million Jews were exterminated during the Holocaust. The author does not neglect to mention attempts to save Jews in Denmark or even fascist Italy. He also mentions Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg's attempt to rescue Hungarian Jews and describes the Nuremberg trials against the war criminals. There is even a quote from Auschwitz commander Rudolf Hoess's testimony in Nuremberg about the atrocities in that extermination camp. Of the textbooks that I have reviewed for this study, this is by far the most complete and accurate in information regarding the German and European Holocaust.

Another 11th-grade textbook, "Istorie" (History), authored by Sorin Oane and Maria Ochescu in 2002, includes a chapter on "the totalitarian regimes of the interwar period," insisting, in a special lesson, on the political repression under those regimes. On page 93 in Chapter 8, the reader is informed that Nazi terror had been directed particularly against the communists and the Jews. "At the core of the Nazis' social policy was the racial problem, in particular anti-Semitism," the text reads. "In 1933, Jews represented about 1/100th of the German population. Nazis blamed them, however, for all economic and political weaknesses of postwar Germany. In "Mein Kampf," Hitler states that: 'Jews have never created an institution but they destroyed so many. They seek to suppress the Germans' national feeling and spoil their blood.'"

A sidebar in the same volume marks the stages of Nazi anti-Semitic hysteria, showing that until 1939 and during the first years of the war, "Germany's most outstanding scholars and artists, some Jewish and some German, fled the country." The authors include a list of people who fled Germany and Austria before the war. More surprising, however, is a chronological and rather detailed list of anti-Jewish persecutions perpetrated between 1933 and 1945: discrimination (1933-38 -- the boycotting of stores, the Nuremberg racial laws, the Kristallnacht), internment in ghettos (1939-41 -- Poland) and extermination (1942-45 -- the Wannsee conference and the collective massacres in the extermination camps at Auschwitz, Chelmo, Treblinka, Majdanek, etc.).

Later, in Chapter 9, which deals with World War II, an entire subchapter is dedicated to the Holocaust, defined as "sacrifice brought to divinity by the ancient Hebrews and Assyrians,

consisting in burnt offerings. In the 20th century, the term was used to designate the tragedy undergone by the Jewish population subjected to extermination (including by burning) in camps built for this particular purpose by the Nazis." Under the title "Racism and Extermination," information is given on the fate of Jews in Poland and the Western part of the Soviet Union, liquidated by the Einsatzgruppen. Mention is made to the fact that

435 concentration camps and the extermination camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau and Majdanek were set up in Poland.... Some concentration camps were eventually turned into extermination camps. The entire operation acquired industrial dimensions, and each camp had a plan to fulfill. At Auschwitz, the largest of all death camps, 12,000 people were exterminated daily by gassing, shooting, etc. By the end of the war, the Holocaust had resulted in nearly 6 million Jewish deaths, [representing] two-thirds of Europe's Jewish population (Oane and Ochescu, 2002, p. 102).

The volume specifies the atrocities committed at Lidice, in Czechoslovakia, as well as at Oradour-sur-Glane, France, placing them in the same category of wartime occurrences as the Warsaw ghetto uprising. On page 103, a map shows the concentration and extermination camps of Nazi Europe (significantly, Transnistria is missing); a photo of several Dachau inmates taken at the moment of their liberation is reproduced; as is the above-mentioned testimony of Rudolf Hoess in Nuremberg, that trial being briefly covered on page 122, as well. It is probably not mere chance that the text emphasizes that "similar horrors were also perpetrated in this war by the Italian and Japanese occupiers and by the Croat ustasa," or "of all the countries occupied by Germany, Poland suffered the biggest human losses compared to the total population: 6 million dead." While this information is accurate, the manner of its presentation seems to betray a subtle intent to minimize the special anti-Semitic aspect of Nazi and pro-Nazi policies by presenting Jewish victims as mere casualties of an inhumane war and Holocaust perpetrators as criminals among many other lawbreakers.

This feeling is further enhanced by the technique of presentation. In an extremely original vision, the manual, which covers world history from 1815 until the present, includes, in each chapter, a brief parallel presentation of Romanian history at a particular scrutinized historical moment. The chapter on World War II is also accompanied by a sidebar on Romania. At this point, however, things get complicated. In a first paragraph, the authors mention that "[concentration] camps were set up, while enterprises and [state] institutions were militarized. Although the Antonescu regime opposed the extermination of the Jewish population in Romania, during 1941-43 almost 100,000 Jews were deported to Transnistria, where thousands of people died under harsh living conditions and atrocities." The reader is never told who was guilty of committing those atrocities, and might become even more disoriented learning from the second paragraph that:

**[D]uring the war, the situation of Jews in Romania was different from that of the Jews who were left in northern Transylvania, [which was] annexed by Hungary, where they were almost entirely slaughtered. Their case was the most rapid implementation of the final solution in Europe. The Romanian Jews were victims of racial legislation and of other discriminatory measures but at the end of the war the Jewish community counted about 300,000 members, more than in any other country dominated by the Nazis (Oane and Ochescu, 2002, p. 122).

It thus becomes obvious that the authors remain faithful to the former communist "party line": "It happened, but not here." This Janus-faced posture has been labeled by Shafir (2002, pp. 89-103) as "selective negationism." Oane and Ochescu's position is not much different from that displayed by most other authors scrutinized in this study: There is no explanation as to who was imprisoned in the camps and no mention of the "Romanianization" process, which in their terminology is replaced with the vaguer and misleading "militarization." Moreover, the attempt to save Antonescu and the Romanian authorities' face leads to an aberration: If the regime was against deportation, who deported the Jews to Transnistria? Last but not least, the comparison with the situation of Jews in

northern Transylvania betrays the authors' communist training. This was precisely the strategy promoted by the former regime to blame, once more, the Magyar authorities, with the twofold purpose of attacking Janos Kadar's Hungary and rehabilitating Antonescu and the Romanian authorities' nationalist policies. The end of the paragraph provides the perfect crowning of the technique; the authors conclude that the Romanian Jews had a happier fate because they suffered nothing more than discriminatory measures, and anyway more of them were left alive after the war than in other countries. Naturally, comparisons have their importance; but the authors fail to mention how many Jews lived in Romania before the war. If one embraces the figure of 800,000, promoted by another textbook, which, in the same style, forgets to mention how many were left (the 12th-grade textbook by Mihai Manea, analyzed below), some 500,000 -- or nearly two-thirds of the Jewish population -- appear to be missing. Apparently, this is not nearly sufficient for Oane and Ochescu to justify the label of "extermination policy."

In his "Istoria Romanilor de la 1821 pana la 1989" (History of the Romanians from 1821 to 1989) textbook for the 12th grade, published in 1998, Manea writes that on 9 August 1940 "the Jewish population was banned from civil service in administration and the army, and from owning property," and claims that although this "was just the beginning of a series of anti-Semitic measures," they allegedly were also "a rare instance in the history of Romania [sic]." Unaware of the self-contradiction, or choosing to ignore it, Manea adds: "Both anti-Semitism and nationalism were, however, moderate, the Jewish population counting, on the brink of war, 800,000 inhabitants" (Manea, 1998, p. 323). If anti-Semitic measures throughout Romanian history can be deemed to have been "rare," one is hardly surprised to see that the policies of the Iron Guard and the Goga-Cuza or Antonescu governments are in turn described as characterized by "moderate anti-Semitism" and "moderate nationalism." And, like Oane and Ochescu, Manea insists on the number of Jews living in Romania before the war but is silent about how many were still alive after it.

Furthermore, he tells his young readers that

[u]nder exceptional circumstances, the Antonescu government intensified political repression through arrests, deportation and by imposing anti-popular measures. Labor camps were set up and enterprises and institutions were militarized. Thus, prisons and labor camps were opened in the country at Targu-Jiu, Caransebes, or on the territory under [military] war administration at Odessa, Vapniarka, Smerinka, Bogdanovka, and Dumanovka (Manea, 1998, p. 339).

There is no mention as to whom these measures affected; the student is left to guess. Pupils using the textbook are also told by its author that

[i]t was Antonescu's merit that he opposed the enforcement of the "final solution" and the extermination of the Jewish population of Romania. The excesses and the losses amid the Jewish population on the territory occupied by the Horthyates in northwestern Transylvania and in Transnistria notwithstanding, the "final solution" was not enforced in Romania, an exception being...the program [sic] of 6 July 1941 in Iasi. In Bessarabia, despite all the efforts made by the leaders of the Zionist movement in Romania -- L. Filderman, M. Benvenisti, Al. L. Zissu -- to save the lives of the Jewish population, in tragic and complex [sic] circumstances, massacres were nonetheless carried out in Marculesti, Floresti, Gura Kamenca, Climauti, Gura Cainari. During the summer of 1942, Ion Antonescu managed to obtain the annulment of the promise made to Gustav Richter, German police attache in Romania and representative of Adolf Eichmann, commander of the Reich's Security, to deport the Jews of our country to the Auschwitz death camp. The Romanian government agreed, however, to allow the emigration of Jews to Palestine; in very hard times, Romania thus became a genuine springboard for the emigration of Jews from Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland.

The text obviously intends to create the impression that Antonescu in fact tried to save the

Jews, and whatever went wrong happened without his knowledge and were mere exceptions to the general rule. Not to mention the use of a euphemistic phrase such as "tragic and complex circumstances" to describe the Romanian authorities' participation in the atrocities! And the contradiction in terms is simply outstanding: If in Romania the final solution was not applied, but massacres did occur in Bessarabia, one might logically conclude that Bessarabia was not part of Romania! If so, why did Antonescu join Hitler's war to liberate it?

Last but not least, very interesting is the textbook for the 12th grade published in 2001 by a group of authors, with historian Ioan Scurtu as editor. Although Scurtu does not avoid the issue (which is not surprising considering his current position of counselor to the president of Romania on educational matters), he dismisses it in a brief paragraph:

****[the] Antonescu regime promoted an anti-Semitic policy, taking measures particularly against the Jews of Bessarabia, whom he accused of communism. Pogroms were recorded (Iasi and Odessa), the number of dead or missing Jews amounting to about 250,000 people. Still, Antonescu did not accept the "final solution" (the extermination of the Jews) demanded by Hitler (Scurtu, 2001, p.188).**

On page 189, the students are also told, "Following the confrontations of January 21-23, 1941, 416 victims were recorded, of which 120 were Jews." That is virtually all the authors have to say about the Holocaust and the "Jewish problem." One notes the repeated insistence on Antonescu's rejection of Hitler's demand that Romania agree to the deportation of its Jews. This reminds one of Radio Erevan: first, because the Marshal DID agree to the deportations but withdrew his agreement as the looming end of the war appeared clearer to him as an experienced military commander; and second because even before agreeing to send Romania's Jews to the German death camps, Antonescu had his own recipe for a "Romanian final solution," which he started implementing and then interrupted (see Ancel, 2001, pp. 111-142 and 2003, pp.125-275).

Conclusions

Of course, this study is not exhaustive. It was not intended to be -- although it is not the first produced by the author on this problem (see Waldman, 2003). There are many school and high-school textbooks that have not been taken into account here. But those that have been reviewed demonstrate, in my opinion, that there is no coherent view on what should be taught in relation to the Holocaust or how it should be taught. Some textbooks do not touch on the subject at all; others are completely beside the point; and still others still are inaccurate or incomplete. An attempt to put together whatever is accurate in all these textbooks shows that not even then would the image be complete. For someone who is not familiar with the true history of Romania -- and I am not necessarily referring to foreigners, but also to the generations educated under the communist regime, when historical information was filtered and rewritten to fit communist requirements -- it is impossible to get from these textbooks a correct picture of what really happened at that time.

After 14 years of "democracy" in Romania, the Holocaust is still an extremely sensitive topic. The current authorities are still reluctant to admit a Romanian chapter in the European Holocaust, claiming that what happened in Romania entailed minor events that do not justify that status. Much of what has been achieved in the last three years is the result of international pressure. Raising awareness on what truly happened during World War II and teaching people to assume responsibility for their history as it is -- rather than as they want it to be -- is therefore still a high priority.

Furthermore, this study shows that the problem arises only when what is in question is the Holocaust in Romania. It is readily noticeable that, while the textbooks for the eighth, 10th, and 12th grade vary considerably in approach and information, both 11th-grade textbooks include vast and accurate data, regardless of who authored them. In addition, the presence of the same quotations from the relevant international literature proves that, at least in this respect, a large basis of information is available to anyone interested. The same cannot be said of Romania's recent history. Here, too, similar details appear in most textbooks. Still,

this does not mean they are accurate; on the contrary, it suggests they are designed to accredit the same false image of what truly happened.

Therefore, there is much to be done in this direction. But much also depends on the determination of the new generation of historians to tackle and present the real history of those times and teach children according to current methodologies. In effect, the 27 percent of votes given to an extremist party like Greater Romania during the last elections is merely a natural result of the lack of information and education of younger generations in regard to the real history of the far right in the country. However, it is interesting to note that more and more young people -- pupils and students -- have developed a special interest in this field and seem to be looking for reliable sources. The near future will probably show what they have discovered.

Postscript: The Future Looks Bright

At the end of 2003, Romania applied to join the International Force for Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research. The government expressed its willingness to organize and sponsor further events, conferences, seminars, and training courses, in cooperation with the nongovernmental sector (there are at least four NGOs with experience in such projects: Initiatives for Democracy in Eastern Europe (IDEE), the Romanian Institute for Recent History, the Holocaust Victims' Association, and the Association for African and Oriental Studies). It also pledged to stimulate a national program of teacher training in Holocaust education. Moreover, it went so far as promising to alter and develop the curriculum so as to include the Holocaust as a topic in itself when modifying the compulsory period of education in keeping with the European-integration agenda, in more than one curriculum area: Romanian and universal history, civic education, social sciences, literature, and arts.

To assist in this process, a series of specifically devised academic and scholarly publications is under preparation for the next school year. The Holocaust Victims' Association is carrying out a joint project with the Ministry of Education and Research for the distribution in schools and high schools of a survivors' memoirs and a book of relevant articles, designed to serve as supporting material for teaching the Holocaust. The Moshe Carmilly Institute for Hebrew and Jewish History of the Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj and the Goldstein Goren Center for Hebrew Studies of Bucharest University each year elaborate teaching materials for those attending their training sessions. The Center for Research and Study of the Culture and Civilization of South-Eastern European Jewry of the University of Craiova is working on two volumes of excerpts regarding the oppression of the Jews (forced labor) taken from French and Romanian archives, in cooperation with the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism. In turn, the Romanian Institute of Recent History is preparing a three-volume resource book (one introductory and two with documents) on the European and Romanian Holocaust designed to serve as documentary support for teachers.

With such an impetus, things should start looking better. Until the next flip-flop, that is.

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