

# INTERWAR EAST CENTRAL EUROPE, 1918–1941

The Failure of Democracy-building,  
the Fate of Minorities

*Edited by Sabrina P. Ramet*

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# 5

## INTERWAR ROMANIA

### Enshrining ethnic privilege

*Roland Clark*

Writing in 1925, the ultranationalist poet Nichifor Crainic said that on 6 August 1917 at Mărășești “our soldiers, with improvised equipment, threw themselves into battle. They held their weapons like a shepherd holds his crook and, defenseless peasants that they were, charged the murderous machine of civilization.” “That glorious moment,” he wrote, “was the beginning of Romanian democracy.”<sup>1, 2</sup> In reality, by 1917, Romanian soldiers were neither ignorant nor defenseless. Nor did this victory mean that their opinions suddenly mattered politically. But myths surrounding peasants and the Battle of Mărășești did underscore social, political, and economic discourses for the next 20 years. Romania had waited until August 1916 to enter World War One, cultivating diplomatic relationships with both the Triple Alliance (Romania’s traditional allies against Russia) and the Triple Entente (which promised significant territorial gains). The need for secrecy while negotiations continued meant that it was not able to build up its army and so its troops entered the war untrained and without adequate equipment. Support promised by the Entente against the Bulgarian, Austro-Hungarian, and German armies failed to materialize, and German troops occupied Bucharest by December.<sup>3</sup> British officials did their best to destroy Romania’s oil and grain reserves, but Norman Stone estimates that once these fell into German hands it “made possible the Germans’ continuation of the war into 1918.”<sup>4</sup> So disgusted were the other Entente powers with Romania’s rapid defeat that they did not invite the prime minister, Ion I. C. Brătianu, to a strategy meeting in Rome in January 1917 and then ignored him when he invited himself to a follow-up meeting in Petrograd later that month.<sup>5</sup>

Transylvania’s Hungarians and Saxons welcomed the German reconquest of Transylvania, but anti-German sentiment was widespread among ethnic Romanians in early 1917.<sup>6</sup> Romanian officials discovered containers of anthrax

and glanders at the German legation the day they declared war, sparking fears that Germany intended to launch biological attacks. The bombing of Bucharest, the large numbers of refugees, and the requisitions imposed by the occupying forces on a population already living at the level of subsistence further exacerbated hostility toward the Germans.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, most Romanian soldiers were conscripts and fought with the knowledge that the state had taken few measures to look after their families and property while they were at war.<sup>8</sup> To make matters worse, first cholera and then typhus decimated the Romanian armies that winter, the latter reaching epidemic proportions. By April 1917 the government was so terrified of mutinies that it promised land redistribution and universal male suffrage as soon as the war was over.<sup>9</sup>

With French help, Romania reconstructed its armies between January and July 1917. By late summer they were properly trained, well-armed, and eager for battle. After almost 11 months on the defensive, on 22 July 1917 Romanian and Russian troops began bombarding the German Ninth Army along a 22-mile front at Mărăști, in eastern Romania, forcing the Germans to launch a counteroffensive without adequate preparation. The subsequent battle near the village of Mărășești left 27,410 Romanians, 25,650 Russians, and 17,000 Germans dead, wounded, captured, or missing.<sup>10</sup> Despite the heavy losses, the German offensive had failed and Romanian soldiers discovered that with the proper equipment they were more than a match for their German and Austro-Hungarian counterparts. The famous “virgin of Jiu,” a decorated war heroine by the name of Ecaterina Teodoroiu, met her death leading an attack at Mărășești, and soldiers of the 32nd Regiment won renown for throwing off their equipment and fighting with only the shirts on their backs.<sup>11</sup> The poet Octavian Goga wrote

The soldier who triumphed at Mărășești showed the world what these people from the Danube are capable of. The legends about the superior courage of those from Berlin evaporated before the villagers from Târgoviște who charged in their shirts ... surrounding themselves with an aura of classical bravery that seems as if it came straight out of the most glorious pages of the Greco-Roman annals.<sup>12</sup>

Snubbed at the peace conferences despite the transient victories of 1917, Brătianu's government nonetheless had the opportunity to realize its territorial ambitions by force of arms. The “Old Kingdom” had been formed through the union of the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia in 1859, adding Northern Dobrudja in 1878 and Southern Dobrudja in 1913. After World War One, Romania gained Transylvania, the Banat, Crișana, Bukovina, and Bessarabia. The autonomous Moldavian Republic proclaimed in January 1918 called on Romanian military support, as did the Romanian National Council in Czernowitz when it sought independence for Bukovina from the Austro-Hungarian Empire in October.<sup>13</sup> In April 1919, Béla Kun's

attack on Romanian troops in the Apuseni Mountains provided an excuse for Romania to advance farther into Hungary, overthrowing Kun and annexing Transylvania. Two-thirds of the Banat passed into Romanian hands following a peaceful settlement in July 1920.<sup>14</sup> Suddenly in control of large numbers of Jews, Hungarians, Saxons, Swabians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Serbs, and other minority groups, Romanian elites struggled to establish ethnic Romanian dominance over more than twice the number of inhabitants while also restraining widespread rural dissatisfaction.<sup>15</sup>

### Universal male suffrage

Even though the war helped people to identify with the nation, it did not generate meaningful bonds between citizens and the state. People often simply ignored official attempts to commemorate the war dead, preferring local memorials and private rituals to state-sanctioned holidays and cemeteries.<sup>16</sup> King Ferdinand had promised the Romanian soldier in December 1916 that “fighting for national unity, he is also fighting for his own political and economic freedom (*pentru dezrobirea lui politică și economică*).”<sup>17</sup> But the state that emerged from the war was neither united nor particularly democratic.

Romanians had enjoyed limited male suffrage since 1864, but politics relied heavily on patronage networks and royal support. The king appointed a government to organize elections; that government appointed its own prefects and local officials who then ensured that it was elected, using bribery and force whenever necessary. Only twice during the interwar period (1919 and 1937) did a party with a “governmental dowry” fail to win an election.<sup>18</sup> In 1917, the Liberal Party extended the vote to all adult male citizens in order to

**TABLE 5.1** Romanian population by ethnicity in 1930

<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Romanian	2,138,917	58.1
Jewish	496,375	13.6
Hungarian	406,955	11.1
German	192,879	5.3
Russian	125,190	3.4
Ruthenian/Ukrainian	55,289	1.5
Bulgarian	45,293	1.2
Roma	40,775	1.1
Other (less than 1%)	149,386	4.1
Total	3,651,059	100

Source: Sabin Manuilă, *Recensământul general al populației României din 29 decembrie 1930*, Vol. 2 (Bucharest: Institutul Central de Statistică, 1930), pp. xliv–xlv.

garner support for its plans to break up the old landed estates. The 1923 constitution enshrined universal male suffrage, adding that only men over the age of 40 could vote for the Senate.<sup>19</sup> It nonetheless took time to standardize the system, with majoritarian representation being retained in Transylvania and Bukovina until 1926 while the rest of the country used proportional representation.<sup>20</sup> The appearance of entirely new constituencies had a significant impact on electoral politics: 83% of deputies elected in November 1919 were in parliament for the first time.<sup>21</sup> Romanian democracy survived until February 1938, when King Carol II disbanded parliament and declared a royal dictatorship.

During the interwar period, as they had prior to 1918, feminists consistently supported nation-building projects and formed charitable organizations as a way of contributing to a society that excluded them from formal political power. After 1929, highly educated women, female state employees, war widows, decorated war heroes, and female leaders of civic organizations could vote in local elections, but most women had to wait until 1939 before receiving the right to vote. Married women did not even receive civil rights until 1932.<sup>22</sup> Female suffrage followed a decades-long feminist struggle that received at best patronizing recognition from those in power.<sup>23</sup> In a rare debate over women's rights in 1921, one senator remarked that "it is true that we must be concerned about the life of the *state*, but it is no less true that we must also concern ourselves with that of the *nation*." He continued that, just as the village "is the basis of the state, *woman* is the basis of the nation." As a result, "a woman must first of all take care of her children and raise them to be good citizens."<sup>24</sup>

Elites were skeptical about the population's ability to participate in national politics. Dimitrie Drăghicescu, a leading Liberal, commented sarcastically in 1922 that peasants were "good soil for politics, in the hands and carts of other classes."<sup>25</sup> Only 69.2% of Romanian men could read and write according to the 1930 census, but this does not mean that they were politically illiterate.<sup>26</sup> Villages were generally just as politically diverse as the general population, and rural voters expressed interest in what political parties would do for them rather than in ideological manifestos. A patronizing sociological study of the village of Ghigoești in Neamț county from 1938 wrote that

passionate in politics, they know no other ideology or behavioural norm than the right of the legendary fox. Personal interests overrule the most beautiful principles ... More than 50% ... mostly vote for the incumbent party, or they vote according to impulse, trying new groups, and this not according to the party's principles, but from the desire to see something new, what the others are like who haven't yet been in power.<sup>27</sup>

The Conservative Party was the first victim of extended suffrage. Having relied heavily on patronage networks, it had no organizational structure in place to

facilitate electoral campaigning and no broad constituencies within the electorate.<sup>28</sup> The National Liberal Party had dominated prewar politics and was well situated to dominate interwar politics as well. It did not rely on any one class for support, did particularly well in rural areas, and attracted people who voted in favor of existing governments in the hope that they would reward loyalty. It won the largest number of votes in 5 out of the 10 general elections held during the interwar period.<sup>29</sup> The National Liberals had been led by Ion Brătianu from the 1860s to the 1880s, and during the interwar period it was dominated by his sons, Ion I. C. (Ionel), Vintilă, and Dinu. Benefiting from their longevity in power, the National Liberals cultivated particularly close connections to leading industrialists and bankers, managing the economy to advance their own business interests.<sup>30</sup>

The first party to win an election under the new system was the Romanian National Party, led by Alexandru Vaida-Voevod. The National Party of Transylvania had represented Romanians in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and it quickly reorganized as the Romanian National Party after the war, creating local branches in rural areas led mostly by priests, primary school teachers, notaries, and wealthy villagers.<sup>31</sup> As a result, most Transylvanians voted for it in the elections of November 1919. Vaida-Voevod formed a “parliamentary bloc” together with the Peasant Party and the Bessarabian Peasant Party. Created in December 1918 under Ion Mihalache’s leadership, the Peasant Party enjoyed the support of most of rural Moldavia and Wallachia.<sup>32</sup> Ethnic Germans from Transylvania established their own party but also joined the parliamentary bloc after the elections.<sup>33</sup> Under the leadership of elites from the newly acquired territories and with the backing of new voters from the Old Kingdom, the parliamentary bloc set out on a program of radical changes, including agrarian reform, restricting the role of the *gendarmierie*, and extending protection for tenants of rental properties.<sup>34</sup> King Ferdinand intervened and forced new elections, which were won overwhelmingly by General Alexandru Averescu’s People’s Party. Averescu had become a national hero during World War One and used his popularity to create a following that drew together remnants of the Conservative Party and veterans enamored of the “Averescu myth,” while remaining more palatable to the Liberals than the Peasantists were.<sup>35</sup>

## Land reform and industrialization

Despite having campaigned on a conservative platform, Averescu’s veteran support base compelled him to introduce the program of land redistribution promised by the king in 1917. Former serfs had received some land when Mihail Kogălniceanu’s Liberal government abolished feudal obligations in 1864, but it was not enough to live on, forcing them to continue working for their old landlords as wage laborers in a system the socialist writer Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea labelled “neo-serfdom.”<sup>36</sup> Rural dissatisfaction erupted



in the form of a country-wide rebellion in 1907 that devastated the properties of large landowners and involved widespread attacks on Jews.<sup>37</sup> Any government that would have refused to redistribute land would have committed political suicide. Dietmar Müller writes that, as part of Averescu's 1921 reform, "approximately 6 million hectares of land were appropriated, of which roughly 3.6 million hectares of farmland, 950,000 hectares of pasture, [and] 490,000 hectares of forest, were distributed by 1927 to roughly 1,368 million families."<sup>38</sup> Those who received land had to follow "compulsory farming plans" that dictated how the property was to be used.<sup>39</sup> Only married men, war widows, and orphans had the right to receive land, and there was a widespread belief that people were not allowed to sell the land they received. Evolving administrative structures in rural areas also meant that village elites benefited disproportionately from the reforms.<sup>40</sup>

A great deal of land changed hands, but farmers still lacked access to the credit they needed to modernize their farms, and the government kept agricultural prices low to prevent inflation.<sup>41</sup> Inflation was a genuine problem. The Germans had issued large numbers of banknotes during the occupation of 1917–1918, and the Romanian government in exile issued more banknotes from Moldavia during the same period. Inflation increased even more after the war ended because of the challenges of introducing a single currency in the new territories.<sup>42</sup> None of this made it easy to maintain a stable economy in the wake of such a massive redistribution of property. As David Mitrany noted in 1930, the result was

an enormous legal change, but only a very moderate economic change. Production is, on the whole, carried on by the same men with the same means as before. Broadly speaking, it has been not so much a change from large-scale to small-scale farming, as a change from farming by small tenants to farming by small owners.<sup>43</sup>

A Liberal campaign against Averescu induced him to resign in December 1921, and the National Liberal Party held power for most of the next seven years. Once back in government, the Liberals introduced a new constitution in 1923 and electoral reforms in 1926 that reduced the power of opposition parties and gave extra powers to the prime minister at the expense of parliament as a whole.<sup>44</sup> Alongside constitutional reform, the Liberals pursued a policy of industrialization "through ourselves alone" (*prin noi însine*). Romania remained primarily agricultural until after World War Two, although factories had begun to replace peasant cottage industries in some areas since the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>45</sup> The first petrol distillery was built at Ploiești in 1857, and the first derrick sank in 1861. Oil became increasingly important as the global industry developed, and major American, German, and French investors established operations in Romania between 1904 and 1906.<sup>46</sup> Romanian industrialization began in earnest after 1887.<sup>47</sup> The country had eight cotton-weaving

mills by 1911, employing about 2,000 people, primarily in Bucharest. Postwar expansion meant an increase in the size of factories more than in their number. More than twice the number of people worked in factories in 1930 compared to 1900, while the number of factories actually decreased.<sup>48</sup> The Liberal governments of the 1920s restricted access to foreign loans and imports, arguing that firms should be Romanian-owned and Romanian-financed, and that the majority of their employees should be ethnic Romanians.

A handful of major Bucharest banks with close ties to the Liberals financed industrialization. By 1925, 50% of their long-term loans were in industry.<sup>49</sup> On paper, the results were impressive. Between 1924 and 1928, production levels in manufacturing grew by 188% and in mining by 189%. Oil production also rose in leaps and bounds, from 968,000 tons in 1918 to 5,800,000 tons in 1930.<sup>50</sup> Dietmar Müller points out that the temporary boom of the early 1920s was driven by inflation and government stimulus, however, and production costs far outweighed profits.<sup>51</sup>

Industrialization also meant that new forms of labor contracts had to be negotiated, new political solidarities developed, and new everyday cultures formed through which Romanian workers made sense of their lives. Prior to the invocation of a worker-exploiter conflict, labor disputes had been framed as competitions between groups of workers. Manufacturing had been organized through guilds from the eleventh century onward, and guilds continued in Romania until 1945, although anti-guild legislation in 1873 wrote their declining influence into law, and twentieth-century guilds were feeble relics of their medieval forebears.<sup>52</sup> Guilds emphasized the cooperation between masters and journeymen in the production of manufactured goods, and this form of organization promoted vertical, regional, and trade-based ties rather than class-based ones. The regulation of labor in Romania in the second half of the nineteenth century took place at the request of small-scale craftsmen, not as a result of agitation by wage-earners, who did not find their political voice until just before World War One. Trade legislation from 1902 confused guilds, corporations, and unions, and the last of these first began to take shape after a 1909 law gave legal basis to professional associations.<sup>53</sup> Manifestos of the Social-Democratic Party from 1912 bemoaned the lack of labor organization and emphasized the importance for workers to form unions.<sup>54</sup>

Workplace legislation relating to safety, hygiene, and child labor was introduced in Romania in the last years of the nineteenth century, and many issues were not addressed until after World War One. Roughly one-third of the workforce was female, and, while rural women looked after children while working at home, the phenomenon of urban women entering factories and having to leave their children in preschools created fears that industrialization and the financial independence it provided women might be harmful for children.<sup>55</sup> Labor laws in 1921 and 1929 regulated and expanded technical education, establishing new hierarchies and professional standards for tradesmen and industrial workers.<sup>56</sup> Collective conflicts involving industrial workers were

an increasingly common occurrence in the early twentieth century. In 1910, unions were involved in 15 boycotts, 107 strikes, and 3 lockouts.<sup>57</sup> Collective conflicts rose dramatically once workplace legislation was introduced in 1920, culminating in a wave of countrywide strikes in September and October.<sup>58</sup>

Workers experienced workplace legislation and laws governing collective conflicts as novelties and were at first unsure of how to negotiate them. The Regional Inspectorate of Labor in Timișoara scolded the carpentry union from Caransebeș in 1923, reminding them that they had to respect legislation and fill out the proper paperwork when they engaged in industrial action.<sup>59</sup> Most industrial action throughout the interwar period focused on gaining collective contracts and on forcing employers to respect both the law and the contracts that they had previously signed with workers. Workers unions adopted traditions from French Marxism, and thus had a decidedly socialist tinge to them.<sup>60</sup> Unions repeatedly expressed solidarity with the struggles of workers elsewhere in the country, and even engaged in sympathy strikes when the occasion called for it.<sup>61</sup> But unions did not represent the majority of workers. By 1930, only 50% of railway workers in Cluj were members of a union.<sup>62</sup>

A cursory examination of archival records pertaining to Transylvanian factories suggests that ethnic tensions may have played a role in some places but not in others. The annual reports of local trade organizations in Transylvania, for example, were usually published in three languages and gave statistics about the multiethnic nature of their membership with no hints of tensions between members.<sup>63</sup> Records of labor disputes from the region rarely make mention of ethnic tensions either among the workers or between workers and management, but cases do exist.<sup>64</sup> A petrol refinery in Târgu-Mureș was run by Jewish managers from Maramureș who threatened to import Jewish workers from Maramureș in 1932 if their workers did not give up their right to collective contracts.<sup>65</sup> Another dispute, this time at the Holy Cross Factory in Vlahuța in 1930, involved a Czech manager who could speak neither Romanian nor Hungarian and who refused to pay workers for long periods of time, in addition to charging exorbitant prices at the canteen from which they were obliged to buy their food.<sup>66</sup> Both of these cases revolved around economic issues, but the fact that the ethnicity of the managers was repeatedly mentioned in administrative records of the dispute suggests that workers were quite capable of framing their problems in ethnic terms when it suited them.

Industrialization and the limits of the 1921 agrarian reform meant that none of the major parties managed to gain the support of the rural population, although all claimed to speak on behalf of “the peasantry.” The 1930 census listed 72.3% of Romanians as “exploiters of the soil” and another 9.5% as involved in some form of industry.<sup>67</sup> These people were celebrated by elites but rarely had much of a political voice. Before 1821, words like *norod* or *prostime* were commonly used to refer to the rural masses, but *prost* became an increasingly pejorative term during the nineteenth century, gradually taking on its current meaning of “idiot.” After 1821 the word *țăran* – the

Romanian equivalent of peasant – became common both as a sociological category and as an idealized group of people whose values and lifestyle embodied the nation. *Țăran* also had negative overtones, however, and most rural people called themselves *săteni* (villagers).<sup>68</sup> From the 1890s onward nationalists in particular claimed to value *țărănimea* (the peasantry) as the “true” Romanians, celebrating them during the interwar period through “traditionalist” literary and artistic movements.<sup>69</sup>

In 1936, the economist Virgil Madgearu argued that despite the significant differences between agricultural laborers, small proprietors, and other *țărani*, they effectively behaved as a single class because all shared the same aspirations to become independent producers able to employ others.<sup>70</sup> Social stratification increased in rural areas during the interwar period, however, and agricultural laborers quickly turned against *chiaburi* (*kulaks*) as “class enemies” once socialist collectivization began in 1949.<sup>71</sup> Far from all *țărani* engaged primarily in agricultural labor. Of the 586 “laborers” who lived in the village of Dragomirești in Argeș county in 1941, for example, only 128 worked in agriculture.<sup>72</sup>

Working people would have found it difficult anyway to place themselves firmly within one sociological category or another if they worked at more than one job. Roughly 6% of Romania’s working population in 1930 reported that they had two major professions. Of those who reported having a second job, 45% listed their secondary occupation as being in agriculture, 30% in industry, and 5% in commerce/credit.<sup>73</sup> Even people who worked full-time in industry often had their primary ties in the village. A lack of housing near the factory meant that many workers lived in their villages and travelled long distances to work each day, or else slept in overcrowded shelters. A 1933 report from the Inspectorate of Labor in Ploiești reported that some workers travelled 15–20 km on foot to get to work, and that they preferred to do this rather than sleep in the miserable conditions available near the factory.<sup>74</sup> The everyday reality of living and working across the urban/rural divide reinforced a linguistic tendency to group farmers together with industrial workers as part of the working poor (*muncitori*). Worker solidarity was based not on one’s relationship to the means of production, but on access to capital – all categories of workers felt exploited by the wealthy financiers and landowners, and thus often made few political distinctions between agricultural and factory labor.

## Winning over the provinces

While struggling to win the votes of working people, Bucharest elites also sought to extend their control over the new territories. It was not a foregone conclusion that the culture and political ambitions of the Old Kingdom would dominate interwar Romania. Florian Kühner-Wielach notes that in 1918 Transylvanians saw themselves as pioneers, and even redeemers, expecting to bring their economic resources and political traditions to their poorer

neighbors in Wallachia and Moldavia. They envisaged “a pluralistic, multinational state with *Romanian* hegemony and under *Transylvanian* leadership.”<sup>75</sup> Bucharest Liberals had other ideas. They intended to shape the new territories in their own image, limiting pluralism and ethnic diversity as much as possible. Government documents laid out plans to cultivate “moral values and patriotic sentiments” in the new territories, using Romanian schools and Churches staffed by personnel from the Old Kingdom.<sup>76</sup> Romania began sending teachers and books into Bessarabia even before the union of the territories was officially agreed, and many more followed over the next decade.<sup>77</sup>

A series of laws between 1924 and 1928 introduced far-reaching educational reforms that standardized the school systems from the various territories while equipping Romanians for life in a modern industrial state.<sup>78</sup> The Liberal minister of education, Constantin Angelescu, explained that

the school must everywhere provoke a freshening of the spirit; to awaken the national consciousness to Romanian life and culture and to solidify the spiritual unity of all Romanians. Only by enlightening and strengthening the national consciousness can we boost the kin's vital powers and [power to] resist all the assaults from without and within, and ensure the endurance of our dominion in the Kingdom's new boundaries.<sup>79</sup>

The introduction of universal male suffrage provoked complaints that most Romanians were not “ready” to participate in the running of the country, complaints that were answered by the expansion of tertiary education and the elevation of experts and professionals to a privileged social status. Intellectual work became a national duty and gave low-level bureaucrats remarkable authority over those who relied on them.<sup>80</sup> Other experts hoped to shape the nation according to the standards of their disciplines. Sociologists catalogued and analyzed the rural population both in order to make policy recommendations about development, pronatalism, or education and to prove the legitimacy of Romania's claims to the new territories.<sup>81</sup> Public health officials bemoaned poor sanitary conditions and encouraged racist interventionist policies to prevent epidemics.<sup>82</sup> Eugenists such as Iuliu Moldovan argued for a new constitution that “must place the biological interests of the family above those of the individual and the biological integrity of the human capital above the interests of material property.”<sup>83</sup> Above all, in 1929 the government expanded the powers of the Siguranța, or secret police. First established in 1908, the Siguranța worked closely with the gendarmerie to monitor subversive activities, including extremist political groups, religious minorities, and the activities of minority ethnic groups. The Siguranța's remit extended significantly beyond punishing criminals. Rather it worked to prevent threats to the nation-state by infiltrating and harassing groups it suspected did not fully embrace the state's ideology.<sup>84</sup>

As Mariana Hausleitner points out, in interwar Romania modernization was simultaneously nationalization. In Bukovina the state allowed the Jewish, Ukrainian, and German minorities less and less autonomy as the 1930s went on.<sup>85</sup> In Bessarabia, Romanian officials saw any attempt at Jewish cultural organizing as proof of communist agitation.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, police consistently identified Hungarian cultural associations in Transylvania as evidence of irredentism.<sup>87</sup> After a two-month tour of the country, an American investigative commission in 1928 concluded that “a hideous campaign of intimidation and brutality was being carried on against the Jewish citizens of the state, its motive being a mixture of arrogant intolerance and ignorant hatred.”<sup>88</sup> Ethnic minorities quickly learned to articulate requests for local autonomy in ways that affirmed Romanian nation-building projects. Communities that failed to do so effectively were marginalized and denied access to state resources.<sup>89</sup> Acceptance came at the price of assimilation for these communities. Roma, for example, benefited from state resources only to the extent that they owned land and entered state institutions such as schools and Churches.<sup>90</sup>

The central idea driving reforms and nation-building in the new provinces was that ethnic Romanians from the Old Kingdom were now in control of the state. Not everyone was enthusiastic about this idea. Bucharest elites saw nation-building projects as ways to *raise* the level of civilization in the new territories, but Transylvanians perceived this “levelling” as a distinct step *down*.<sup>91</sup> Romanian elites in Transylvania responded to attempts at centralization by promoting Alba Iulia as an alternative to Bucharest in their discourses about the nation and by subtly discriminating against people from the Old Kingdom.<sup>92</sup> Romanian teachers sent to Bessarabia faced hostility from their local colleagues and were challenged by students who did not speak Romanian well. Many schools simply ignored aspects of the state-mandated curriculum.<sup>93</sup> A French report from May 1919 explained

south of Kishinev the majority of the population is plainly hostile to the Romanians [and] Russian is their language and interest. The small Romanian element there is represented by poor peasants who are themselves hardly well-disposed in favor of their compatriots. The rest – Jews, Bulgarians, Russians, German settlers – detest and despise the Romanians.<sup>94</sup>

Romanian troops had vandalized and expropriated Ukrainian schools when they entered Bukovina in 1918, insisting that they promoted irredentist agendas. The government permitted minority schools, but after 1924 they had to teach the national literature, history, geography, and civics curricula using the Romanian language.<sup>95</sup>

Minority students were at a distinct disadvantage when sitting for the baccalaureate exams that would get them into university. One student newspaper asserted in 1925 that 80% of students failed the exams, and examiners from the Old Kingdom could use the oral section of the exam to fail minority

students who had done well in the written sections. The Peasantist politician Romul Boilă from Transylvania claimed that the exams “cut the future of young lives from the annexed provinces.”<sup>96</sup> In 1926, an angry Jewish student from Cernăuți named David Fallik harassed one of the examiners who he believed had intentionally failed him. Upset that a Jew should be allowed to attack a Romanian, a university student named Nicolae Totu shot and killed Fallik. Totu was a member of the antisemitic National Christian Defense League (LANC<sup>97</sup>) and argued successfully at his trial that the murder was justified because Fallik “struck a teacher, and in striking a teacher he had struck the state itself.”<sup>98</sup> Totu’s acquittal was one of many instances in which juries sided with ethnic Romanians who had publicly injured or killed members of ethnic minorities. In doing so, they affirmed that ethnic Romanians enjoyed certain privileges, such as easier access to education, better funding for their churches and cultural associations, the right to have their history and culture celebrated publicly without arousing police suspicion, and even the right to kill members of minority groups under special circumstances.<sup>99</sup>

### Religious diversity

The state’s support for Romanian ethnic privilege can be seen in religious policy during the interwar period. In 1919 the minister for public education and religions, Vasile Goldiș, argued that the Romanian Orthodox Church (BOR<sup>100</sup>) must be the only official Church in the country: “The state must not be allowed to become multi-confessional, as those people suggest who are promoting the destruction of the moral order with their most pernicious ideas and theories.”<sup>101</sup> The BOR had become a state institution following the unification of Wallachia and Moldavia in 1859, and it gradually lost more and more autonomy over the following decades.<sup>102</sup> The status of other Churches became a particular problem when large numbers of Roman Catholics, Eastern-Rite Catholics, and Protestants became Romanian citizens after 1918. Whereas the BOR had been the only “dominant” Church according to the 1866 constitution, the 1923 constitution added “and the Eastern-Rite Catholic Church comes before other religions.”<sup>103</sup> Contesting the rights of non-Orthodox Churches was a way for the BOR to define its own position vis-à-vis the state.<sup>104</sup> Interwar Church leaders complained that the state was persecuting it by secularizing BOR property and tolerating other Churches, but government ministers pointed out that the BOR still received generous grants and more financial support than any other Church.<sup>105</sup>

Emperor Leopold I had established the Eastern-Rite Catholic, or Uniate, Church in Transylvania during the late seventeenth century as a way of subordinating Orthodox Christians to Rome – and to the Holy Roman Empire – without substantially changing beliefs or practices. Minor differences between Eastern-Rite Catholic and Romanian Orthodox Churches *had* developed by the twentieth century, especially in terms of their corporate identities, but

**TABLE 5.2** Romanian population by religion in 1930

<i>Religion</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Orthodox	2,223,965	60.9
Jewish	520,004	14.2
Roman Catholic	377,303	10.3
Reformed Calvinist	179,978	4.9
Eastern-Rite Catholic	167,430	4.6
Lutheran	95,377	2.6
Muslim	36,829	1.0
Other (less than 1%)	50,153	1.4
Total	3,651,039	100

Source: Sabin Manuilă, *Recensământul general al populației României din 29 decembrie 1930*, Vol. 2 (Bucharest: Institutul Central de Statistică, 1930), pp. xcvi–xcvii.

Eastern-Rite Catholics had been enthusiastic leaders of the Romanian national movement in Transylvania and felt entitled to membership in the nation as Romanians *and* as Eastern-Rite Catholics.<sup>106</sup> The BOR argued that Eastern-Rite Catholics were actually wayward Orthodox, and must rejoin the BOR if they expected any rights within Greater Romania. Eastern-Rite Catholics responded that, while they accepted that every Church should seek converts,

there is nonetheless an enormous difference between peaceful “missionary activity” through argument and illumination, winning souls through persuasion with the power of the truth and good works, ... and demagoguery, disturbances, organised with money and axes, envy and chicanery, with illegal interventions of the public authorities, as some dominant conquistadors (*conchistadori*?) seeking cheap immortality understand it.<sup>107</sup>

Roman Catholics too argued that they could be “good Romanians” even though they were not Orthodox. Leading Orthodox commentators such as Nae Ionescu disagreed, maintaining that Orthodoxy and Romanian ethnicity – and with it, ethnic privilege – were synonymous.<sup>108</sup> Roman Catholicism represented internationalist values that Orthodox nationalists found deeply suspect.<sup>109</sup> Hostilities culminated in debates surrounding the 1927 Concordat with Rome, in which the Romanian state acknowledged and regulated the two Catholic Churches inside its borders. Romanian metropolitans protested vigorously against the concordat, arguing that it permitted the Catholics too many bishops, too many churches, too much land, and too much public money, given the number of believers.<sup>110</sup>



Compounding the BOR's struggles with established Churches was the exponential growth of "neo-Protestant" churches such as Baptists, Seventh-Day Adventists, Pentecostals, and Brethren. Unlike the established Lutheran and Reformed Protestant Churches found in Transylvania, neo-Protestant Churches appeared in the late nineteenth century and spread throughout the country. Many neo-Protestants were former Orthodox Christians, and the BOR responded by encouraging the state to harshly persecute neo-Protestant groups, some of which were never officially recognized as Churches during the interwar period.<sup>111</sup> The rise of neo-Protestantism also occasioned schisms within the BOR itself, as individual reformers imitated neo-Protestant methods and theology only to be themselves cast out of the Church.<sup>112</sup>

Alongside its disagreements with other Christians, the BOR attacked both Freemasons and Jews. Orthodox writers "exposed" Freemasonry from the early 1920s onward, culminating in an official condemnation of it by the Holy Synod in 1937. Romanian Freemasonry was officially dissolved by the state 10 months later.<sup>113</sup> Antisemitism was widespread in modern Romanian society.<sup>114</sup> Antisemitic organizations were first established in 1886, and the first explicitly antisemitic political party in 1910.<sup>115</sup> Nineteenth-century antisemitism was associated primarily with atheists and free-thinkers, but the scientist Nicolae Paulescu introduced it into Christian circles in the early twentieth century, and by the interwar period most BOR newspapers expressed antisemitic views at some time or another.<sup>116</sup> Large numbers of priests joined right-wing and fascist political parties, and senior Church figures attacked Jews in their sermons and writings.<sup>117</sup> As both an ethnic and a religious minority, Jews proved to be an effective target for the BOR and other Romanian nationalists seeking to secure Romanian ethnic privilege within the nation-state.

### The rise of fascism

The introduction of universal male suffrage raised the expectations of hundreds of thousands of Romanians that their voices and interests would be represented in the country's parliament. The failure of the major parties to win the hearts and minds of voters gave opportunities to parties on the far right and the far left. The Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917 and the establishment of the Comintern in March 1919 split Romanian socialists between those who were willing to work together with the Bolsheviks and those who preferred independence. The majority decided in favor of collaborating with the Comintern at a party congress in May 1921, which marked the formal establishment of the Romanian Communist Party (PCR<sup>118</sup>). Police arrested the congress delegates soon after they had reached this decision, however, and persecuted the PCR harshly until the end of World War Two. Despite waves of strike action in 1920 and 1933, police harassment ensured that the PCR never became a significant force in Romanian politics.<sup>119</sup>

Fascism too had a halting start because of police persecution. Two fascist movements appeared in Romania during 1921/1922, both influenced by Mussolini's success in Italy.<sup>120</sup> The Liberals immediately banned fascist organizing, and by 1924 most fascists had joined A. C. Cuza's National Christian Defense League.<sup>121</sup> A professor of law at the University of Iași, Cuza had a long history of antisemitic organizing, but his party blossomed in the wake of antisemitic student riots that engulfed the country's major universities in December 1922.<sup>122</sup> The number of students enrolled at university increased dramatically following the war, and universities were unprepared for the sudden influx of generally ill-prepared students. Crowded dormitories and inadequate facilities in libraries and laboratories contributed to widespread student dissatisfaction, which culminated in demands for numerous *clausus* legislation limiting the number of Jewish students at university. The student movement continued throughout the interwar period, working together with LANC to inject a rabid antisemitism into Romanian politics. Several student leaders, including Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, were involved in highly publicized court cases for murder and treason. Codreanu and 5 of his colleagues were arrested in October 1923 for plotting to assassinate 10 or more prominent Jews and then, in October 1924, Codreanu murdered the police prefect in Iași. The students readily admitted their guilt in both cases, but both times were acquitted because of their "patriotic" motives.<sup>123</sup>

Student violence and various publicity stunts kept LANC in the newspapers throughout the 1920s, with a rhetoric that combined economic antisemitism with attacks on political corruption and inefficiency. Personal rivalries split LANC's leadership in 1927. Accusing Cuza of "politicianism," Codreanu and his supporters established a new movement called the Legion of the Archangel Michael. Just as Cuza had cultivated ties with prominent antisemitism elsewhere in Europe, Codreanu advertised his affinities with Mussolini and Hitler as models for the movement. During their first few years, legionaries worked on attracting students and disillusioned LANC supporters to their ranks with rhetoric about youth, purity, and spirituality. They began propaganda marches through isolated rural areas in November 1928 and a sustained campaign to attract factory workers in early 1933. In 1930, Codreanu established a paramilitary wing of the Legion known as the Iron Guard. The Guard was banned in 1933 but the name stuck and became synonymous with that of the Legion.<sup>124</sup>

Legionaries won two by-elections in August 1931 and April 1932, and they managed to attract the support of young intellectuals thanks to the patronage of Nichifor Crainic and Nae Ionescu – two influential ultranationalist publicists. These intellectuals quickly set about developing legionary ideology with a focus on youthful purity and anti-politicianism, and the hub of the movement shifted from Iași to Bucharest. The authorities tried to restrict the Legion's ability to contest the national elections of December 1933 and legionaries met force with force. Fearing the Legion's popularity, the government had scores of legionaries arrested only a couple of weeks before the

election. Angry that they had not been allowed to compete fairly, the legionaries assassinated the new Liberal prime minister, Ion Gh. Duca. Most of the movement's leadership stood trial for Duca's murder, but only the three assassins were convicted.<sup>125</sup>

Codreanu reorganized the Legion in 1934, creating the Everything for the Fatherland Party as a separate political wing. He published his memoirs as a political manifesto in 1935 and established a large network of summer work camps, presenting the Legion as a grassroots movement committed to strengthening the nation through voluntary labor, physical fitness, self-discipline, and a puritan morality. Legionaries continued to threaten public figures with assassination and still attacked Jews during this period, but celebrated violence less than during the period prior to 1933.<sup>126</sup> The 1930s provided more opportunities for women to get involved in fascist politics, and large numbers of women joined the Legion. Fascism encouraged unmarried women to become politically active without compromising their conservative Christian values and allowed married women to engage in political activism alongside their husbands and brothers.<sup>127</sup>

Codreanu's new focus paid dividends, and his party won 15.6% of the vote in the national elections of November 1937. Unwilling to allow Codreanu to take power, the king appointed a National Christian Party (PNC<sup>128</sup>) government led by A. C. Cuza and Octavian Goga. The PNC introduced harsh antisemitic measures while also violently attacking legionaries. King Carol II, who had been on the throne since 1930, used the violence between Cuzists and legionaries as an excuse to declare martial law and a royal dictatorship on 10 February 1938. Codreanu disbanded the Legion a little less than two weeks later. He was arrested for libel soon after, then convicted of treason before being killed by the authorities in November 1938. Following harsh persecution that left hundreds of leading legionaries dead, the survivors either fled to Germany or went into hiding.<sup>129</sup>

## The demise of democracy in the 1930s

Romanian democracy had been in trouble long before the royal dictatorship. Having undermined democratic processes through the electoral reforms of 1926, the increasingly unpopular Liberals managed to hold on to power with a couple of short breaks until both King Ferdinand and Ionel Brătianu died in 1927. Winning 77.8% of the votes in the national elections of 1928, the National Peasant Party swept into government led by Iuliu Maniu, who represented the middle-class wing of the party, and Ion Mihalache, who represented rural voters. Once in power, the Peasantists shifted the focus of the economy from investment in industry to promoting agriculture through affordable loans to small-scale farmers. They did not implement the more radical redistribution of land they had been promising since 1921, however, and increasingly lost the support of rural voters. They became, as a contemporary saying went, "a party without peasants."<sup>130</sup>

The National Peasantists also revoked the protectionist tariffs introduced by the Liberals, encouraging foreign investment at a time when Europeans were least interested in such ventures – during the early stages of the Great Depression.<sup>131</sup> Discussions with other Balkan states between 1930 and 1933 succeeded in establishing preferential trade deals with Romania's neighbors but did not produce the economic union some had been hoping for, which aimed at giving these predominantly agricultural states greater access to the global economy.<sup>132</sup> Nor did international conferences during these years involving agrarian states across Eastern Europe succeed in improving Romania's ability to sell its agricultural products on the world market.<sup>133</sup>

Industrialization achieved very modest successes during the interwar period, but by 1929 Romania was able to import mostly partially fabricated goods for the limited domestic market and to finish the processes in the country – something that had not been possible a decade earlier.<sup>134</sup> The Depression hurt industry the most, causing widespread unemployment as demand for Romanian oil evaporated. Agriculture too suffered and the interest rates on loans increased dramatically following the collapse of several major banks. The problems of two bad harvests in a row were compounded as the factories needed fewer raw materials and the cities consumed less in the wake of higher food prices.<sup>135</sup> Major strikes broke out on the railways and in the oil refineries in February 1933.<sup>136</sup> Fascists recruited heavily among workers during the Depression, arguing that ethnic minorities were taking Romanian jobs.<sup>137</sup>

But it was the return of Prince Carol in June 1930, not economic problems, that brought down the National Peasantists. Carol had left the country in 1925 and separated from his wife, Princess Elena, in order to pursue an affair with Magda Wolf, a woman of Jewish heritage better known as Elena Lupescu. When King Ferdinand died in 1927, he was succeeded by a regency council, which ruled on behalf of Carol's son, Prince Michael. In 1930, Carol, who had been excluded from the royal succession in January 1926, returned to Romania. The prime minister, Iuliu Maniu, welcomed Carol's return, but only on the condition that he renounce Lupescu and reconcile with his wife. Carol refused and Maniu resigned. Parliament proclaimed Carol as king the following day; King Carol took the royal oath on 8 June 1930. Maniu soon returned to office but resigned again in October once Lupescu joined Carol in Romania and it became clear that Maniu and Carol could not work together because they disagreed over who should run the country – the king or the prime minister. By December 1930, senior politicians were speculating that King Carol II intended to establish a royal dictatorship. Instead, he assembled an advisory board of his favorites known as the "camarilla," which helped shape official policy and appointed its members to government posts. As members of Carol's camarilla, Lupescu and prominent (ethnically Jewish) businessmen such as Max Aușnit and Aristide Blank became the focus of antisemitic and anti-corruption attacks in the press while enriching themselves through shady government contracts. The image of Jewish corruption

that surrounded the camarilla fueled the rise of far-right parties and encouraged politicians such as Alexandru Vaida-Voevod to adopt fascist slogans and programs.<sup>138</sup>

The state was the largest consumer of heavy industry, investing a large amount of money in products produced by companies owned by those close to the centers of power.<sup>139</sup> In 1933, the “Skoda” scandal broke out, revealing the corruption of senior politicians, including Iuliu Maniu. The scandal involved corruption at a Czech armaments company that was contracted to produce weapons for the Romanian army. Fiscal irregularities were discovered, the weapons were found to be overpriced and of poor quality, and Romanian military secrets were discovered in the hands of Czech businessmen.<sup>140</sup> The “Skoda Affair” was closely followed and editorialized in most Romanian newspapers, and it helped to discredit the country’s political elite, fueling claims that no politician could be trusted. Struggling to negotiate a working relationship with King Carol, Romania had nine governments between June 1930 and November 1933, eight of which were National Peasantist. Coupled with the National Peasantists’ inability to form a stable government, the Skoda Affair brought the Liberals back into power, with that party winning 51% of the votes in the national elections of December 1933.

Legionaries assassinated the prime minister, Ion Gh. Duca, only a few days after he took office, passing the reins of government to Gheorghe Tătărescu. The banks that had sustained the “old” National Liberal Party of the 1920s had collapsed during the Depression, causing a shift within party politics. By 1933, the influence of the Brătianu family was restricted primarily to the party apparatus, while “young” Liberals such as Tătărescu controlled the cabinet.<sup>141</sup> Less and less interested in parliamentary procedures, between 1934 and 1938 Tătărescu sought to concentrate decision-making power in the cabinet itself, bypassing parliament as much as possible.<sup>142</sup> Less subtle than Liberal economic policy had been in the 1920s, Tătărescu’s government increasingly abandoned any pretense about its ties to industry. It increased import duties four times between 1932 and 1937 as well as investing directly in industry, offering subventions to individual companies, and legalizing cartels.<sup>143</sup>

While several of Romania’s neighbors were turning toward a German-oriented foreign policy, the Liberal minister for foreign affairs, Nicolae Titulescu, set to work reinforcing a pro-French alliance in East Central Europe. Romania had been a member of the Little Entente since 1921, together with Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, but in February 1933 Titulescu and his counterparts signed a “pact of reorganization” that strengthened the alliance in the event of German aggression. A new treaty with the Soviet Union followed, then a new alliance with Yugoslavia, Turkey, and Greece against Bulgaria. Titulescu strongly supported the League of Nations, and the League’s failure to curtail Mussolini’s invasion of Abyssinia revealed how weak his carefully negotiated system of alliances actually was in the face of Italian or German aggression. Italy responded to Titulescu’s hostility to the Abyssinian

campaign by no longer importing oil from Romania. Italy had been a major market, and the extent to which the Soviet Union was willing to interfere in the domestic politics of its allies became increasingly clear with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. Humiliated by the weakness of the League of Nations and suspect because of his pro-Soviet foreign policy, the king forced Titulescu to resign and sent him into exile in the summer of 1936.<sup>144</sup>

The nationalist press strongly criticized Titulescu's pro-French foreign policy, arguing that it subordinated Romanian interests to those of humanitarianism, Freemasonry, communism, and world Jewry.<sup>145</sup> King Carol maintained an official policy of nonalignment until 1940, but trade ties brought Romania and Germany closer together from 1936 onward.<sup>146</sup> Shifting foreign policy and the growing popularity of fascism encouraged other politicians to embrace fascist politics. In 1934, Mihail Stelescu left the Legion to establish the Romanian Crusade, a fascist party purportedly financed by the king, which fizzled out soon after the legionaries murdered Stelescu in 1936.<sup>147</sup> The former National Peasantist prime minister, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, formed the Romanian Front in 1935. It staged fascist-style rallies and marches, argued for a closer relationship with Italy and Germany, used slogans such as "Romania for the Romanians," spoke of the need for a "national reawakening," and attacked "the reprehensible Romanian tolerance for foreigners."<sup>148</sup> Also in 1935, three leading antisemites – Nichifor Crainic, A. C. Cuza, and Octavian Goga – formed the National Christian Party as an umbrella ultranationalist party. Cuza and Goga soon expelled Crainic and campaigned on the core issues that had sustained LANC during the 1920s.<sup>149</sup> Despite their shared values and occasional efforts at cooperation, legionaries, Crusaders, Vaidists, and Cuzists regularly clashed in street battles, cultivating a culture of violence and muscular masculinity.<sup>150</sup> King Carol also took advantage of fascism's popularity by establishing a youth organization known as *Strajă Țării* (The Sentry of the Country) modeled on the Hitler Youth and the legionary Blood Brotherhoods. Swearing "Faith and Work for Country and King," young sentries wore uniforms, attended summer camps, and performed voluntary labor for charitable causes. What *Strajă Țării* lacked in popular appeal it made up for with generous scholarships and access to jobs.<sup>151</sup>

### Under three dictators

The national elections of December 1937 marked the end of the National Liberal Party's time in power and the rise of the far right. The PNC's six weeks in government were most notable for the sudden increase in antisemitic legislation, some of which was revoked by its successors following international protests. Goga and Cuza revoked the citizenship of Jews who had been naturalized since World War One, and began the process of removing Jews from the civil service, expropriating Jewish-owned factories, preventing Jews from obtaining permits to sell alcohol, and banning Jewish newspapers.<sup>152</sup> These laws

reflected a consistent antisemitic agenda for which Cuza had been agitating since the 1890s, but they could be implemented only in an environment characterized by the collapse of democracy, hysterical racism, and the dominance of Nazi Germany in East Central Europe. Public celebrations of antisemitism accompanied these laws, including attacks on individual Jews, the closing of Jewish cultural associations, and forcing Jews to keep their shops open on the Sabbath.<sup>153</sup> Attacks on Jewish businesses caused financial chaos as production was halted and banks temporarily stopped issuing loans.<sup>154</sup>

King Carol II abolished the parliamentary system in February 1938 but kept many of its bureaucrats in place. Codreanu noted that most of the mayors and prefects under the royal dictatorship were Liberals or Liberal sympathizers, and the communist Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu writes that Carol's regime financed the same heavy industry that had flourished under Tătărescu.<sup>155</sup> Carol took firm measures against the Legion, but when the National Liberal and National Peasantist parties refused to dissolve, he allowed them to remain intact, albeit without the possibility of contending elections or carrying out propaganda.<sup>156</sup> He also took measures to limit regionalism by redrawing regional boundaries and appointing royal representatives tasked with "controlling and governing all public, administrative, economic, and social activity in the region."<sup>157</sup> Ethnic irredentism was firmly dealt with and the government pursued a strict policy of Romanianization.<sup>158</sup> Carol appointed the Orthodox patriarch, Miron Cristea, as his first prime minister. Keeping in mind that Iuliu Maniu had publicly refused to consent to seeing Carol become king because of his affair with Elena Lupescu, the patriarch was careful never to comment on Carol's love life.<sup>159</sup>

The last of Carol's governments, led by Ion Gigurtu, included a number of individuals sympathetic to Nazi Germany, including 3 legionaries and 13 Cuzists. In office from 4 July to 4 September 1940, it brought antisemitism back onto the official agenda.<sup>160</sup> Carol's minister of justice, Ion V. Gruia, described the legal policy under Gigurtu, while displaying the garbled logic and jargon characteristic of the period, as follows:

For new realities, new rules of law. What constitutes the organic reality of the state is the Nation ... From an ethical standpoint, this means a spirituality based on origin, i.e., the same ethnic origin. The national state cannot be achieved except through the nationalization of the professions. The inner life of professions – original and autonomous – is contained within the limits of the National State.<sup>161</sup>

In August 1940, Carol introduced a set of laws classifying Jews according to their religious practices or those of their parents, their membership of "the Jewish community," or having "Jewish blood." The government divided Jews into three categories in order to institutionalize antisemitic laws. Those who had (1) been naturalized before 30 December 1918, (2) families whose fathers

had fought in the Romanian army, and (3) others were exempt from the harshest of restrictions. The others had their rights to work or own businesses severely curtailed and found themselves having to do “community service” (*muncă de interes obștesc*). On that day, Jews also lost the right to marry Romanian citizens or to escape persecution by converting to Christianity.<sup>162</sup>

German expansion caused a number of borders to be revised in late summer 1940. Romania lost Bessarabia and northern Bukovina to the USSR in June; Romanian soldiers massacred local Jews while they retreated, including in one pogrom in Dorohoi in which over 200 people died.<sup>163</sup> Adding insult to injury, Romania then lost northern Transylvania to Hungary in August, and Southern Dobruja to Bulgaria in September. Following large-scale protests, Carol abdicated in favor of his son Michael, who immediately appointed General Ion Antonescu as prime minister, alongside the new leader of the Legion, Horia Sima, as deputy prime minister. The National Legionary State, as it was known, was an explicitly fascist regime. Antonescu and Sima allied the country firmly to Nazi Germany and institutionalized a culture of popular violence against Jews. They practised strict censorship of the press and created a parallel police force in which groups of legionaries carried out vigilante justice in the name of the state, including murdering their political enemies who had been imprisoned under Carol. Legionaries appointed themselves to public office, from the highest to the very lowest, and dominated public spaces with flags, marches, rallies, and music.<sup>164</sup> The new regime extended existing legal restrictions on Jewish worship and economic activities to include limits on actors, pharmacists, and doctors. On 5 October 1940, the state began “Romanianizing” Jewish property and businesses. Newly appointed commissars ensured that no business employed more than its fair share of Jews and oversaw the systematic confiscation of Jewish real estate.<sup>165</sup>

The strained relationship between the Legion and Antonescu broke down in January 1941, when Sima launched a failed rebellion against the general. Legionaries carried out a brutal pogrom in Bucharest during three days of rebellion, arresting and torturing hundreds of Jews, devastating and looting synagogues, shops, and homes, and executing scores of people in the process.<sup>166</sup> Antonescu’s regime arrested and harassed known legionaries from this point on, driving some into exile and effectively ending the Legion’s influence on Romanian politics but leaving others free to participate in anti-Jewish actions as soldiers or bureaucrats under Antonescu’s command.<sup>167</sup> The general’s military dictatorship then began a more systematic program of excluding Jews from public life through economic restrictions, deportations, forced labor, and mass murder, measures justified whenever possible by appeals to public law.<sup>168</sup> Antonescu invited advisors from the Nazi Reich Security Main Office (RSHA)<sup>169</sup> to help shape Jewish policy, and the recommendations of Gustav Richter, an SS officer attached to the German legation in Bucharest, guided Antonescu’s legislative and bureaucratic approach to the Holocaust.<sup>170</sup>



Antonescu's government used baptism certificates and "certificates of nationality" issued by town halls to distinguish between Jews and citizens, causing a great deal of confusion and controversy in the process.<sup>171</sup> Certificates of nationality impacted other minorities as well, forcing groups such as the Csangos, Hungarian-speaking Catholics in Moldavia, to prove that they were "of Romanian origin" – a task that was frequently difficult if not impossible.<sup>172</sup> Throughout Antonescu's time in office, newspapers and radio equated Jews with Bolsheviks and described them as a mortal threat to the Romanian nation.<sup>173</sup> Between 1941 and 1944 the state organized Jews aged between 18 and 50 into labor brigades and forced them to carry out "community labour."<sup>174</sup> Failure to carry out orders satisfactorily resulted in beatings, solitary confinement, or extra duties.<sup>175</sup>

As they had done during the 1930s, Dr. Wilhelm Filderman and the Federation of Jewish Communities resisted Antonescu's antisemitic measures through legal challenges, frequent petitions, and communal support groups struggling to help both deportees and those who remained at home. Individuals also attempted to sabotage the Romanianization process through fraud, bribery, preemptively selling property to gentiles, or stalling the transfer of their properties.<sup>176</sup> Antonescu dissolved the Federation in December 1941, establishing the Jewish Center in its place, which functioned as a Romanian *Judenrat*, with all appointments to leadership positions having to be approved by Antonescu.<sup>177</sup> Those Jews who were able fled the country in difficult conditions with the support of Zionist groups and other Jewish associations.<sup>178</sup>

## Ethnic cleansing

Romania began its attack on the Soviet Union as part of Operation Barbarossa on 22 June 1941. Four days earlier, Antonescu had ordered the evacuation of rural Jews in the region between the Siret and Prut rivers and had instructed the authorities in Galați to concentrate the city's Jews into a ghetto.<sup>179</sup> In Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, the army evacuated 40,000 people by 31 July 1941, "cleansing" 441 villages and small towns, and killing up to 14,850 people in a pogrom in the city of Iași that ended with thousands of Jews being forced into tightly packed "death trains," where many died from heat, thirst, and starvation.<sup>180</sup> The pogrom itself took place on 29–30 June and was a disorganized and gruesome affair involving local antisemites, police, and soldiers.<sup>181</sup> Tens of thousands of Jews fled before the Axis advance. Including those who were deported or conscripted into the Red Army, roughly 140,000–150,000 Jews from Bessarabia and northern Bukovina were living in the Soviet Union by February 1942. Between 35,000 and 45,000 of them did not survive the war.<sup>182</sup>

As the Romanian army advanced through Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, soldiers, gendarmes, German Einsatzgruppen D units, and local antisemites rounded up and murdered Jews in village after village, killing between 43,500 and 60,000 people during the month of July 1941.<sup>183</sup> Both regular

soldiers and members of designated “death squads” (*echipe de execuții*) carried out the murders.<sup>184</sup> A number of massacres were also instigated and carried out by locals without the involvement of soldiers or gendarmes. In some instances, perpetrators had been or were affiliated with antisemitic organizations such as LANC, the Legion of the Archangel Michael, or the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, while others had been encouraged to attack Jews by observing decades of antisemitic policies implemented by the Romanian state.<sup>185</sup> Locals and bureaucrats competed with one another for the plunder of Jewish property.<sup>186</sup>

In late July 1941, the Romanian army organized Jews from northern Bessarabia into convoys and herded them across the River Dniester, only to have them sent back by German officers on the other side. Murder, plunder, rape, or death from hunger and disease took their toll on the roughly 32,000 Jews involved, and, in mid-August, the small number of survivors were eventually interned at the Vertujeni camp.<sup>187</sup> During August 1941 the authorities established transit camps at Vertujeni, Mărculești, Edineți, and Securenii as well as at several smaller sites. Supervised by the gendarmerie, but without any provision for food, shelter, and medicine, the deplorable conditions in the camps meant that scores of people died each day, their bodies thrown into mass graves.<sup>188</sup> Romanian troops occupied Chișinău (as Kishinev was now called) on 16 July and soon massacred roughly 10,000 Jews. They concentrated the remaining Jews into a ghetto, where they were plundered, used for forced labor, and deported piecemeal across the River Dniester before the ghetto was liquidated on 30 October 1941.<sup>189</sup>

Further deportations became possible once the Tighina convention of 30 August 1941 gave Romania control of the territory between the Dniester and Bug rivers, which was renamed Transnistria. On Antonescu's orders, the Romanian authorities immediately began evacuating the Bessarabian transit camps and ghettos as well as deporting Jews from southern Bukovina and Dorohoi county. Many more Jews died in the process.<sup>190</sup> It was illegal for Jews to convert to avoid deportation, and those who converted to Romanian Orthodoxy or to Protestantism were deported for breaking the law. The small number of Jews who converted to Catholicism, however, remained alive thanks to the efforts of the papal nuncio Andrea Cassulo and to the Romanian authorities' hope that the pope might intervene on their behalf should the tide of war turn against them.<sup>191</sup> Resistance to deportation also came from Traian Popovici, the mayor of Cernăuți, who argued against the deportations on the grounds that they were an unnecessarily barbaric solution to the Jewish problem; he exempted large numbers of Jews he designated “economically useful.” Antonescu suspended the deportations on 13 November 1941, and so these people were able to remain in the ghetto another few months until deportations resumed in early June 1942.<sup>192</sup>

Whereas most Jewish deportees came from Bessarabia or Bukovina, Jews were deported from throughout the country if police identified them as communists.<sup>193</sup> Similarly, the regime interned and sometimes deported non-Orthodox

Christian groups, including Inochentists (a millennialist group from Bessarabia), Jehovah's Witnesses, and Baptists.<sup>194</sup> In May 1942, Antonescu gave the order to begin deporting Roma, initially targeting itinerant communities and those so poor that decision-makers deemed them a burden on or a danger to society. Gendarmes relied on vague eugenicist arguments about "public health" in selecting who should be deported, and targeted people from throughout the Old Kingdom. The regime claimed to be "settling" Roma in Transnistria, but it confiscated their horses and wagons and denied them food or the possibility of work. Large numbers of people died from hunger, cold, and disease in the winter of 1942/1943. The deportation of Roma continued until October 1942; and, of the 25,000 Roma deportees, an estimated 11,000 perished in Transnistria.<sup>195</sup>

## Conclusion

The extent to which the mass murder of between 280,000 and 380,000 Jews, as well as other victim groups, was the logical conclusion of the previous 20 years of Romanian history is an open question. It is nonetheless possible to trace a number of historical threads connecting the "democracy" won at Mărășești with the mass murders of 1941 to 1944.

First, the failure of the ruling elites to successfully convince the majority of Romanians that politicians had their best interests at heart encouraged voters to turn to extremist alternatives such as LANC and the Legion of the Archangel Michael. Romania failed to develop a democratic political culture that the majority of citizens believed in and wanted to see succeed.<sup>196</sup>

Second, nationalist rhetoric from 1848 onward had promised Romanians that ethnic privilege would accompany democracy and independence. Interwar Romanian democracy was premised on an exclusionary ethnic nationalism that had as its logical end result the elimination of other groups found on Romanian territory.<sup>197</sup>

Third, the incorporation of the new territories into Greater Romania normalized the idea that the state had the right – even the duty – to homogenize the population linguistically, religiously, and culturally. When officials organized population exchanges and ethnic cleansing during World War Two, they were following a similar logic to that which had inspired their predecessors over the past 20 years. It was no accident that most of the violence during the Holocaust took place in Bessarabia and Bukovina – two regions that had been the focus of some of the most intensive nation-building projects of the interwar period.<sup>198</sup>

Fourth, by 1941 the nationalist message that had formed the core of the school curriculum throughout the interwar period had produced a new generation of elites who believed strongly in the idea of Romanian ethnic privilege. Concerted efforts by state-builders to ensure that only ethnic Romanians received positions of authority in the new territories created a culture of chauvinism and entitlement that reached its pinnacle in wartime Romanization policies.<sup>199</sup>

Fifth, the role of the Orthodox Church in legitimating and enforcing ethnic nationalism helped nationalists to justify the exclusion of minorities. As the representatives of sacred truths, priests, metropolitans, and the patriarch encouraged Romanians to believe that ethnic privilege was a divine right and that theirs was a holy struggle against enemies of the nation. Support from the missionary priests in Transnistria made the process of mass murder much more palatable for the perpetrators.<sup>200</sup>

Sixth, the focus on industrialization that dominated interwar economic policies produced a state that worked seamlessly together with the sorts of heavy industries that flourish during wartime. While parliamentary politics could no longer guarantee substantial spending on heavy industry by the late 1930s, authoritarian regimes allowed a continuation of the status quo for large industrialists. Industrialization also alienated rural voters who turned to fascist groups, such as the Legion, which promised to represent their interests more steadfastly than the Bucharest elites had.<sup>201</sup>

Seventh, the authoritarian tendencies of the National Liberal Party under Brătianu and Tătărescu and the failure of successive National Peasantist governments, together with the institutionalization of corruption first by the National Liberals and then by Carol's camarilla undermined any pretense that Romania was a democracy. Romanians were well prepared for authoritarian rule by the time Carol II declared his royal dictatorship.<sup>202</sup>

Finally, the failure of the League of Nations and Titulescu's system of alliances to guarantee the country's territorial integrity through peaceful diplomacy legitimated calls for diplomacy by strength of arms. The rise of Nazi hegemony in East Central Europe made it easier for fascist and right-wing parties to take power across the region. Ethnic cleansing was not the inevitable consequence of the Battle of Mărășești, but it was a phenomenon a long time in the making.

## Notes

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