

Transnistria, the "General Plan East", and the "Shoah by bullets"

Chioveanu, Mihai

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Chioveanu, M. (2010). Transnistria, the "General Plan East", and the "Shoah by bullets". *Studia Politica: Romanian Political Science Review*, 10(3), 427-446. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-446713>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY-NC-ND Lizenz (Namensnennung-Nicht-kommerziell-Keine Bearbeitung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/deed.de>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY-NC-ND Licence (Attribution-Non Commercial-NoDerivatives). For more information see:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>

Transnistria, the "General Plan East", and the "Shoah by Bullets"

MIHAI CHIOVEANU

With the early "flush of victory" against USSR, and the cover provided by Hitler's "war of annihilation" in the East, Ion Antonescu and his regime turned ethnic cleansing into a top priority policy¹. Mesmerized by the promise of a Jew free Romania, with other ethnic and religious minorities targeted as well, the government easily accepted mass killing, ghettoization, and brutal deportations as effective genocidal means to achieve envisioned ultra-nationalistic and "redemptive" ends. However, with late 1942 and the "pallor of defeat", at a time the Nazi continent wide Holocaust was in full swing, Bucharest decided to reject the *International Final Solution* proposed by Berlin. Plans to deport the Romanian Jews to Poland were unexpectedly abandoned, and further evacuations to Transnistria halted². All of a sudden, Romanian decision makers (re) turned to emigration, a long-abandoned by that time Nazi policy, presenting it as the only acceptable, to them, solution to the *Jewish Question*³. No secret was made out of their intention to continue the ethnic cleansing operations by more civilized means, and with more profitable ends: ransoming Jews, containing German protests, signaling the allies that Romania undertook a different path⁴.

The shift came too late, at a time the evil was already done, and Romania stood on the verge of genocide. Transnistria was by now an infamous "kingdom of death". Bullets, famine, hard labor and diseases were effective means in the Romanian process of destruction of the Jews, a process that did not include gas vans and chambers, but in which not one community east of the river Prut was spared⁵. Acting as liaison to the Nazi perpetrators the Romanian ones moved hastily from savage massacres to more bureaucratic ways of killings⁶. The cruelty is striking, and the process is no less structured in its brutality when compared to the Nazi one in the occupied Soviet territories⁷.

¹ For a thorough analysis on ethnic cleansing policy in Romania see Vladimir SOLONARI, *Purifying the Nation: Population Exchange and Ethnic Cleansing in Nazi Allied Romania*, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2009.

² Mihai CHIOVEANU, "The Unforeseen Defection. Romania's Disengagement from the Nazi Final Solution", *Studia Politica. Romanian Political Science Review*, vol. VII, no. 4, 2007, pp. 879-902.

³ Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 2007, pp. 450-451. See also Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Evreii din România între anii 1940-1944*. vol. III, 1940-1942: *Perioada unei mari restriști*, partea a II-a, Hasefer, București, 1997, doc. 556, pp. 273-274.

⁴ Andreas HILLGRUBER, *Hitler, Regele Carol și Mareșalul Antonescu. Relațiile germano-române. 1938-1944*, Romanian transl. S. Neagoe, Humanitas, București, 1994, pp. 283-284.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 280.

⁶ Michael MANN, *The Dark Side of Democracy. Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005, pp. 305-306.

⁷ Wendy LOWER, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine*, The University of North Carolina Press, 2007, pp. 144 and following.

The importance of Transnistria stays with the staggering number of victims, the expediency of killing operations in the vicinity of villages and towns, very personal, a human butchery that resembles in its mixture of police, military, and bureaucratic violence, efficient and organized, many other killing fields and cases of ethnic cleansing and genocide, and the proximity of the Holocaust in Ukraine, different from the classic Shoah only in terms of framework and method¹. Moving from here and aiming for clarity, I will try to understand the policy that made Transnistria possible, a development that is not incidental and accidental.

My chief interest is to delineate reasons and motivations that might facilitate the understanding of the twisted and paradoxical decision-making process, and the strategic logic of the Romanian perpetrators. Attention is given not only to the Romanian government, institutions and agencies but also to the Nazi perspective on Eastern territories, the empire-building policy in the Ukraine, and the dynamic of the Nazi solution to the Jewish Question. When analyzing the actions and attitudes of the above-mentioned actors in a wider context, my intention is simply to shed some light on the inception and role of Transnistria during the Holocaust.

One element that puzzled the historical analysis in the case of the Nazi Final Solution and consequently in the case of the Romanian Holocaust was the excessive and often reductionist search for the one document, issued at one time, indicating the ultimate, formal decision to murder all the European Jews. With mainstream Holocaust scholars still unable to reach consensus, accepting that the issue is still a matter of probability, not certainty, I will focus instead on the goals centered process and its dynamic, often contradictory, mixing views, local conditions, zealous initiatives from below, vested (self) interests that had to be protected from others². The secretive, corrupt, and valuing action political culture of the Nazis, often ignored, suggests a further look into the serie of escalating instructions in the form of vaguely worded orders from above, and continuous radicalization in the form of personal initiatives from below, finally resulting in the formulation of uniform policies³. Describing how as to understand what and why it happened in the case of Nazi Germany, I will try to pinpoint whose role is pivotal in the process that generated Transnistria, and what is deliberate in the anti-Jewish policy of the Romanians.

The long lasting anti-Semitic tradition and hate⁴ and ethnic-cleansing as an ideological core constituency will help me point out that Antonescu's regime was not simply a puppet, acting on external pressure. The Nazi's offered some incentives, Transnistria included, and to some extent instigated the crime and backed the Romanians as agents of the mass-murder campaign. However the Romanian "willing executioners" followed their own path, developed and later implemented their own project, in most respects independently from the Nazi one. The German presence and overwhelming political and military role favored and facilitated the Romanian actions⁵ who, on their turn, gave a new impulse to the German policies. Hitler perceived the Romanian pogroms in Bucharest and Iasi as a sign of growing awareness toward the

¹ *Ibidem*, p. 69.

² *Ibidem*, pp. 3-8.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

⁴ See Robert PAXTON, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, Penguin Books, London, 2005, pp. 20, 79, 97.

⁵ See Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution. The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March 1942*, University of Nebraska Press, Yad Vashem, Lincoln, Jerusalem, 2004, pp. 275-277.

Jewish threat, with Europeans following the German anti-Semitic lead. Reading the reports of *Einsatzgruppen D* one can easily realize that the Nazi ideological warriors were often outperformed by the Romanian army and gendarmerie. A preliminary conclusion would be that Romanian murder policies "mixed in a particularly lethal brew" with the German ones¹. What has to be explained is the impetuosity of the Romanian campaign at the beginning and its limits by the end.

In this sense, my hypothesis is that the initial collaboration was made possible by a minimal consensus: Jews would have to disappear. What was not clear, degenerating into a clash of visions, policies, and actions was: where?, when?, and how?; they will disappear. To the Romanians, and to the Germans, ethnic cleansing was a common vision and goal. All means were rendered acceptable, from legislation to emigration, ghettos, terror, mass murder and evacuation to the East. The common set of policies which made the German-Romanian cooperation possible included the effort to secure and pacify the conquered territories, the destruction of bolshevism, and the cleansing of the land by means of evacuation to a destination yet to be determined in the East with the conclusion of the war. Nazi instigation, supervision, and back-up were minimal at the beginning, and became increasingly intrusive only when they had to protect their priorities from the Romanians who, as long as the abstract idea of an exit, meaning reservation, was provided, stood in line. When the Nazis moved from cleansing to genocide, without announcing their partners, speeding the process, signs of Romanian uneasiness appeared. It took a long time, and a series of genocidal acts for the Romanians to understand what is going on. Golta and Berezovka are but two of the many examples. Pushing east, against the wall of Nazi colonies in Ukraine, the Romanians generated a jammed traffic with only one way out. The Nazis had a solution at hand to the too many problems generated by the Romanians: death.

Starting with the preparations for Operation Barbarossa the leaders of the Third Reich were hastily and incoherently moving from cautious, pragmatic, and instrumental policies, to more lasting solutions to the Jewish Question. With December 1940 to December 1941 the Jewish question was gradually turned from a major task of the peace period into a goal to be achieved with and during the forthcoming war. Departing from the *International Solution*, but without abandoning the term, which continued to be part of the sterile language of the perpetrators², the Nazis were making room for a new solution, to dwarf previous plans and deeds. The new, total war, which unlike previous campaigns magnified everything, including the Jewish question and the solution to it³, implied the death of tens of millions by disproportionate shooting, starvation, and brutal evacuation⁴. A vague vision of implied genocide in the future was at hand before June, only the time table was missing. No decision to kill all Soviet Jews has been taken previously, not to mention announced, and no major and visible preparations were made long in advance⁵. Lifting most of the too many restrictions imposed by the impunity of law, and the reluctance of some of the army officers to act brutal against civilians, still complaining about the absence of funds, destinations,

¹ Saul FRIELANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit, pp. 166,169, 225.

² Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution...cit.*, p. 195.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 214.

⁴ Heinz HÖHNE, *The Order of the Death's Head. The Story of Hitler's SS*, Penguin Books, London, 2000, p. 315. For the Nazis Poland was only a laboratory, while in the USSR, they could deploy their fantastic visions of a "grotesque, unreal, pathological future".

⁵ Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution...cit.*, pp. 213-214.

transportation means, and so on, the Nazi leaders were, soon enough, to give up the constraints of the impunity of thought. Not yet ready to "predict" the final solution they turned the killing of civilians from terror into mass murder, a more dangerous yet, to them, practical and efficient policy, centralized and supervised by state agents. Moving to a war of annihilation, they also seized the opportunity to move to a more radical "prototype for SS policies". Emigration, already reduced to little more than a trickle, was reconsidered, abandoned, and latter on (October) forbidden¹. The same happened to the territorial solution of Madagascar². Instead, latently genocidal plans and policies were brought to the table³. When it came to the Soviet and Polish Jews, previous plans for deportation and expulsion to the East "with the conclusion of the war" were gradually abandoned as to make room to the *unthinkable* and *unspeakable*⁴. However, before June, most Nazi decision makers were at best mentally relocating the territorial solution from Madagascar and Lublin to an indeterminate and military yet unconquered east, somewhat recycling and radicalizing previous plans and policies⁵. To September at least, Berlin experts were designing plans for a reception area, still not knowing about the new solution, just sensing a major change, and therefore, like R.H. Hoppner, one of Eichman's many experts, asking for clarification:

"because first of all the basic decision must be made. It is essential in this regard [...] that total clarity prevails about what finally shall happen to those undesirable elements [...] is it the goal to ensure them a certain level of life in the long run, or shall they be totally eradicated"⁶.

What Hoppner did not know was that with July-August his desk plans on one hand, and his masters' policy in the field on the other hand were no longer converging. Protecting their domain, and mini-empires, the modern Nazi satraps, refused to rule over repositories to unskilled labor force made of undesirables⁷.

The invasion in Russia took many of the leaders of the Third Reich from plans of expulsion and commensurate population decimation as the central vision and solution toward a Europe free of Jews to systematic total extermination⁸. Previous short and

¹ Ian KERSHAW, *Hitler. 1936-1945: Nemesis*, vol. 2, Penguin Books, London, 2000, p. 145.

² Yitzhak ARAD, Israel GUTMAN, Abraham MARGALIT (eds.), *Documents on the Holocaust*, University of Nebraska Press, Yad Vashem, Lincoln, Jerusalem, 1999, pp. 118-121.

³ Ian KERSHAW, *Hitler. 1936-1945: Nemesis*, cit., p. 135.

⁴ Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution...cit.*, p. 37.

⁵ Michael BURLEICH, *The Third Reich, A New History*, Pan Books, London, 2001, pp. 597-598. This option will be ruled out later on, at a time when it was totally unclear what deportation, evacuation, resettlement meant.

⁶ Quoted in Dan STONE (ed.), *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2005, p. 188.

⁷ Michael R. MARRUS, *The Holocaust in History*, Key Porter Books, Toronto, 2000, pp. 60-62, 79.

⁸ Robert GELLATELY, "The Third Reich, the Holocaust, and Visions of Serial Genocide", in Robert GELLATELY, Ben KIERNAN (eds.), *The Specter of Genocide. Mass Murder in Historical Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, cit., pp. 255-256, 258. From 1939 the Nazis initiated the fanciful *General Plan East*, developed in five stages, and revised three times, turning demographic engineering into a major radical operation. The plan proved technically unworkable, and turned into an invitation to serial genocide. By November 1941 the RSHA drafted a version that called for resettlement of no less than 31 millions from all West areas to the East, with the "undesirables" to be replaced by 10 million ethnic Germans. By April 1942 the

long range "plans for the settlement of the Jewish question in the German sphere of influence in Europe after the conclusion of peace", including overseas evacuation and the creation of reservations in a territory in the East "yet to be determined"¹, were rapidly abandoned. Nazi demographic engineering, fanciful but impossible to carry out, was to be replaced by a new policy². Somewhere between July and October 1941 Nazi anti-Semitic policy shifted rapidly from emigration and expulsion to physical extermination³. With mid July the killings expanded from Jewish commissars and party members, and cleansing the territory, to killing all able bodied Jewish males. By mid August the number of victims increased ten times, with the perpetrators moving "beyond the wildest of deportations"⁴. Women and children fall into the gruesome picture too⁵. No more ghettos, no more labor force. All provisions were eliminated, the Einsatzgruppen redimensioned, new SS and police forces were reallocated to the rear back of the front. The first sweep of killings was not triggered by a formal decision; the only smoking gun to indicate it is but the macabre reality of the repetitive, mechanic *aktionen*, leading to many, not one Babi Yar. A process of cumulative radicalization turned the action from terror to mass murders, moving to the verge of genocide. It took months for the killing to reach momentum and scope. July 16, with Hitler's victory speech, the Atlantic Chart of August, the second Nazi offensive with October 15, and the early December Soviet counteroffensive, were but four major events fostering killings and determining more and more perpetrators to move from destruction to total annihilation of all Jews, to cross the line from envisaging a solution through policies of expulsion (with concomitant decimation) to a policy of systematic and total mass murder⁶.

Racism, agrarianism, and territorial expansion also lifted provisions and eroded taboos. The newly conquered lands in the East were valued by the Nazis for natural resources, not their populations, and were to be exploited and radically transformed according to utopian schemes that included militarism, colonialism, and genocidal policies⁷. The region was envisioned before the attack as an Aryan stronghold, of agricultural colonies and SS estates. The soil and racial (blood) policy, the idea of breeding the best when eliminating the useless, excluded the vicinity of Jews first and foremost. Thus, the first step on the path to the Holocaust in the East was made long before⁸. The process of making decisions was not easy as it was not just for the

Reich ministry for occupied Eastern Area was in charge with the implementation of this plan, which is, most probably, the plan Mihai Antonescu referred to latter on, when emphasizing the lack of logic from the part of the Nazis who opposed deportation to Transnistria and the evacuation of Jews over the Bug.

¹ *Ibidem*, p. 247.

² Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution...cit.*, pp. 102-106.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 424. Emigration was forbidden by October, on orders issued by Heinrich Muller, the head of Gestapo. The same month, even before, the first deportation from Berlin, Vienna, Prague and the overcrowded ghettos of Poland started.

⁴ Michael MANN, *The Dark Side of Democracy...cit.*, p. 210.

⁵ See Martin GILBERT, *Holocaust. A History of the Jews of Europe During the Second World War*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1985, pp. 180 and the following.

⁶ Christopher BROWNING, "The Decision-Making Process", in Dan STONE (ed.), *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, cit., pp. 186-188.

⁷ Ben KIERNAN, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2007, pp. 421-426.

⁸ Wendy LOWER, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine*, cit., pp. 2 and following.

SS to make an input, but also for the party, the economic planners and demography experts. Jews in the deficit area of *Ostland* were to die of hard labor and starvation, and whenever possible expelled to Siberia; in the surplus area of Ukraine they were to receive a subsistence minimum as to work in agriculture. The latter were soon to realize that the plan is not working and represents a barrier to other plans to conquer, exploit, colonize, Germanize¹. The inevitable conclusion was that no work and no food were to be provided to the Jews, not even in the Ukrainian bread basket. The killing operation was to be utilitarian but the paroxysmal reaction of the ordinary men soon turned it instinctual, and into human butchery.

Aiming to take hold, secure, avoid previous dead-locks, and a new traffic jam², the SS opted from the early days for an Alexandrian way of solving the problems of the past without generating new ones³. A new policy was therefore needed as to avoid the burden of starvation, disease, revolt of an embittered population expelled to the east, in a quarantine reservation policed by the Germans. To worse things, the military setbacks foreclosed any deportation to Siberia, forcing the decision makers to decide for one of the two major goals: German *Lebensraum*, or a territorial solution for the Jewish Question.

Even before the invasion, which set in motion "a fateful chain of events that open the door to the Final solution", the orders lost accuracy, turned more general and imprecise, focusing on expediency. Massacres came into the picture and as to engulf Jews as agents of communism, agitators, and saboteurs. The process was somewhat hazardous, also when it came to creating the task forces in charge with the operation to secure and pacify. From May to late June the anti-Jewish circle of the "self-cleansing efforts" (*Selbstreinigungsbestrebungen*) was added to the anticommunist one of *Sauberungaktionen*⁴. Combining the two, the orders explicitly mentioned the Jews in party and state positions, and implicitly that Jewish males represent a special danger that has to be dealt with more severely⁵. Stalin's appeal to a partisan war with July 3 was but to worsen and justify further killings, with Hitler ordering on July 16 the cleansing of conquered land of any kind of opposition⁶. Consequently, all provisions and distinction vanished rapidly. No specific order to exterminate all Soviet Jews was needed⁷. Changing priorities, the Nazis were soon to preclude exits by emigration and reservation. It is not crystal clear when exactly the Jews were no longer part of General Plans East, with liquidation replacing expulsion⁸. Before the invasion the strategy included, at least in the eyes of Rosenberg, and much like in

¹ Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution...cit.*, pp. 236-239.

² Robert PAXTON, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, cit., pp. 159-160.

³ Christopher BROWNING, "The Decision Concerning the Final Solution", in François FURET (ed.), *Unanswered Questions. Nazi Germany and the Genocide of the Jews*, Schocken Books, New York, 1989, p. 109.

⁴ Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution...cit.*, pp. 223-229.

⁵ Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit., p. 207.

⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 199-201.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 207.

⁸ Robert GELLATELY, "The Third Reich, the Holocaust, and Visions of Serial Genocide", cit., pp. 255-257. By November the Jews were still mentioned by Wetzel's plan. But Wetzel was but a pencil pusher working for Rosenberg's ministry, an expert who continued to work on his plans only to realize later that he miscalculated and reach the same conclusion: Jews have to die. The final solution was not imposed on him; it was accepted "consensually".

Poland, confiscation of property, marking, labor, registration and listing, concentration in ghettos, in preparation for further expulsion to the wastes of the East¹. Acting on vague guidelines and general principles, even some of the most trustworthy Nazis, such as Hans Frank, continued to believe that Jews will be expelled eastward, thus cleansing the occupied territories of them². What Frank and others did not realize was that the Jews were no longer part of the General Plan East. In their case "resettlement to the East" was rapidly turned into a code word for mass murder³.

The Final Solution was decided, planed, and ordered by few, in great secret. No formal document indicates when the decision has been taken. Moreover, it seems that in most cases no clear instructions and no specific orders were needed in the field. A brush stroke was sufficient. The euphoria of rapid victory, the impression of mightiness, and visions of Ukraine as a Garden of Eden was to make most decision makers wonder whether Jewish work force is still wanted or more drastic measures were needed⁴. The dilemma was no longer whether Jews should be killed, but why not killing them all. Different agencies had different approaches, in different areas, with prevailing conditions to trigger solutions more than the preexisting apocalyptic plans for racial engineering⁵. No uniform pattern existed, with each and every actor adjusting and coordinating the set of measures to the vision and long range plans⁶. To late December 1941 police forces and civil administration had the upper hand and were allowed to conduct experiments, as the balance of power shifted from center to periphery⁷. Lower echelons in the field were to decide, higher echelons to sanction, encourage, shield, support. The result, at least when it comes to the police forces was a continuous radicalization of the measures⁸. The top decision makers were meanwhile busy with securing jurisdictions and prerogatives, and satisfying political ambitions⁹.

March to May 1941, Hitler informed most of his staff and allies that Jews will have to disappear from Europe, send to Siberia on his order¹⁰. By late July, Arthur Nebe lamented that his men were killing Jews by the thousands, given the vast number of

¹ Wendy LOWER, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine*, cit., p. 86.

² Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution...*cit., pp. 239-243.

³ Robert GELLATELY, "The Third Reich, the Holocaust, and Visions of Serial Genocide", cit., p. 258.

⁴ Ben KIERNAN, *Blood and Soil...*cit., pp. 426-431. The Nazi dream of an agricultural Eden in the east left no room for the Jews, city dwellers and archetypal urbanites, the worst of the unproductive and degenerate people of Russia.

⁵ Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit., pp. 201, 238,361, also Ben KIERNAN, *Blood and Soil...*cit., p. 445.

⁶ Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution...*cit., pp. 295-313.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 295.

⁸ Wendy LOWER, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine*, cit., pp. 86 and following. The SS, who had the upper hand in anti-Jewish policy making, was interested in avoiding the Polish experience of ghettos, turning them into simply a preparatory step of a new practice, assembling people shortly before killing them. Thorough clean-up was to eliminate the problem of food and shelter, and the danger of disease.

⁹ Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution...*cit., p. 310. The special squads expended rapidly from 3 000 to 11 200, and more units were allocated to the task. By December there were 33 000 men under arms with but one task, kill Jews. Ghettos were abandoned in favor of immediate cleansing, which generally meant in urban areas extermination.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 315.

them in Russia, but that a solution to the Jewish Question will be possible only after the war and then only through deportation¹. By late August, Jews were no longer part of any plan for evacuation. On Himmler's pressure to act more aggressively, the SS and police start killing men, women and children, as many as possible². With the front advanced and the agglomeration of troops in the rear, decision makers seized the opportunity to move from war on bolshevism to worse, genocide. Racial aims thus took over political and military goals³. Jews were no longer to be taken out of their land but of the land⁴. The SS was moving that swiftly from gradual liquidation to genocide that other agencies had to protest, asking them to depart from comprehensive and immediate killing, to let some Jews alive for the sake of force labor and the reconstruction of large areas⁵. The situation somewhat changed with late 1941, when civil administration took hold, and the police and army administration lost full control. By that time the long process of bringing all strands of anti-Jewish policy together was over, all being aware that in the end the solution was death⁶. The shift was made by the preeminence of the new type of violence, bureaucratic, with the machinery of destruction now in the hands of the Reich commissars⁷.

By early 1942, with the Wansee Conference making clear the method, priorities, coordination, tasks, jurisdictions and so on⁸, most Nazi "pencil pushers" and "expertocrats" departed from previous plans of forced emigration and relocation⁹. However, the polycratic nature of the "weak dictatorship of consensus"¹⁰, marked by conflicting policies and personalities¹¹, doubled by the fact that the factories of death were not all ready and working at full capacity, and the supply system was not running properly yet¹², was but to slow the process in the first months of 1942. Meanwhile, the second sweep of killing by bullets in Ukraine started. The bread basket was by now secured and German colonies strengthened. Vinitza became the new "wolf lair" of the East. Five major autobahns were already under construction. The Jews: the fittest

¹ *Ibidem*, p. 313.

² Wendy LOWER, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine*, cit., pp. 72-73.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 73.

⁴ Robert GELLATELY, "The Third Reich, the Holocaust, and Visions of Serial Genocide", cit., pp. 250-251.

⁵ Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution...* cit., p. 314. Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit., p. 359 and following. See Wendy LOWER, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine*, cit., p. 83.

⁶ Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution...* cit., p. 318.

⁷ Wendy LOWER, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine*, cit., p. 128.

⁸ Christopher BROWNING, "The Decision Concerning the Final Solution", cit., p. 112.

⁹ Robert GELLATELY, "The Third Reich, the Holocaust, and Visions of Serial Genocide", cit., p. 256.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 241.

¹¹ Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit., p. 336. Facing opposition from the government on various issues concerning the German but not East Jews Hitler had to force the hand of Reichstag and impose a second Enabling Act in April 1942, granting him unlimited powers, placing Führer's principles above law.

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 490-492. From a logistical point of view, the deportations were a constant factor of stress, at least up to 1943, gave head aches to the Nazis, who never had enough trains, not exactly when they needed them, as the Reihsbahn was failing short with providing sufficient freight cars as there were always other priorities. See also Raul HILBERG, "The Bureaucracy of Annihilation", in François FURET (ed.), *Unanswered Questions...* cit., pp. 123-125.

were to be worked to death; the rest, the useless eaters, were hunted down and killed to the last. The killings continued in the spring and summer of 1942, and thereafter to the end of the war, but, with some exceptions, such as Vinitza, where the RSHA decided on a thorough cleansing, at a lower scale and pace¹. What the paperwork of the administration did was to rationalize the killing process, at the same time adding a new method to bullets and gas vans, the *Vernichtung durch Arbeit* (extermination during work)². The role of the SS in the new framework was no less prominent. They were in charge with creating and managing camps, supplying workers to the Todt, finally killing the unfitted, as by spring 1942 they secured the role of the single authority of the Final Solution.

The allies were not consulted nor informed about the new developments, but simply dragged into, and left to discover the new path when struggling over the cryptic, sterile bureaucratic language of the Nazis, and facing the facts on the ground³. It was the actual realization of the final solution in the field to make them aware, and not an existing plan or a verbatim decision announcing it. The Nazis felt no need to talk about the new policy, as for them the Russian campaign was a continuation and radicalization of what was already started in Poland, meaning ethnic cleansing (*Völkische Flurbereinigung*)⁴. If the widening circle of the informed on the final solution reached the Romanian government, it did so only by the time the Nazis raised the issue of the European Jews at large, not just the Soviet Jews⁵.

The case of Romania (Transnistria included) is at first glance not substantially different from that of Germany and its policy in Ukraine. Romanians stood on the Nazi side in the genocidal mire, and huge proportions of Romanian and Ukrainian Jews perished at the hands of the Romanian government. There was little or no need for any form of German participation to "cleanse the ground" as violence was triggered by the degree of local anti-Semitism existing before the war, backed by anger, bigotry, opportunism, materialism, careerism and military (in)discipline. The enthusiasm of the perpetrators, from the simple soldier and gendarme to the high rank officers, from the anonymous civil servant to the top bureaucrat, adds to the explanation for the paroxysmal violence of the mid 1941-late 1942 period⁶. The entire process, in which hundred of thousands of Romania and Ukrainian Jews perished, was turned into a carnage that exhausts the reader⁷.

With late 1941, the impression left by the Romanian speeded killings and deportations was that all barriers have been removed, with the Antonescu government

¹ Wendy LOWER, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine*, cit., pp. 129-130.

² *Ibidem*, pp. 143-145.

³ The perception of Bucharest was altered by the fact that they were discussing the issue with the diplomats mainly and rarely with the SS. At a local level the Romanians knew about the massacres, and took part in the killing. Some of them even wrote reports and asked for further instruction. Yet, none of them had a panoramic vision on the unfolding events.

⁴ Robert GELLATELY, "The Third Reich, the Holocaust, and Visions of Serial Genocide", cit., pp. 246-249.

⁵ Christopher BROWNING, "The Decision Concerning the Final Solution", cit., pp. 117-118.

⁶ In his excellent book on the Romanian Holocaust Armin Heinen introduces no less than five categories of violence: dictatorial, fascist, military, collective, and bureaucratic. See Armin HEINEN, *Rumänien, der Holocaust und die Logik der Gewalt*, Südosteuropäische Arbeiten, R. Oldenbourg Verlag, München, 2007.

⁷ For an excellent and accurate account of the crimes perpetrated by the Romanians during the Holocaust see Radu IOANID, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu*, Editura Hasefer, București, 1998.

anxious to settle the Jewish Question in a matter of months, and not with the victorious conclusion of war against USSR, as it was initially envisioned and (most probably) discussed in Berlin¹. With Odessa, one of the greatest massacres in the entire Holocaust, Romanian mass killings turned genocidal², reaching a peak with Golta and Berezovka only to slow down thereafter. Moreover, the perspective changed dramatically once the Romanian government turned to the Jews of Regat, Transylvania and Banat.

Long before the war on USSR unfolded, the Jewish minority, an "enemy population" to the mind of right wing Romanian authoritarians and fascists, had to be watched, controlled, deprived of civil and political rights and propriety, and whenever possible forced into emigration or simply thrown over the borders of Romania. By 1940, overseas emigration as well as a territorial solution, the mass resettlement of Jews in a non European land, were not new, nor Nazi inspired solutions to those that gradually turned Romanian antisemitism into a component of the nation's morphology³.

From 1938 to 1940, with the collapse of the democratic system, Romania introduced several, progressively more severe anti-Semitic legislations⁴. The worst was yet to come with September 1940, and the advent in power of an authoritarian and nationalistic general, Ion Antonescu, backed by the Iron Guard⁵. Within months, the Romanian government came to the conclusion that, one way or another, the *Jewish Question* has to be solved⁶. The ideal "Romania for the Romanians" was reiterated, and so was "ethnic purification"⁷. The cleansing policy, which had to be progressive and methodical,⁸ not to exceed confiscation of Jewish rural proprieties, concentration in urban areas, emigration whenever possible⁹, gradually brought the Romanian state next to Nazi Germany and paved the way to the Holocaust, turning Romania by 1941 into a country of pogroms, mass killings, ghettos, and brutal deportations¹⁰.

With the attack on USSR Antonescu seized the opportunity to articulate a strong rationale for his policy behind the display of a vengeful, bellicose, and xenophobic ideology. The fact that he knew before, with March, about the Nazi plan to invade USSR, as well as, with June, of the Nazi intention to exterminate the political commissars and Soviet Jews in *Aktionen*, is to strength the argument. The Romanians were, most

¹ Robert GELLATELY, "The Third Reich, the Holocaust, and Visions of Serial Genocide", cit., p. 250.

² Michael MANN, *The Dark Side of Democracy...*cit., p. 305.

³ Tuvia FRILING, Radu IOANID, Mihail IONESCU (eds.), *Final Report. International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania*, Polirom, Iași, 2005, pp. 28, 102.

⁴ Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution...*cit. pp. 210-212. As Browning put it, "a proper anti-Semitic stance from Romania" was a way to improve the relation with Germany, deteriorated after the assassination of Codreanu. Romanian oil was not enough, nor the fact that Romania left the League of Nations. Nuremberg inspired legislation was introduced, increasing Romania's dependency on Germany and generating a wave of spiraling anti-Semitism of a new type.

⁵ Tuvia FRILING, Radu IOANID, Mihail IONESCU (eds.), *Final Report...*cit., pp. 50-54.

⁶ Lya BENJAMIN, *Legislația anti-evreiască*, Editura Hasefer, București, 1993, pp. 51-54.

⁷ ANIC, Fond PCM, dosar 327/1940, file 31-32.

⁸ ANIC, fond PCM, CM, dosar 1770/1940, vol. 2, file 783-784.

⁹ Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Documente. Comisia internațională pentru studierea Holocaustului în România*, Polirom, Iași, 2005, pp. 111-112.

¹⁰ Saul FRIELANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit, pp. 329-330. Also Raul HILBERG, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Quadrangle, Chicago, 1961, p. 692; Martin GILBERT, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, Pimlico, London, 2001, pp. 22-25, 36-38, 75-80.

probably, made aware on the future developments of the cleansing operations, and the method: sparking pogroms, with civilians taking part and killing in mobs, mass shouting on the spot of suspected elements, concentration of Jews in rural area to urban zones, finally evacuation to the East, to forced labor camps and/or the Polar wastes of Russia. The outline was clear, the goal also. Jews were to disappear. When, where, and how were details to be worked out in time by the underlings. The problem for the Romanians was the scarce time to prepare the operations and the absence of previous experience of how to conduct it systematically. The consequences were terrible, turning the brutal evacuations into an invitation to genocide¹.

For Antonescu, it was the "Bolshevik-Jew" who made his special attention and monomaniacal obsession. Documents indicate that, on several occasion, the dictator discussed the situation and activity of communists in Romania, "of which 90% are kikes", and proposed solutions as to put an end to the threat: expulsion for the Hungarians, Bulgarians, Russians, and concentration camps for the Jews². However, not only some Jewish Bolshevik agents were targeted but the entire Jewish population in Romania, as they were all working against the Romanian state. Furthermore, the Bessarabian Jews, crossing the border in organized groups were responsible for propaganda in favor of USSR and against Romania, thus inciting the Romanian Jews to turn against the authorities³. That was, according to him, to explain the "defiant" and pro-soviet attitude of Jews in Moldova in general, and Iași in particular, in spite of the "deep fear" of the very same population of potential armed retaliation for present deeds, past attitude, and participation in anti-Romanian actions.

Before the war started, Jews from Moldavian villages were deported to towns and camps in South Romania⁴. The police operation to remove the Jews away from the front line was designed to secure the area and instigate civilians and the military altogether⁵. Rampant anti-Semitism, part of the final preparations for the invasion of USSR was to facilitate ethnic cleansing by means of deportation and mass killing. The entire "Judeo-Bolshevik population" was to be evacuated, and all Jewish males were considered suspects, and thus subjected to summary investigations and execution by shooting⁶. The Iași pogrom was the last test and first operation of the cleansing campaign, with the initiative and coordination for the mass slaughter going to the Romanians. The toll of death exceeded 10 000 victims, with the "shame of 1940 washed in the blood of the Jewish plague"⁷. On July 4 1941 Ion Antonescu disapproved the

¹ Jean ANCEL, "Archival Sources concerning the Holocaust in Romania", in Mihail IONESCU, Liviu ROTMAN (eds.), *The Holocaust and Romania. History and Contemporary Significance*, Editura Semne, București, 2003, pp. 62-63.

² Marcel-Dumitru CIUCĂ, Aurelian TEODORESCU, Bogdan Florin POPOVICI (eds.), *Stenogramele consiliului de miniștri în perioada guvernării Antonescu*, vol. I, Arhivele Naționale ale României, București, 1997, pp. 366, 601, 628, 687.

³ Arh. MapN, dosar 155, fila 162-172.

⁴ Tuvia FRILING, Radu IOANID, Mihail IONESCU (eds.), *Final Report...cit.*, p. 118.

⁵ Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Documente. Comisia internațională...cit.*, pp. 186-188. The deportation was for the government a pre-emptive strike meant to remove a "hostile population" away from the front line. Any attempt from the Jews to disobey the orders was to be punished by shooting. The police had the task to identify all potential instigators and soviet agents among Jewish males from 16 to 60 years old, and send them to camps.

⁶ Jean ANCEL (ed.), *Documents Concerning the Fate of Romanian Jewry during the Holocaust*, vol I, New York-Jerusalem, 1985-1986, vol. II, doc. 1, p. 1.

⁷ Lya BENJAMIN, *Legislația anti-evreiască*, cit., doc. 42, p. 155.

methods, the violence, the massacres and lootings, by civilians and soldiers, but not the ends. From that moment all initiatives to cleanse Romania of Jews were to rest with the government¹. Deportation, ghettoization, extermination were officially turned into state organized and sponsored policy². Days later, on July 8, Mihai Antonescu did the same, informing his ministers that ethnic cleansing became a state matter and governmental venture:

“You must be merciless [...] I do not know when, after how many centuries, the Romanian nation will again enjoy this total freedom of action, with the possibility for ethnic purification and national revision. This is the hour when we are masters on our territory. Let it be used! [...] If needed be, shoot with machine guns, and I say that there is no law”.

In one sentence both the impunity of law and thought were lifted, with the official further suggesting that initiatives and zeal from the underlings are welcomed³. From that moment the balance of power shifted from center to the periphery.

The Romanian troops entering in Bessarabia and Bukovina and acting as an Iron Broom, cleansing villages and towns by massacres, caused 25 000 deaths in less than one month. In some cases the entire Jewish population of one village was killed on the spot, in other cases only the leaders of the community. Taking advantage of the cover provided by war, the government, the army and police high command made no attempt to put an end to the killings. Violence against the Jewish enemy population was righteous and meant to further strength the combat spirit of an army fighting not against civilians but soviet agents and partisans. The strategy was simple and efficient: first offer satisfaction to the mob and vengeful army, allowing them to kill and loot, second deport the survivors to the Dniester banks, crossing them into Ukraine, with the Germans to evacuate them further East.

Blaming the Jews not only for the events of 1940 but for all the evils of the soviet occupation⁴, the authorities kept the machine oiled and ready for brutal and swift, spontaneous and apparently disorganized massacres and deportations, the result of an odd mixture of destructive spirit and opportunism⁵. The Jewish population was aware of the Romanian “revenge” and “convenience” to kill and expel, thus running by the thousands to USSR, only to be captured latter on, murdered on the site, in Odessa, or deported to death in Berezovka, by the Romanians and the Germans. The case of Odessa is illustrative for the combination of anger with ethnic cleansing. Conquered by the Romanian army after a long and grim siege ended with more than 70 000 loses, with heavy reprisals before and after the bomb attack on the Romanian headquarters, ending in terrible massacres – 19 000 Jews killed in Odessa, and 40 000 more in Dalnic, outside the city, Odessa was latter to be totally cleansed, with the survivors targeted for evacuation and extermination⁶. By that time the war against the Jews was no longer a matter of strategy. With Antonescu coming closer and closer to Hitler’s vision: “At the end of this struggle we will cleanse the world of them, or

¹ Michael BURLEICH, *The Third Reich...cit.*, pp. 620-621.

² Jean ANCEL (ed.), *Documents...cit.*, vol. X, doc. 23, pp. 79-80.

³ Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Documente. Comisia internațională...cit.*, pp. 204-208.

⁴ Andreas HILLGRUBER, *Hitler, Regele Carol...cit.*, p. 280.

⁵ Raul HILBERG, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, cit., pp. 668-669.

⁶ Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Documente. Comisia internațională...cit.*, p. 282.

become the slaves of the Jewish Beast", the fate of the Moldavian, Bukovinian and Bessarabian Jews was sealed forever. They were to be all deported into Transnistria¹.

Moving to war, the much too optimistic and opportunistic Romanian government also moved to ethnic cleansing, killing and pushing tens of thousand of Jews to the Dniester², against a wall made of German army and police units, and with Antonescu protesting that the German administration in Ukraine is sending them back, thus working against the principles announced by the Führer in early meetings³. At first glance the Romanian cleansing pattern looks incoherent with its criminal orders from above, violent impulses from below, and the climate of unmitigated violence generated by the attack on USSR, which released most of the destructive energies. Yet, it is not that different from the situation on the German front, where it was often for the *Wermacht* to give the first blows, not the SS, nor the order police⁴. Moreover, the entire operation was meant not simply to solve the Jewish question, but part of a more general plan of ethnic resettlement, Romanianization, and homogenization⁵. The rest has to do with convenience, fear, revenge, dispossession, and is part of a more general story of political use of violence that often ends in purification and destruction of entire groups.

With late June, before the invasion the Romanians elaborated a plan similar to the Nazi one, based on the concept of cleansing the ground of communists, saboteurs, and Slavic elements (Ukrainian intelligentsia) by police methods⁶. Jews were also to be identified and removed, first communist agents and sympathizers. The Ministry of propaganda did its best to instigate for revenge and pogroms. The SSI was to act on identical grounds with *Einsatzgruppen D* – collect information, identify the dangerous elements, instigate, recruit and arm civilians, prepare the ground for the police and armed forces, who were latter to secure and pacify the respective areas⁷. The German task force, the last created and the smallest was to move along with the German 11 Army, operating on a different sector, and in advance. Only two officers were appointed as liaison to the Romanian Special Echelon⁸. Bessarabia and Bukovina were to be systematically cleansed by incited pogroms, police mass shooting, deportations and ghettoization⁹.

What no one predicted in Bucharest, yet constantly instigated, was the uncontrolled escalation of killings in the field¹⁰. Practical rationalization was rapidly downplayed by ideological bias, and looting. To the unchecked ordinary men systematic annihilation

¹ Jean ANCEL (ed.), *Documents...cit.*, vol. II, pp. 57-58.

² Vladimir SOLONARI, *Purifying the Nation...cit.*, pp. 190-191.

³ Jean ANCEL, "Archival Sources concerning the Holocaust in Romania", cit., p. 72. No document points to what has been discussed at this meeting.

⁴ Jurgen MATTHAUS, "Operation Barbarossa and the Onset of the Holocaust", in Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution...cit.*, pp. 258-259.

⁵ See Viorel ACHIM, Constantin IORDACHI, *România și Transnistria: Problema Holocaustului*, Curtea Veche, București, 2004, p. 55. Sabin Manuilă elaborated and presented to Antonescu in October 1941 a plan for ethnic purification by means of deportation and exchange of populations.

⁶ Tuvia FRILING, Radu IOANID, Mihail IONESCU (eds.), *Final Report...cit.*, p. 63.

⁷ Jean ANCEL, *Preludiu la asasinat. Pogromul de la Iași, 29 iunie 1941*, Polirom, Iași, 2005, pp. 27-28.

⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 21-26, 147.

⁹ Tuvia FRILING, Radu IOANID, Mihail IONESCU (eds.), *Final Report...cit.*, pp. 127-129.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

was not logistically difficult, morally questionable, and politically dangerous. Moving too far, too quickly, eroding discipline and taboos to the last, Romanian units were part of the mass murder in a "tacit division of labor" with the Nazis¹. Pogroms were incited in rural areas, backed by the idea of collective defense, ethnic and political cleansing, bitter antisemitism, revenge, and plunder. Some army commanders took the initiative in the absence of specific orders from above, and moved to mass-murder once they realized that no specific preparations are needed in advance, with the killing squads being often ad-hoc selected and assembled. Local collaborators were also recruited². Unlike the army, the gendarmes had a more precise mission, and benefited from a better logistic of mass murder. Often, the units were made up of men that served in the two provinces before 1940, were more disciplined killers, and knew better who the local antisemites were³. Yet, even in their case, the pattern was not uniform, depending a lot on initiative, interpretation of imprecise orders, and the level of enthusiasm. The presence, in several instances, of *Einsatzgruppen D* members also mattered, turning the killings more systematic and focused, and setting an example of increasingly harsher treatment of Jews that exceeded the initial logic of the commissar order, and moved towards a racial approach⁴.

The outraged *Einsatzgruppen D* officers complained about the Romanians' *modus operandi*, yet this has to do with a more general and stereotypical perception (of Himmler, Heydrich, and many others) on the people in the East, less civilized and thus to be contained, as they have the tendency to spiral into mass murder and consequently generate social chaos⁵. What was indeed chaotic, was the expulsion of the Jews beyond the Dniester in July-August, before negotiating it with the German military administration who, at that time, was still securing the territory and consolidating the German positions in preparations for a new offensive, and making room by shooting thousand of Jews before starting new deportations⁶. The new offensive and wave of deportations was planned with mid October, when Jews from Germany, Austria, and other European territories were deported to ghettos in Lodz, Riga, Minsk, for hard labor, including the construction of planed extermination camps in Belzec, Sobibor, and Moghilev⁷. Not taking more Jews, others Jews, was in the eyes of the already overworked German military administration a matter of resources and priorities⁸.

¹ Jurgen MATTHAUS, "Operation Barbarossa... cit.", pp. 267-276.

² Vladimir SOLONARI, *Purifying the Nation...*cit, pp. 170-173, 193.

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 173-174.

⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 175-190.

⁵ Wendy LOWER, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine*, cit., p. 92. The initial role of the task forces was to incite but also control, to turn killings expedient and into an orderly efficient operation. Reality in the field looks different. The killers often exceeded their mandate, beating, raping, looting, torturing, humiliating. See also Tuvia FRILING, Radu IOANID, Mihail IONESCU (eds.), *Final Report...*cit., p. 132; Martin GILBERT, *Holocaust. A History of the Jews of Europe during the Second World War*, cit., p. 178.

⁶ Tuvia FRILING, Radu IOANID, Mihail IONESCU (eds.), *Final Report...*cit., p. 64. See also Dennis DELETANT, *Aliatul uitat al lui Hitler. Ion Antonescu și regimul său, 1940-1944*, Rom. transl. Delia Răzdolescu, Humanitas, București, 2008, p. 156.

⁷ Christopher BROWNING, "The Decision-Making Process", cit., pp. 188-190.

⁸ Tuvia FRILING, Radu IOANID, Mihail IONESCU (eds.), *Final Report...*cit., pp. 160 and the following.

The green light for the Romanian massive deportation came with October, as planned; the second wave of deportation was better organized as to make looting more profitable for the state, but no less brutal, with Antonescu admitting it latter when saying to his cabinet "only I know how many of them died on route"¹. By that time, with late August, the Romanians also had at hand a territory where to take their Jews, Transnistria. Meanwhile, Antonescu, worried by the initial massacres that exceeded in number and brutality the original plan, accepted the creation of temporary ghettos and transit camps in Bessarabia. What he continued to refuse to understand was the fact that for the Germans Transnistria was but Romania's dumping ground². Consequently, he accepted to turn the region into a huge concentration camp, yet only in preparation for further expulsion to the East. As he put it at the time, the Jewish question is to be solved soon, with the remaining 40 000 Bessarabian and Bukovinian Jews to be tossed over the Dniester, and when possible beyond the Urals³.

By late 1941, the Romanian ethnic cleansing operations in Bessarabia and North Bukovina, a combination of random and selective mass killing and wild deportations to Transnistria, a region where the Romanian government accepted to temporarily collect their Jews as to latter push them into Russia, where it was for the Germans to evacuate them further East, beyond the Urals, were rapidly coming to an end⁴. The Romanians, speeding the deportations from the very beginning of the campaign, forcing the Dniester and than the Bug, did not realized that the Germans were not just unable and unprepared to cope with their expediency, but also shifted to a more radical solution. Operating unsystematically, disregarding protests and persuasions from their allies to slow down the actions⁵, the Romanian government aimed to cleanse its eastern territories in an overnight process. Room had to be made, the "Bolshevik" Jews expelled, as other undesirables were staying in line, the Jews of South Transylvania, Banat, and Regat, the Roma, some religious minorities, and so on. No preparations have been made in advance, as the Romanians had no previous experience with ghettos and transit camps, furthermore rejected the idea of turning any piece of Romanian territory into a dumping ground, or reservation⁶. Unaware and uninformed that with July 16 Hitler, Himmler, Rosenberg and other top Nazi leaders turned Russia into a fated land of German expansion and colonization, a Garden of Eden were no further expulsion of Jews was permitted, except for the German Jews, and were the existing Jewish population was to be exterminated⁷, the Romanians could not grasp the logic of the Germans who pushed back the Jews deported to Moghilev in July, and shot 12 000 out of 25 000. Latter on, having Transnistria, a poisonous gift

¹ Jean ANCEL, "Archival Sources concerning the Holocaust in Romania", cit., p. 84.

² Dennis DELETANT, *Aliatul uitat al lui Hitler...*cit., pp. 166 and following. The way the first deportation campaign was conducted made the Hungarians and even German consul in Czernowitz to emphasize once more the lack of civilization of the Romanian government, News reached the American embassy, generating protests and forcing the two Antonescu to pardon for the excessive brutality of the police operation. See also Jean ANCEL, "Archival Sources concerning the Holocaust in Romania", cit., p. 78.

³ Jean ANCEL, "Archival Sources concerning the Holocaust in Romania", cit., pp. 74-77.

⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 93-98.

⁵ Michael MANN, *The Dark Side of Democracy...*cit., pp. 304-305, Jean ANCEL (ed.), *Documents Concerning the Fate of Romanian Jewry...*cit., doc. 148, p. 293.

⁶ Jean ANCEL, "Archival Sources concerning the Holocaust in Romania", cit, p. 98.

⁷ Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution...*cit. p. 109.

from Hitler for Romania's participation in the war, a share of the huge Ukrainian bread basket that was to satisfy political ambitions, but also a land where Romanians could deport the "undesirables", work them to death, and finally murder them, the government in Bucharest was still hoping to expel the Jews to Russia. In August 1941 Mihai Antonescu informed the Romanian cabinet on his previous discussions with several Nazi officials concerning the implementation of an "international solution" to the Jewish Question, meaning evacuation to the East. Up to December 1941 Ion Antonescu continued to believe that the issue is discussed in Berlin: "The Germans want to bring the Yids from Europe to Russia and settle them in certain areas, but there is still time before this plan is carried out"¹.

This was no Romanian dreadful imagination at work, only "wishful thinking" based on former Nazi plans from 1939-1940 aiming for a territorial solution. Most probably, the Romanians knew about it since June 1940, when the Ion Gigurtu cabinet expressed his intention to collaborate with the Germans and solve the Jewish Question by means of evacuation and relocation to the East, where a reservation for the European Jews was to be created². However, by mid 1941, the plan was already outdated as a new vision emerged from within the leadership of the Third Reich, somewhat bringing the Romanian policy of ethnic cleansing to a deadlock³.

Hitler's gift for Antonescu and Romania, an extra reward for joining Germany at war, fulfilling dreams and political ambitions, Transnistria was accepted for good reasons: territorial expansion, colonization, strengthening Romanianness in the East⁴. What the Romanians did not realize when signing the Tighina accord was that, except for Hitler, the rest of the Nazi leaders were rather unhappy, and imposed some limits, giving the Romanians the right to temporarily hold it and turn the region into a confined space for looting, exploiting forced labor, dropping and smoothly executing Jews, Roma, and others⁵. Unfortunately, the much too blind, depth, and stubborn Romanians refused to understand what the Germans were doing in the vicinity of Transnistria with September 1941, rounding up 5000 Jews in Nikolaev for resettlement, only to liquidate them and thus make room for German colonists. The fact is that they accepted it, soon doing the same in Odessa, crushing bolshevism and liquidating Jews, and latter in other counties of Transnistria, in Golta and in Berezovka, Vapniarka and Peciora⁶. In some cases, the killings were performed by the Germans, but the structural circumstances facilitating and requesting a radical solution on the

¹ Tuvia FRILING, Radu IOANID, Mihail IONESCU (eds.), *Final Report...cit.*, pp. 64-67.

² Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Evreii din România între ani 1940-1944. vol II., Problema evreiască în stenogramele Consiliului de miniștri*, Hasefer, București, 1996, p. 365. See also ASB, Fond PCM, Cabinet, dosar 478/1941 file 110,112, 120, 153, 158, 239.

³ Andreas HILLGRUBER, *Hitler, Regele Carol...cit.*, pp. 280-281.

⁴ Solonari claims that Antonescu forced the arrangement, in order to turn Transnistria into a land where to continue the deportations, as a temporary reservation from where to push the deportees further east pending the end of war. See Vladimir SOLONARI, *Purifying the Nation...cit.*, pp. 204-205.

⁵ Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution...cit.*, p. 296.

⁶ For the long and episodic process of killing the Jews of Odessa, out of anger and frustration, latter in retaliation, finally in death marches and shooting operation in Golta and Berezovka, and the dynamic of the Romanian and German collaboration see Dora LITANI, "The Destruction of the Jews of Odessa in the light of Rumanian Documents", in Michael R. MARRUS (ed.), *The Nazi Holocaust*, vol. 2, Meckler, London, 1989, pp. 484-503.

spot were the deliberate product of Romanian government and agencies¹. Pushing the Jews West to East, to the Dniester and than the Bug, the Romanians were constantly generating problems: storage, famine, diseases². Evacuation to the frontier in the absence of minimal preparations had a snow-ball effect. With the exits closed by the German administration, the Romanians were forced to create temporary camps to dump the unwanted³. Soon they had to accept mass killing to eliminate threats and make room, for the sake of keeping the time table of cleansing⁴. The jammed traffic had to be fluidized before moving to the Jews of Regat and Transylvania, Roma and others⁵. What the Germans disliked was the fact that the Romanians were not operating systematically and constantly. Outperforming them in the early days, weeks and months, killing Jews by the thousands in repetitive outburst of violence like in Odessa and Dalnic⁶, they were latter on resuming to deport them to camps on the banks of river Bug, forcing the German civil administration to solve the problem with the help of Ukrainian auxiliary police units (*Schutzmannschaften*) and SS German militia⁷. Not so much the nature of the job displeased them, but the extra burden of the task⁸. Reading the reports and testimonies, one can easily realize that the problem was not with the ordinary men (Germans, Ukrainians, Romanians) but with the confused administration, though the Tighina accord was clear about jurisdictions, prerogatives, mandates, terms of cooperation⁹.

With December 1941, to May 1942 Transnistria was not just a dumping ground but also a kingdom of death, and a bureaucratic nightmare to last¹⁰. The disaster was generated by the Romanians. Antonescu new about the situation and the inevitable solution, and concluded: "Let those die in there [...] I cannot do anything for them anymore". Death was not ordered directly but suggested, as in other instances, with the central and local administration of Transnistria accepting it. Mass murder became once more the price to be paid for the purification to succeed¹¹. The Jews in Moghilev (55 000) and other camps west of the Smerinka-Odessa railway were still alive, with the SD considering their presence only 35 km away from Vinitza an unacceptable

¹ Tuvia FRILING, Radu IOANID, Mihail IONESCU (eds.), *Final Report...cit.*, pp. 141 and the following.

² *Ibidem*, pp. 133-134. Also Jean ANCEL, "Archival Sources concerning the Holocaust in Romania", cit, pp. 83-85.

³ Vladimir SOLONARI, *Purifying the Nation...cit.*, pp. 200-204. The rate of death in the overcrowded ghettos and camps, lacking shelter, medicine and food supplies, exceeded 5-10 inmates per day.

⁴ Dennis DELETANT, *Aliatul uitat al lui Hitler...cit.*, pp. 192-197.

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 202-210.

⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 185-186.

⁷ Dora LITANI, "The Destruction of the Jews of Odessa...cit.". Also Tuvia FRILING, Radu IOANID, Mihail IONESCU (eds.), *Final Report...cit.*, pp. 156-159.

⁸ Heinz HÖHNE, *The Order of the Death's Head...cit.*, p. 296. Zealous missionaries, the settlers were part of the ruthless police actions, proving more brutal and often more eager to kill than the professional killers. In Poland first, and than in Soviet territories they left their mark of revenge, looting, lack of discipline, and arbitrariness on the cleansing campaigns.

⁹ Andreas HILLGRUBER, *Hitler, Regele Carol...cit.*, pp. 280-281.

¹⁰ Jean ANCEL, "Archival Sources concerning the Holocaust in Romania", cit., pp. 86 and the following. Also Dennis DELETANT, *Aliatul uitat al lui Hitler...cit.*, p. 185.

¹¹ Jean ANCEL, "Archival Sources concerning the Holocaust in Romania", cit., pp. 85-93, doc. 37-38.

"security" threat¹. No matter the massacres of 1941 and the killings in Odessa, Golta, and Berezovka, the Romanians were once more turned by the Nazis into not suitably efficient perpetrators in carrying out the final solution, thus to be continuously pressured to follow the (new) German approach. Why were the Germans complaining might seems unclear. The Romanian civil administration worked with them and hardly opposed the SS hunting operation in Transnistria, sometimes even providing the Todt with workers. It rather looks like Himmler and his Vo Mi being displeased with having a dumping ground in the vicinity. The successful operation of colonizing ethnic Germans (90 000 *Volkdeutsche*) near the Bug, strengthening Germanism while killing Jews with the *Selbstschutz* (self defense police squads made of ethnic Germans) as to secure the area, gave them impetus and made them wonder why not expanding Himmler's kingdom². Taking Transnistria back from the Romanians, at least east to the Smerinka-Odessa railway, was one good solution. The argument was, as before, that Romanians are unable to organize and reconstruct the area, as they were unable even to meet the German standards when it comes to the anti-Jewish measures in the name of progress. Moreover, sending more Romanian Jews and Roma to Transnistria, with the Germans to dispose them, would have hindered the reconstruction of Ukraine. Transnistria under the Romanian administration, with its improvised policies, turned into an everlasting disaster, made them wonder if a reconsideration of the Tighina accord is not necessary and helpful³. At the same time Berlin made another offer to Bucharest. The new solution was to put the Romanians' priorities in order, and secure the interest of the German civil administration and colonies that were by now reconstructing Ukraine.

To avoid the perpetuation of the disaster, soon after the extermination of the Jews in Berezovka and the overcrowded camps of Golta was over, realizing that the Romanians were anxious to turn to the Jews of the Old Kingdom, Banat, and Southern Transylvania, deporting them to a still overcrowded Transnistria as to "make room for Romanian refugees"⁴, the Berlin decision makers figured out that it would be easy to convince the two Antonescu to accept a new plan: the deportation of Romanian Jews to the Lublin area. By the end of July 1942 the two parts reached an agreement to start the deportation with September 10. The rest was but a matter of technicalities and formalities to be latter on settled by bureaucrats⁵. Once the decision has been taken, there were no reasons for the German part to doubt that the Romanians would change their mind. Yet, unexpectedly, on October 13, 1942, the Romanian government decided to halt deportations⁶.

The Romanian government hardly accepted to turn Transnistria into a dumping ground for ethnic undesirables, mainly Jews but also Roma⁷. Trapped into the Shoah by bullets, the Romanian administration also had to turn it into a kingdom of death. The intention was to push the Jews across the Bug, and abandon them at the hands of the Germans. The result was different. Deportation to the camps of Transnistria was

¹ Wendy LOWER, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine*, cit., p. 153.

² *Ibidem*, p. 172-173.

³ Raul HILBERG, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, cit., pp. 683-685.

⁴ Tuvia FRILING, Radu IOANID, Mihail IONESCU (eds.), *Final Report...cit.*, p. 168.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 169.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 170.

⁷ Michael BURLEICH, *The Third Reich...cit.*, p. 657. For the Roma population see Vladimir SOLONARI, *Purifying the Nation...cit.*, pp. 264-285.

turned into a death sentence. Tens of thousands died here of typhus and starvation, in mass killings, whether preemptive strikes or simply outbursts of therapeutical violence, executed by the Romanians alone, together with the German police and the Ukrainians, or at the hand of the SS and the *Todt*. Some of the episodes were as horrible and cruel as to leave the fortuitous eye witness with the impression that he lives again scenes from the legionar rebellion, with the slaughter performed this time under the patronage of the state and army¹.

What the Romanians did not understand was the lack of logic of Berlin, insisting on deportation of Romanian Jews to Poland, at the same time rejecting any evacuation of Jews in Transnistria over the Bug². Mihai Antonescu raised this issue during his meeting with Hitler, Rosenberg, and Ribbentrop in Vinitza in October 1942. By November 1942 he informed Richter that he is personally against any act of barbarity, criticizing the abuses and crimes of the past, denying the responsibility of the government, deflecting it toward the lower echelons of Romanian executionaries in Transnistria and the local German Police³. No less anti-Semitic when it came to economic reforms and emigration, and only 16 months after the terrible massacres in Bessarabia and Bukovina, the man advocating ethnic cleansing by mass killing and expulsion, turned his logic up side down, introducing to an exasperated German expert and adviser no less than seven major reasons for the Romanian government to halt deportations and depart the German plan⁴.

Paradoxical as it might seem, the very existence of Transnistria as an alternative space where the Romanians could deport their Jews, as well as other categories of "undesirables" also endangered the Nazi plans. From mid 1941 up to late 1942, Romanians did not give up the idea to evacuate Jews under their control to this region. Nothing was organized in advance, as from there the deportees were to be later pushed over the Bug, into Russia⁵. German local and central authorities panicked, protested, and opposed the Romanians, from the highest to the lowest level of command, by means of diplomatic pressures and negotiations down to killing and plundering expeditions by the local German Police in Transnistria, which was under Romanian administration yet, with the Romanians not knowing how to react, and with thousands of Jews massacred in the winter and spring of 1942⁶. In many respects Transnistria was but the outcome of a deadlock of Romanian policy to ethnically cleanse Romania, a deadlock generated by the lack of communication between the Germans and the Romanians, and therefore a clash of two visions. Latter on, and when convenient, as to prove their independence when refusing to deport their Jews to Poland, the Romanians could turn to their Racial dumping ground. With time passing, and Romania deserting the Nazi Final Solution, Transnistria also served to deceive the Germans.

The horrendous mass killings of 1941 that together with Transnistria make the core of the Romanian Holocaust represented for the Antonescu regime components of an instrumental ethnic cleansing policy. It is rather difficult to claim that the

¹ Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Documente. Comisia internațională...cit.*, p. 301.

² Raul HILBERG, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, cit., p. 696.

³ Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit., pp. 450-451. See also Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Perioada unei mari restriști*, partea a II-a, pp. 273-274, doc. 556.

⁴ Radu IOANID, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu...cit.*, pp. 336-337.

⁵ Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Perioada unei mari restriști*, partea a II-a, cit., pp. 202-203, doc. 490.

⁶ AMAE, Problema 33, vol. 15, fila 58, also AN, Fond PCM, dosar 104/1942, fila 306.

Romanians intended to exterminate the entire Jewish population of Romania. Moreover, with the passage of time, a physical solution to the Jewish question turned impractical, not only geopolitically, but also financially, as it was permanent. Vested interest made the Romanians reconsider their policy, thus going from emotional to more rational perpetrators. For most of the Romanian decision-makers the Jews were unwanted, an active enemy at most, but not a metahistorical one¹. True, Ion Antonescu's permanent frustration with conventional military and political strategy might have had sparked further deportations and killings at any time, especially in 1944. Yet, in spite of the many deadlocks, the other decision-makers no longer endorsed his visions. Some shred of compassion with the victims is not to be totally ignored, as total extermination might have represented a psychological barrier they could not cross, as many others. Like the Slovaks, the Romanians might have seen the deportation as a huge operation that would "shove off (the Jews) to the East never to be seen again"², rejecting extermination when they had to take the substantial risk of alienating western allies and incite further intervention, both domestic and international. Thus, instead of escalating and radicalizing the anti-Jewish measures, like in Germany³, the circumstances and stakes of late 1942 to mid 1944 mild the Romanian ones.

When it comes to Transnistria, the only conclusion I can reach is that the combination of dictatorial, military, and bureaucratic violence turned the Romanian anti-Jewish policy, at least by results if not by intention, into genocide⁴. Transnistria was the outcome of an intersection of parallel wars of annihilation of Nazi Germany and Antonescu's Romania. Romanians knew of, and were inspired by the combined policies of colonization and expulsion put into practice by the Italian fascists and the Nazis. However, the Nazi practice was but a confirmation and gave an impulse, lifted barriers, and provided the Romanians with the know-how. The idea of ethnic cleansing as a precondition to achieve a historical fantasia, to reconstitute the Romanian ethnic bloc in its historical and millennial space, was Romanian⁵.

Members of the Jewish and the Roma groups were killed, and the survivors were bodily and mentally harmed. The life conditions in the camps were as genocidal as bullets if we consider the subsistence diet, the lack of medical assistance, and the insufficient living conditions. Transnistria was no reservation, not to say a protected one. In the absence of any exits, denied by both Romanians and Germans, it was a dumping ground operating on the logic of encirclement and annihilation. To us, it is part of "the murder of the Soviet Jews (that) marks a watershed in history, a quantum leap toward the Holocaust"⁶, and thus, inescapable history.

¹ Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit., pp. xvii-xx.

² Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution...* cit. p. 379, also Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit., pp. 450, 452, 537.

³ IDEM, *The Origins of the Final Solution...* cit. pp. 426-427.

⁴ See Armin HEINEN, *Rumänien, der Holocaust und die Logik der Gewalt*, cit.

⁵ Vladimir SOLONARI, *Purifying the Nation...* cit, pp. 325-333.

⁶ Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution...* cit., p. 245.