

*Memoria infidelă: uitare, sublimare, ocultare*

**NEGATION AT THE TOP:  
DECONSTRUCTING THE HOLOCAUST DENIAL SALAD  
IN THE ROMANIAN CUCUMBER SEASON**

**Michael Shafir**

The “cucumber season” is known among media people to be that time of the year when they have to hunt for news instead of being hunted by them. It is a season when “anything goes”. Astute and/or aspiring politicians, aware that their peers are sweating on sea-shores or contemplating mountain peaks, take advantage to have newscasts cover statements they make that would be ignored during the rest of the year. With most journalists gone on vacation as well, television networks fill air time with a plenitude of “nothing” ranging from “Tarzan” to “Dracula” festivals, not to speak of the soap-operas with which they cultivate the intelligence of viewers during the rest of the year. It is not by chance that the “cucumber season” is also known as the “silly season”.

A lot of ink has been spent by political scientists and journalists after 1989 to describe what came to be called “Romanian exceptionalism”.<sup>1</sup> Romania, it would seem, is just “different” from other East-Central European former communist states. But to my knowledge no one – not even the author of the best analysis of post-communist media *modus operandi* in that country<sup>2</sup> – imagined that exceptionalism in the Romanian case extends to the “cucumber season” as well. Romania may be the only country in the world where the season is dominated by politicians who are closer to the end rather than to the beginning of their political career, and by incumbent governments rather than by aspiring politicians – in short by those who dominate newscasts in the rest of the year as well. This exceptionalism does not make the protagonists less “silly” than their associates in the “cucumber-dominated” season elsewhere in the world. But it might make them less eligible to the attenuating circumstances of inexperience or unfulfilled political ambitions.

Two successive scandals of international proportion involving Holocaust-denial postures by the Romanian government and the country's president in June and July 2003 illustrate this exceptionalism in abundance. Both scandals excelled in their apparent futility. Both defy at first sight logic and/or “national interest”. Finally, both scandals illustrate a problem whose significance extends far beyond their immediate circumstances – that of “historical memory” and its political implications.

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<sup>1</sup> For one of the best articles see Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Romanian Exceptionalism? Democracy, Ethnocracy and Uncertain Pluralism in Post-Ceausescu Romania*, in Karen Dawisha, Bruce Parrot (eds.), *Politics, Power and the Struggle for Democracy in South-East Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 403-450.

<sup>2</sup> See Peter Gross, *Mass Media in Revolution and National Development: The Romanian Laboratory*, Ames, Iowa State University Press, 1996.

It is not my intention in this article to describe in minute detail the evolution of the scandals. I take it for granted that they are well known to readers of “Xenopoliana”. Instead, I intend to submit those events to an analytically-conceptual examination of their *significances*. I am consciously employing here the plural rather than the singular. This should not be mistakenly interpreted to imply that I am the partisan of the post-modernist approach to history and historiography. I do not believe that *any* interpretation of history is legitimate, for that would land me in either the camp of “vulgar Marxism” or in that of the Holocaust deniers, and perhaps in both. I do, however, believe that a plurality of explanations can co-exist and that neither people nor *peoples* are driven by singular motivations, unless they are obsessed. And obsession is the stuff of novelists and of psychiatrists, not of historians or (in my own particular case) political scientists.

In other words, I do believe in (non-post-modernist) “deconstructionism”. Deconstruction – by which I mean analyzing events in the particular context in which they occur *without losing track of historical antecedents* – by definition involves a plurality of motivations, for we are never consciously driven only by the purpose we seem to pursue *here and now*. We are also influenced by the socialization processes we underwent and, no less important, by our conscious or unconscious effort to meet the expectations of those we strive to please, or whose support we wish to recruit. I am aware of the fact that “traditional” historians would frown at the above. And yet, they do not frown when illustrious predecessors, from Tacitus to their own contemporary models, do little else than try to step into the shoes of their heroes and villains and read those villains' and heroes' “subjective memories” whenever “documents” are prone to more than one interpretation.

This brings me straight back to the “cucumber season”. If the perspective I described above is anywhere close to being correct, the “cucumber salad” served by the Romanian cabinet and by President Ion Iliescu in June and July 2003 should be “deconstructed” into all its “ingredients”. How many among us know that the Latin *cucumber* describes a *fruit* rather than a garden *vegetable*? And how about the oil, the vinegar, the salt and (yes!) the sugar that can make it taste one way or another? Finally, how about adding to it some tomatoes?

In what follows I shall be “deconstructing” the Romanian cucumber salad into several co-existing conceptual “ingredients” which I developed in previous works related to Holocaust denial in general and to its Romanian particularities especially. References will be made to those works without more than minimally going into the explanation of the concepts employed. This is due not only to space restraints, but (modesty aside) to the fact that I wish to avoid polemicizing with those “reviewers” of my work whose ill-will and/or incapability to read what I actually wrote disqualified them from any serious future dialogue. Their names are not worthy of mention. I shall therefore focus on, first, “utilitarian antisemitism” as a component of the explanation; second, I shall examine the “double-talk” aspect of official Romanian dissimulation in addressing Holocaust-related problems, or what I prefer calling “simulated change”; third, I shall be addressing the problem of the “comparative trivialization” of the Holocaust as illustrated in the summer 2003 “incidents”; leaving any theoretical considerations aside, I shall then proceed to scrutinize a blatant presidential prevarication; finally, I shall conclude in tackling the problem of “historic memory” and its subjectivity. But before embarking on the above, a very brief “factological” review of the incidents seems warranted.

### 1. Serving the Cucumber Salad: Act One

On 12 June 2003, a very brief official governmental press release announced that the cabinet had approved on the same day a cooperation agreement between the National Archives and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. The communiqué added that Romania's government “encourages research concerning the Holocaust in Europe – including documents referring to it and found in Romanian archives – but *strongly emphasizes that between 1940-45 no Holocaust took place within Romania's boundaries*”.<sup>3</sup> The statement was a perfect illustration of “selective negationism”, by which I mean those types of Holocaust denial that do not negate the Holocaust as having taken place *elsewhere*, but exclude *any* participation of members of one's own nation in its perpetration.<sup>4</sup> It was also an exemplification of brutal falsification of historic fact, based, as we shall see below, on the “technicality” that most Holocaust atrocities in Romania had been committed on territories not officially annexed, and on the willful omission of the atrocities committed on Romanian territory proper.

The communiqué immediately triggered a wave of protests by Jewish organizations in Romania and by official Israeli circles, while also attracting the attention of Jewish organizations in the U.S. and elsewhere. The first Romanian protest came from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL)-affiliated Center for Monitoring and Combatting Anti-Semitism in Romania (MCA), which urged the government to “reconsider its openly-expressed denial of the Holocaust in Romania”.<sup>5</sup> After an apparent hesitation, the Steering Committee of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania (FCER) released on 17 June an unprecedented strong-worded communiqué, noting with “surprise and justified sadness” the government's claim and calling it “irrelevant and out-of-place”.<sup>6</sup> The Romany Center for Public Policy “Aven Amenza” likewise protested the statement in an open letter addressed to Prime Minister Adrian Năstase, after a meeting which commemorated 61 years since the start of the deportation to Transnistria of Romanian Roma. The center said it intends to sue Public Information Minister Vasile Dâncu, whose office disseminated the Romanian government's announcement, saying that the statement amounted to the denial of the extermination by the Ion Antonescu regime of 36,000 Roma during the Holocaust.<sup>7</sup> Like the FCER, Aven Amenza described the claim that no Holocaust had been perpetrated on Romanian territory as “irrelevant”.

Romania's Ambassador to Israel, Mariana Stoica, was summoned on 16 June to the Israeli Foreign Ministry, where she was handed an official protest and told that Israel “takes a grave view of the Romanian statement, which is at odds with the historical truth and detracts from the steps taken by the Romanian government to confront the past”. The Romanian cabinet, Israeli Foreign Ministry Deputy Director David Peleg told Stoica, “must find a way to correct this unfortunate statement, in order

<sup>3</sup> Rompres, 12 June 2003; “Adevărul”, 13 June 2003; RFE/RL Newswire, 13 June 2003. Emphasis mine.

<sup>4</sup> See Michael Shafir, *Between Denial and “Comparative Trivialization”*. *Holocaust Negationism in Post-Communist East-Central Europe*, Jerusalem, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, The Vidal Sassoon Center for the Study of Antisemitism, 2002, p. 52-59 and the expanded Romanian translation of this work, *Între negare și trivializare prin comparație: negarea Holocaustului în țările postcomuniste din Europa Centrală și de Est*, Iași, Polirom, 2002, p. 88-103.

<sup>5</sup> MCA Press Release, 12 June 2003.

<sup>6</sup> “Realitatea evreiască”, No. 189, 6-23 June 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Rompres, 17 June 2003 and “Curentul”, 17 June 2003; RFE/RL Newswire, 19 June 2003.

to return bilateral ties to the right path”.<sup>8</sup> The Knesset's (the Israeli parliament) Immigration, Absorption and Diaspora Committee approved a resolution “strongly protesting” the Romanian government's statement and describing it as an act of “Holocaust denial”. It said that Romania's cabinet must “acknowledge the facts and the responsibility of the [Ion Antonescu] government that had brought about the murder of Jews in Romania”. The resolution noted that Ambassador Stoica, on her government's instructions, had refused an invitation to attend the committee's meeting. It also cited Romanian-born committee chairwoman Colette Avital as saying: “The denial of the Holocaust by Romania's government creates a dangerous precedent. Four hundred thousand Jews were murdered in Greater Romania during the Holocaust and nobody can deny this”.<sup>9</sup> The Yad Vashem Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority likewise issued a statement bashing the Romanian government's declaration, saying that it “is hardly comprehensible for a country claiming to have a democratic regime to present a version of historic facts that is falsified to such extent”. It drew attention to the recently-published work by Romania-born historian Jean Ancel, which “based on worldwide archival [documentation], including Romanian archives to which access is possible, shows that the Bucharest Romanian government, hand-in-hand with the Romanian Army and with police, has been directly responsible for these massacres”.<sup>10</sup>

Leaving any diplomatic language aside, Radu Ioanid, director of international archival programs division at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, said in reaction to the government's statement that a “fascist-like, [close to the chauvinist] Greater Romania Party (PRM) wing is acting inside the ruling Social Democratic Party (PSD)”.<sup>11</sup> From Australia and the U.S. to Germany, France and Great Britain, the statement received wide (and universally negative) coverage.<sup>12</sup> Citing an analysis by the author of these lines broadcast by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Romania-Moldova service, the German daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on 17 June published an article under the sarcastic title “The Murderers Are Not Among Us” – a clear pun on Simon Wisenthal's classic *Murderers Among Us*. That analysis was also circulated by the MCA at a 19-20 June OSCE international conference on antisemitism in Vienna, much to the embarrassment of the Romanian delegation, which Foreign Minister Mircea Geoană thought safer to renounce heading at the last minute.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Mediafax, 16 June 2003, citing a press release of the Israeli Embassy in Bucharest; “Ziua”, 17 June 2003; *RFE/RL Newswire*, 17 June 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Official press release of the committee (in Hebrew), 17 June 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Mediafax, 16 June 2003. The work referred to in the communiqué is Jean Ancel, *History of the Holocaust: Romania*, Jerusalem, Yad Vashem, 2002, 2 vls. See also the three-volume life-time work by the same author published one year later, *Transnistria, 1941-1942*, Tel Aviv University, The Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center, 2003 and *Hakdama Le'Retzah: Praoth Iasi, 29 July 1941* [Prelude to Murder: The Pogrom in Jassy, June 29, 1941], Jerusalem, Yad Vashem, 2003. Among earlier works by Ancel with the same focus see *Transnistria*, Bucharest, Editura Atlas and Tel Aviv, Tel Aviv University, 1998, 3 vls (in Romanian) and *Contribuții la istoria României: Problema evreiască*, Bucharest, Hasefer, 2001, vol. 1., 2 parts (the sequel to this volume has just been issued at Hasefer in August 2003, but I have not yet received it). See also *RFE/RL Newswire*, 16 June 2003.

<sup>11</sup> “Cotidianul”, 18 June 2003.

<sup>12</sup> For example, see Associated Press, 13, 15 and 17 June 2003; Agence France Presse, 13 June 2003; “The Guardian”, 13 June 2003; the Romanian daily “Gardianul” mentioned on 16 June also the “Washington Post”, the “Kansas City Star”, the “London Free Press”, the British “Daily News”, the U.S.-based MSNBC News and an Australian news agency among the media outlets that covered the affair.

<sup>13</sup> Personal communication by MCA National Director Marco Maximilian Katz.

The near universally negative reaction triggered abroad (to distinguish from the more heterogeneous response in Romania itself) made the government “reconsider” its position. After an initial attempt by Culture and Cults Minister, historian Răzvan Theodorescu to “clarify” the statement by historical-judicial gimmicks (see below), the government issued a “repentance” statement, practically taking back the earlier assertions. The Antonescu regime in Romania, the government's new statement read “was guilty of grave war crimes, pogroms, and mass deportations of Romanian Jews to territories occupied or controlled by the Romanian army” and the Romanian government “assumes its share of responsibility” for the crimes initiated by that regime during the Holocaust.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, the Romanian delegation at the OSCE Vienna conference on antisemitism described the 12 June statement as “an unfortunate mistake that will not be repeated” and went out of its way to demonstrate Romania's readiness to cope with its Holocaust legacy.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, President Ion Iliescu himself had described the government's 12 June statement as having triggered “a useless debate” and as a declaration “that should have never been made”.<sup>16</sup>

## 2. Anyone for a Refill? Act Two

Yet barely one month later, Iliescu himself would provoke an even stronger scandal with his declarations in an interview with the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*.<sup>17</sup> Referring to the cabinet's statement of the previous month which he himself had deemed to be out of place, Iliescu said that “[T]he Holocaust was not unique to the Jewish population in Europe. Many others, including Poles, died in the same way”. But only Jews and Gypsies, the interviewer observed in reaction, had been “targeted for genocide” at that time. To which the president responded: “I know. But there were others, who were labeled communists, and they were similarly victimized. My father was a communist activist and he was sent to a camp. He died at the age of 44, less than a year after he returned”. This was a typical example of indulging into what I (expanding a concept originally devised by U.S. historian Peter Gay) called “trivializing the Holocaust by comparison”. I shall further dwell on this point below.<sup>18</sup>

Unlike the 12 June governmental statement, Iliescu admitted that massacres of Jews had been perpetrated on Romania's territory proper and observed that “the leaders of that time are responsible for those events”. However, he noted, “[i]t is impossible to accuse the Romanian people and the Romanian society of this. When Germany declared [sic!] the Final Solution – a decision that was obeyed by other countries, including Hungary, Antonescu no longer supported that policy. On the contrary, he took steps to protect the Jews. That, too, is historical truth”. He also went on to observe: “Antonescu also had his positive side. In 1944, when Hungary under Horthy was implementing the Final Solution and transported its Jews, including residents of northern Transylvania, which was then under Hungarian rule, to death camps, Antonescu was no longer doing that”. As to the historians' claim that the shift in policies towards Jews was due to Stalingrad, Iliescu readily acknowledged that this “is correct” but deemed the detail to

<sup>14</sup> Mediapax, 17 June 2003; Reuters, 18 June 2003; RFE/RL Newline, 19 June 2003.

<sup>15</sup> MCA press release, 25 July 2003. This press release reacts to the Iliescu statement discussed below.

<sup>16</sup> Rompres and AP, 17 June 2003.

<sup>17</sup> “Ha'aretz” – English edition, 25 July 2003, www.haaretzdaily.com. See also RFE/RL Newline, 28 July 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Shafir, *Between Denial and “Comparative Trivialization”*, p. 60 75 and *Între negare și trivializare*, p. 106, 132.

be “not important”. After all, he remarked in a full display of historical ignorance “didn't the Hungarians also see the Germans' defeat at Stalingrad”?

Indeed they had seen that defeat – a better informed interviewer should have countered – and this precisely was why Horthy attempted to contact the Allies for armistice feelers, which led to Hungary's occupation by Germany in March 1944 and eventually to Horthy's exile in October that year. And while the Admiral bears responsibility for those atrocities committed under his rule, most of the deportations to camps took place after his country was occupied and continued after his enforced exile by the Germans. Horthy, it is claimed by his Hungarian and other defenders, was indeed an antisemite, but also a defender of Jews.<sup>19</sup> All these “historical details” did not hinder Iliescu from telling the interviewer that “What amazes me is that no one has passed such harsh judgment on Horthy in Hungary” as that passed on Antonescu by Romania's [Jewish?] critics abroad. Those critics, Iliescu observed, “are very severe with Antonescu, but not so thorough when it comes to others. For example, why did the return of Horthy's remains to Budapest and the holding of an extensive ceremony not generate condemnation on the part of those who condemn every statue of Antonescu?”<sup>20</sup> Here Iliescu was displaying ignorance of historic fact (an aspect analyzed in the following “deconstruction”), but also giving vent to a widely shared feeling among East Europeans that the world-at-large is conspiring against their country.<sup>21</sup> In other words, he was indulging into what Vladimir Tismăneanu properly labeled as “self-pity” philosophies, which are part of the post-communist mythical framework in which “conspiracy theories thrive”.<sup>22</sup>

The interviewer then observed that the 12 June government's statement had also “led to a discussion about the restitution of Jewish property from the war period”. At this point, Iliescu became outraged:

“What's the connection? I don't think we should make a connection between these things. After all, that is liable to generate sentiments not of a positive nature toward the Jewish population. As though the entire engagement with the Holocaust was intended to justify property claims. I would prefer it if that connection were not made. In other words, the historical research should be left to historians. As for the restitution of property – and there are Romanians, too, and not only Jews, who are asking for property back – today the situation is worse than in 1989. People are struggling with shortages, and at the same time tens of thousands-hundreds of thousands-of people are coming forward with claims, because in Romanian history, during World War II and afterward,

<sup>19</sup> See the discussion in Shafir, *Între negare și trivializare*, p. 58. On the Holocaust in Hungary see above all Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1994, 2 vols. On Horthy, Hungary's participation in the Second World War and his attitude towards the Jews see in particular István Deák, *A Fatal Compromise? The Debate Over Collaborationism and Resistance in Hungary*, in István Deák, Jan T. Gross, Tony Judt (eds.), *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and Its Aftermath*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 39-73.

<sup>20</sup> Iliescu was wrong again. See, for example, Randolph L. Braham, *The Reinterment and Political Rehabilitation of Miklos Horthy*, in Henrietta Mondry, Paul Schweiger (eds.), *Slavic Almanach*, vol. 2, 1993, Johannesburg, University of Witwatersrand, p. 137-140, and *Assault on Historical Memory: Hungarian Nationalists and the Holocaust*, in *Hungary and the Holocaust: Confrontation with the Past*, Washington, DC, Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2001, Symposium proceedings.

<sup>21</sup> For an excellent analysis of this aspect in Romania see George Voicu, *Zei și răi: cultura conspirației în România postcomunistă*, Iași, Polirom, 2000.

<sup>22</sup> Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism and Myth in Post-Communist Europe*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1998, p. 7, 11, 84.

property was nationalized. Does that mean that the wretched Romanian citizens of today have to pay for what happened then? People have already had their fill of property restitutions and of having to pay for what happened during history, without their being guilty of anything... We are in favor of righting wrongs that were done and ensuring compensation of some kind for those who suffered. But we also have to take into account the present condition of Romania. Is it worth continuing to skin those who are living in distress today, too? And just in order to compensate others? I don't find that appropriate.”

It was quite plain that Iliescu was giving vent to his opposition to property restitution in general and to his documented attempts to restrict restitution as much as possible. The presidential opposition had greatly contributed to the fact that Romania thus far lost 40 times at the Strasbourg European Court of Human Rights in lawsuits launched by owners whose demands for restitution had been rejected by politicized Romanian justice courts.<sup>23</sup> It may have been mere coincidence that shortly before the interview with *Ha'aretz* was published, an Israeli citizen, Dora Dickman, had won a lawsuit at that court.<sup>24</sup> But Iliescu was certainly sliding (at best) into a populist or (at worst) into sheer antisemitic discourse when, in a manner reminiscent of the interwar Iron Guard or the post-communist PRM, he warned against “skinning” poor Romanians with restitution demands. And was it also just co-incidental that the president used precisely the PRM discourse when he stated that “history should be left to historians?” That discourse had been employed by the PRM when raising objections to Ordinance 31/2002 (see below) and Iliescu could hardly be unaware of it.

When the interviewer switched the focus of the questions to the chauvinist PRM –the second largest party in Romania's parliament after the 2000 elections – and asked Iliescu whether mainstream parties “reject outright cooperation” with that formation, the president replied that he does “not want to reject that party as a whole”, only its leader, Corneliu Vadim Tudor. “We have to assume that there are decent people in that party and among its supporters, people who support some of the positions of România Mare [PRM] because of the difficulties they are experiencing in their life. There are serious social problems and the economic situation is not yet satisfactory in the eyes of a large part of the population, and that encourages populist utterances,” he explained.

What followed was a repetition of the June scenario. Ambassador Stoica was summoned at the Israeli Foreign Ministry and handed a protest, while the Israeli Ambassador to Bucharest, Sandu Mazor, was instructed to deliver a strong protest at the Foreign Ministry in Bucharest. Once more, Peleg told Stoica that his country considers President Iliescu's declarations to be “grave” and “expects a clarification indicating whether this positions is [also] that of the Romanian government”. It was not in the least insignificant (see *infra*) that Peleg reminded Stoica that Israel has backed Romania's quest for NATO and EU integration, drawing attention that the integration process in the two organizations must be entrenched on forging “a tolerant civil society, capable of courageously facing the darker pages of its own past, assume responsibility for it and learn its lessons”.<sup>25</sup> Israeli Justice Minister Yosef (Tommy) Lapid, himself a survivor of the crimes perpetrated by Hungary in Vojvodina, called Iliescu's comments on the Holocaust “insensitive”.<sup>26</sup> Dorel Dorian, the Jewish community's representative in the

<sup>23</sup> See “Ziua”, 7 August 2003.

<sup>24</sup> Romanian Radio [Alfacont Monitoring for RFE/RL], 23 July 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Mediafax, 26 and 28 July 2003; “Ziua”, 29 July 2003.

<sup>26</sup> “Ha'aretz” – English edition, 25 July 2003. See also RFE/RL Newswire, 28 July 2003.

Romanian parliament, called them a “regrettable error”.<sup>27</sup> The MCA once more issued a protest, reminding that only a month earlier Romania had pledged at the OSCE conference not to ever indulge again in “unfortunate” expressions that can be associated with Holocaust negation.<sup>28</sup> ADL Director Abraham Foxman sent Ilescu a letter of protest urging him to “publicly renounce your comments and take steps towards an honest reckoning of what happened to the Jewish people during the Holocaust”.<sup>29</sup> The incident also somewhat changed the focus of a visit Romanian Foreign Minister Mircea Geoană began to the U.S. the day after the *Ha'aretz* interview publication. The next day, Geoană met with representatives of the U.S. Jewish organizations – B'nai Brith's Vice-President Daniel Mariaschin and American Jewish Committee European Affairs Director Andrew Baker. He told them that one should make a distinction between occasional passing tensions caused by misunderstandings, and Romania's core stance in dealing with the legacy of the Holocaust or the country's relations with Israel and the U.S. Jewish community.<sup>30</sup> The scandal, again, received large international media coverage,<sup>31</sup> not to speak of the media in Israel, where the conservative *The Jerusalem Post*, in an editorial called “Repudiate Ilescu's Anti-Semitism,” went as far as to compare the Romanian president with Austria's far-right leader Joerg Haider and to urge his international isolation.<sup>32</sup>

There was a sense of *deja vu* in what followed. At first, President Ilescu professed to be “surprised and saddened” by the “misinterpretation” of his statements not only by Israeli officials, but also by “Romanian journalists and commentators”.<sup>33</sup> These were said to have been taken out of the context in which they had been made. He also said that it had never been his intention to display a “lack of sensibility” or to “banalize the Holocaust”. Neither did he ever intend to detract from “the responsibility of those who led the Romanian state in that period. Historical truth must be fully expressed”, he said, while also emphasizing the “uniqueness” of the treatment *the Nazis* had applied to Jews in occupied Europe or in the countries allied with Germany (emphasis mine). How about *Romanians*, however? Were only those who headed the state responsible for such crimes? Were only those who issued orders to be held responsible, without any guilt borne by those who carried them out, not to speak of “by-standers?” And was the president aware or not that by making this statement, he was doing little else than engaging into “deflective negationism”, i.e. into the transfer of the guilt for the perpetration of the Holocaust crimes to members of other nations while minimizing own-nation participation in the crimes, which are thus reduced to insignificant “aberrations” committed by non-representative individuals? Deflecting the bulk of the guilt for the Holocaust onto the Nazis is a widespread form of “deflective negationism”, one that could well be dubbed *Deutsche, Deutsche Über alle*.<sup>34</sup>

Ilescu also claimed that the properties confiscated or “Romanianized” from Jews by the Antonescu regime had been returned after August 1944, adding, however, that

<sup>27</sup> “Cotidianul”, 28 July 2003.

<sup>28</sup> MCA Press Release, 25 July 2003.

<sup>29</sup> “Ziua”, 28 July 2003.

<sup>30</sup> See RFE/RL Newline, 28 July 2003, and “Ziua”, 29 July 2003.

<sup>31</sup> See Deutsche Presse Agentur, 25 July 2003; Associated Press, 25, 27 and 31 July 2003; Agence France Presse, 27 July 2003; Reuters, 29 and 30 July 2003; “The Economist”, 7 August 2003.

<sup>32</sup> “The Jerusalem Post”, 26 July 2003. See also RFE/RL Newline, 28 July 2003.

<sup>33</sup> Mediafax, 27 July 2003.

<sup>34</sup> See Shafir, *Between Denial and “Comparative Trivialization”*, p. 23-37 and *Între negare și trivializare*, p. 46-66.



the different “emigration waves” of Jews to Israel had “generated many property-problems”. After “many hesitations and controversies”, he added, a “legal framework has been created allowing restitution to all those entitled to receive it. The Jewish community is receiving back goods confiscated or nationalized, as do all other Romanian citizens”. However, “the problem is complicated”, above all by the “lack of resources that the state can allocate for compensation”. As a matter of historical fact, the restitution of properties “Romanianized” by the Antonescu regime, though legislated, met in practice with the opposition of the country's rulers, and lost much of its significance with the 1948 nationalization. This was a major factor in encouraging Jewish emigration to Israel or elsewhere.<sup>35</sup> Among the reasons claimed by the Romanian authorities before 1948 for the failure to meet restitution demands was the country's poverty in the wake of the loss of the war and the huge reparations imposed on it by the Soviet Union.<sup>36</sup> It seems that history does, indeed, repeat itself. In Iliescu's eyes, however, it was not the communist regime that had created the “property-problems” by nationalizing assets, but the Jews who opted for leaving the country after failing to regain possession or losing it again shortly after.

It was also stated in the official presidential communiqué that “the head of the state never questioned the legitimacy and the morality of requests to restitution and compensation”; he had only wished to “draw attention that in the conditions prevalent in contemporary Romania, where one out of three Romanians live in poverty, paying out some \$9-10 billion in a short time can generate serious economic and social disequilibrium”. He was therefore advocating the “spacing out over time” of compensation for those properties that can no longer be returned to their rightful owners.

This was also the spirit in which Iliescu addressed a letter to Israeli President Moshe Katzav and, in a rather unusual gesture, attempted to assure of his good intentions Israeli Ambassador Mazor in a personal telephone conversation. Soon thereafter, Mariaschin visited Bucharest, was received by Iliescu and, in the same spirit, it was agreed that Romania will be implementing several measures to demonstrate its readiness to move from words to deeds. These measures included the setting up of a commission of Romanian and foreign historians that would “unequivocally establish the significance of the extermination of Jews on Romania's territory during the Second World War”; introducing the teaching of Holocaust courses in Romanian schools; and instituting an official observance of the Holocaust Day in Romania.<sup>37</sup>

Mazor, however, was rather circumstantial in his reaction to the promises received. Israel, he said, will respond to the measures after they are implemented.<sup>38</sup> This did not stop Iliescu from conveying on Mazor a high Romanian state distinction shortly before the end of his mission. That Mazor accepted the distinction so soon after the *Ha'aretz* interview scandal raised more than one eyebrow in Israel and elsewhere. The riddle had a tragicomic key: the distinction had been conferred on Mazor for his “outstanding personal contribution to strengthening the traditional cooperation relations

<sup>35</sup> See Liviu Rotman, *Cuvânt înainte*, in Andreea Andreescu, Lucian Nastasă, Andrei Varga, *Evreii din România (1945-1965)*, Cluj, Centrul de resurse pentru diversitate etnoculturală, 2003, p. 8.

<sup>36</sup> See Hildrun Glass, *Minderheit zwischen zwei Diktaturen: Zur Geschichte der Juden in Rumänien 1944-1949*, München, R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2002, p. 81-94. See also Lucian Nastasă, *Studiu introductiv*, in Andreescu, Nastasă, Varga (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 20 and the documents in this volume on this issue.

<sup>37</sup> See the interview with Mariaschin in “România liberă”, 4 August 2003. The intention to officially mark the Holocaust Day was announced for the first time in-between the two scandals, after a visit to Bucharest by David Peleg. See also RFE/RL Newslines, 23 July 2003.

<sup>38</sup> Mediafax, 28 July 2003.

between the State of Israel and Romania [and] for [his] support of our country's efforts to *build and consolidate a functional market economy*".<sup>39</sup> Mazor would soon announce that he was requesting to have his Romanian citizenship restored, as he intended to work in Romania as manager of a large Israeli investment company and wished to avoid the trouble of having to request a reentry visa after each departure from Romania. But he was thus infringing on Israeli regulations requiring a two-year "cool off" period for civil servants before they would engage in businesses that might raise suspicion of using contacts established during service to their own private benefit. After being warned by the Israeli Foreign Ministry, and after Israeli journalists questioned whether he has served as Romania's ambassador rather than vice-versa, Mazor withdrew his dual citizenship request.<sup>40</sup>

### 3a. Deconstructing the Salad: Utilitarian Antisemitism

"Utilitarian antisemitism" refers to the occasional exploitation of antisemitic prejudice for the needs of the hour by politicians who, by and large, are probably not antisemitic. Failure to distance oneself from antisemitic views in the hope of enlisting the support of those who are obviously prejudiced, or even forging political alliances with them, can be just as telling as is embracing their views openly. That such political alliances are short-sighted and, more often than not, turn against the utilitarian antisemites themselves, is altogether another matter. But it is a matter that brings to fore the singularly *present* orientation of utilitarian antisemites, who seem to believe that what counts is only what serves the need of the hour, and that the future can always be dealt with starting from scratch. It is therefore not surprising to find the political discourse of utilitarian antisemites to be self-contradictory in a longer time perspective. In my book on post-communist Holocaust denial, as well as in a number of earlier and later articles, I have insisted on the extensiveness of the use of this device not only in post-communist East-Central Europe, but also in "established" democracies of the Western hemisphere. Viewed from this perspective, Romania's case, rather than pointing to any "exceptionalism", is rather banal.<sup>41</sup>

In discussing "utilitarian antisemitism," I have also pointed out that it is not as much what utilitarian antisemites *say* that counts, as is what they *refrain* from saying, their political discourse being *implicit* rather than *explicit*. More than any other political discourse with nuances of antisemitism, then, this particular discourse is *coded* and in need for "deconstruction".<sup>42</sup> Enough has been said thus far to realize that the ruling PSD (in its manifold changes of denomination since it came into being in 1990 as the

<sup>39</sup> "Evenimentul zilei", 7 August 2003. Emphasis mine.

<sup>40</sup> "Yedioth Aharonoth", 11 August 2003; "Ha'aretz" – English edition, 12 August 2003; "Ziua", 13 August 2003; "Jurnalul național", 14 and 15 August 2003; "Cotidianul", 14 August 2003; Mediafax, 14 August 2003; see also RFE/RL Newline, 13 and 15 August 2003.

<sup>41</sup> See Shafir, *Între negare și trivializare*, p. 57, 68. See also Shafir, *Marshal Antonescu's Rehabilitation: Cui Bono?*, in Randolph L. Braham (ed.), *The Destruction of Romanian and Ukrainian Jews During the Antonescu Era*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1997, p. 349-410 [Romanian translation published in *Exterminarea evreilor români și ucrainenii în perioada antonesciană*, Bucharest, Hasefer, 2002, p. 400-465]; also the forthcoming *The Radical Discourse in Post-Communist East-Central Europe*, in Leon Volovici (ed.), *Jews and Antisemitism in the Public Discourse of the Post-Communist European Countries*, Lincoln, NE and Jerusalem, Nebraska University Press and The Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism.

<sup>42</sup> For a distinction between "utilitarian" and other types of antisemitism in post-communist East Central Europe see my forthcoming *Varieties of Antisemitism in Post-Communist East-Central Europe: Motivations and Political Discourse*, "Jewish Studies at the CEU", Vol. III, 2003.

National Salvation Front) fully qualifies for being placed in this category. Not only has the PSD made a crucial contribution to the birth of the PRM,<sup>43</sup> not only has it forged an unofficial and later an official alliance with it between 1992-1996, but the party created and led by Iliescu has always included extreme-nationalists sympathetic to the views of the PRM alongside those who were either neutral or opposed to those views. What matters for the “deconstructionist” purpose is the failure of the PSD to call to order its own extreme nationalists (that is, its *silence*). Viewed from this perspective, Ioanid's criticism of the PSD after the government's 12 June statement (see *supra*), while accurate, was hardly “news breaking”. What also matters is the occasional “slip” of the leadership itself into a “telling silence of omissions” when courting the nationalist electorate. Finally, what counts in coming to deconstruct the discourse of utilitarian antisemitism is its sheer lability. The latter aspect, however, is also a reflection of the propensity to “simulate change” and will consequently be separately discussed.

Both the 12 June cabinet statement and Iliescu's interview with *Ha'aretz* must be simultaneously approached from the perspective of the immediate past and the immediate future. The framework for relevant immediate past is provided by Emergency Ordinance 31 of March 2002, while that of the immediate future are the looming parliamentary (late 2004 or early 2005) and presidential (late 2004) elections. Attempting to outlaw the flourishing cult of Marshal Antonescu, the ordinance had been mainly imposed from afar. It became clear to the Romanian leadership that NATO membership (a goal achieved with Romania's admission into the organization at its Prague November 2002 summit) would not be attainable as long as the cult went on with the tacit support of some PSD members and with the active promotion of the PRM and of less significant political formations.<sup>44</sup> But with the next election approaching, the PSD and its leadership wished to signal to the electorate that its posture of “defender of national dignity” had not been forsaken, the more so as it feared that the PRM would not hesitate to build electoral capital on account of Ordinance 31/2002.

This was also the main argument in some of the articles in the Romanian media that distanced themselves from, or took a critical position of, the two incidents. Some of these pronouncements were hardly a surprise. For example, one would have expected little else from political scientist and pundit Dan Pavel – one of the earliest critics of nationalist manipulation of Marshal Antonescu's figure for political purposes in post-communist Romanian historiography.<sup>45</sup> In an article in the daily *Ziua*, Pavel now warned that “yielding to the ultraextremist-nationalist pressure of autochthonous negationist circles” would be tantamount to undermining democracy.<sup>46</sup> The same applies for Cornel Nistorescu, the editor in chief of the daily *Evenimentul zilei*, who concluded that Iliescu was after the vote of “the poor” – to whose poverty his policies had much contributed-whom he could fool with an alleged threat to further

<sup>43</sup> For details see Shafir, *Anti-Semitism in the Post-Communist Era*, in Randolph L. Braham (ed.), *The Tragedy of Romanian Jewry*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 343-344. See also the text of the letter addressed by the PRM founders C. V. Tudor and Eugen Barbu to Romanian Premier Petre Roman in Andrei Pleșu, Petre Roman, *Transformări, inerții, dezordini: 22 de luni după 22 decembrie 1989. Andrei Pleșu și Petre Roman în dialog cu Elena Ștefci*, Iași, Polirom, 2002, p. 226-228 and the different versions of this incident presented by Pleșu and Roman, respectively, in *ibid.*, p. 118-126.

<sup>44</sup> For a discussion see my *Memory, Memorials and Membership: Romanian Utilitarian Anti-Semitism and Marshal Antonescu*, in Henry F. Carey (ed.), *Romania Since 1989: Politics, Culture and Society*, Lexington Books, forthcoming 2003.

<sup>45</sup> See Dan Pavel, *Etica lui Adam*, Bucharest, Du Style, 1995, p. 103-158.

<sup>46</sup> “Ziua”, 23 June 2003.

impoverishment emanating Jewish restitution claims.<sup>47</sup> Andrei Oișteanu, a Jewish social scientist and author of an important book on Jewish stereotypes in Romanian popular and high culture,<sup>48</sup> put it as unambiguously as possible: Iliescu's interview with *Ha'aretz*, he said during a debate on the Holocaust as reflected in the Romanian media, “was not merely a blunder, it was an electoral calculation” targeting Iliescu's “traditional electorate, as well as attempting to attract as many percentages as possible from the Greater Romania Party” ahead of the elections.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Jewish philosopher and pundit Andrei Cornea wrote that Iliescu has in all likelihood “deliberately triggered the scandal in order to appear as a 'genuine Romanian' in the eyes of that [nationalist] electorate of 'genuine Romanians' [*români verzi*] whom he wants to attract to, or to keep on the side of, the PSD in view of the [forthcoming parliamentary] elections”.<sup>50</sup>

But Iliescu cannot run again in the 2004 presidential elections. Why would he, then, indulge into taking positions that would damage his image at international level? According to an exceptionally insightful article published in *Ha'aretz*, Iliescu was hoping to be named Senate speaker after the end of his presidential term. For this “he will need the vote of the extreme nationalist Greater Romania [Party]” and “throughout the interview” that caused the scandal “Iliescu was sending out a message to supporters of that party, the second largest in Parliament”.<sup>51</sup> It should, indeed, be recalled (see *supra*) that the president had indicated that he does not reject the PRM “as a whole”.

Yet deconstructing the June-July Holocaust denial scandals must involve not only a deconstruction of its main protagonists' pronouncements, but also an effort to “deconstruct the deconstructionists”. Not all those who criticized the government or Iliescu can be trusted with being really indignant about the significance of their pronouncements. Take, for instance, the case of Cristian Tudor Popescu. Popescu had in the past come to the defense of notorious Holocaust deniers such as Roger Garaudy and Norman Finkelstein.<sup>52</sup> In early 2003 he became president of the Romanian Journalists' Association and was now in obvious need to mend his West-bashing image among Bucharest-accredited foreign diplomats. In an editorial, Popescu started by citing Iliescu's statement of 3 April 2002 that he “will leave politics when I also leave this world”<sup>53</sup> and went on to say that it is “irrelevant what position Mr. Iliescu will hold after 2004 or what his age will be; what is important is that he wishes to maintain his dominant position in Romanian politics. As a matter of fact, Ion Iliescu is running. And he does so at any costs, even at the cost of serious damages provoked [by his declarations] to Romania”.<sup>54</sup> Or take the case of journalist Vladimir Alexe, who in an article published in the daily *România liberă* went out of his way to demonstrate that Iliescu was displaying populist postures and cultivating an image of “father” (*tatuc* – spelt in a way reminiscent of Russian, rather than the Romanian *tătuț*) of the impoverished, defending them against alleged rapacious Jews. Alexe concluded by questioning

<sup>47</sup> “Evenimentul zilei”, 28 July 2003.

<sup>48</sup> See Andrei Oișteanu, *Imaginea evreului în cultura română*, Bucharest, Humanitas, 2001.

<sup>49</sup> Mediafax, 6 August 2003.

<sup>50</sup> Andrei Cornea, *Iliescu negaționist?*, in “22”, No. 700, 5-11 August 2003.

<sup>51</sup> “Ha'aretz”, 4 August 2003.

<sup>52</sup> For details see *Între negare și trivializare*, p. 42, 122-123 and Shafir, *The Man They Love to Hate: Norman Manea's “Snail House” Between Holocaust and Gulag*, in “East European Jewish Affairs”, Vol. 30, No. 1, 2000, p. 79n. See also George Voicu, *Teme antisemite în discursul public*, Bucharest, Ars docendi, 2000, p. 135-137 and William Totok, *Der revisionistische Diskurs* Konstanz, Hartung-Gorre Verlag, 2000, p. 109n.

<sup>53</sup> See RFE/RL Newslines, 4 April 2002.

<sup>54</sup> “Adevărul”, 29 July 2003.

whether Iliescu might not be playing with the thought of yet another presidential mandate.<sup>55</sup>

That there was an unmistakable note of populism in the presidential interview was correct; and it was also true (though Alexe never mentioned it) that this was by no means a novel tone in Iliescu's pronouncements ahead of election times.<sup>56</sup> Yet Alexe himself has a well-established reputation of being a far more emphatic Holocaust denier than Iliescu is ever likely to become.<sup>57</sup> No matter how valid the points made, the affair had thus turned into one in which Iliescu's critics on the domestic scene were taking turns at bashing the president for their own political agenda and/or for the purpose of attempting to "correct" (most likely in the eyes of Western observers of the Romanian political scene) their own, by far more tarnished, previous Holocaust denying postures. It is not the validity of the arguments that should be questioned, then, but the objective pursued by some of those making them.

As for the arguments, their credibility was enhanced by additional signals pointing to the intention of the PSD and of Iliescu personally to renew their courtship of the extreme nationalist vote. In July the PSD had "absorbed" into its ranks two left-wing extreme nationalist formations. One was a splinter-party that left the PRM in 2001, calling itself the Socialist Party of National Revival. The other was the Socialist Labor Party (PSM), established by former Ceaușescu Premier Ilie Verdeț and, like the PRM, a former ally of the ruling party between 1992-1994, when it was still represented in parliament.<sup>58</sup> Former PSM First Deputy Chairman Adrian Păunescu, who alongside Tudor was a Ceaușescu court poet, had switched to the PSD and had been elected a senator on its lists in the 2000 elections. He was one of the open opponents of Ordinance 31/2002 in the PSD ranks, being a notorious admirer of Marshal Antonescu.<sup>59</sup> Yet in July 2003, one week before the interview with *Ha'aretz* would appear, Iliescu conferred on Păunescu a high state order on his 60th birthday, for the poet's "prodigious publicistic activity and sustained promotion of culture through the dissemination of the noble Romanian sentiment".<sup>60</sup> Finally, Iliescu also signaled that he would be ready to pardon Miron Cozma, the leader of the miners who rampaged Bucharest on several occasions in 1990-1991 and apparently attempted a coup in 1999 with the backing of the PRM, whose deputy-chairman he had been at one point.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>55</sup> "România liberă", 6 August 2003.

<sup>56</sup> See Shafir, *Varieties of Antisemitism* for the Iliescu interview with the daily "Adevărul" of 12 October 1999, ahead of the 2000 elections. On Iliescu's and PSD's populism see also Adrian Cioflâncă, *Tentații neopopuliste în Europa de Est*, in Alexandru Zub, Adrian Cioflâncă (eds.), *Globalism și dileme identitare: Perspective românești*, Iași, Academia Română, Institutul de Istorie "A.D. Xenopol" Iași, Editura Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza," 2002, p. 192-206. The main reference to post-communist populism is Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation*. See also Cas Mudde, *Populism in Eastern Europe*, in RFE/RL "East European Perspectives", Vol. 2, Nos. 5 and 6, 2000, [www.rferl.org/eeepreport/](http://www.rferl.org/eeepreport/) and the round table published in "East European Politics and Society", Vol. 15, No.1, 2001, p. 10- 63, especially the contributions by Tismăneanu, Mudde and Ilya Prizel.

<sup>57</sup> See Shafir, *Între negare și trivializare*, p. 75-76.

<sup>58</sup> See RFE/RL Newslines, 8 July 2003.

<sup>59</sup> For Păunescu's record on Antonescu and his previous criticism of Iliescu on this account see Shafir, *Marshal Antonescu's Postcommunist Rehabilitation*, p. 388-390; *Între negare și trivializare*, p. 80-81, 110, and *Memory, Memorials and Membership*, forthcoming.

<sup>60</sup> Mediafax, 18 July 2003.

<sup>61</sup> See Gabriel Andreescu, *Extremismul de dreapta în România*, Cluj, Centrul de resurse pentru diversitate etnoculturală, 2003, p. 33-34. Attempting to escape responsibility for its role in the miners' 1999 events, the PRM expelled Cozma from its ranks for "bringing the party into disrepute". See RFE/RL Newslines, 29 January 1999. On Iliescu's statement that he was ready to consider a pardon for Cozma sentenced to 18 year in prison for his role in the 1991 descent on Bucharest that brought down the Petre Roman government see RFE/RL Newslines, 21 July 2003.

### 3b. A False Deconstructionist Choice: Between Ignorance and Dissimulation

It has been suggested by several Romanian critics of the June-July Holocaust denying postures that the explanation may rest in “stupidity,” or the marks of “old age” beginning to leave their trace on political judgment.<sup>62</sup> This makes little sense. Iliescu is in his early seventies, and he remains Romania's most versatile politician by far. Stupidity is the last excuse that could be made on his behalf. Besides, no member of the Adrian Năstase cabinet team is anywhere close to “old age”, and the scandals were triggered by the government's “no Holocaust on Romanian territory” pronouncement.

Of far greater relevance is the argument that these pronouncements were primarily due to ignorance, rather than ill-will. It has been explained that both Iliescu and the members of the Năstase cabinet belong to generations that are simply unaware of what the Holocaust has been all about and of Romania's role in its perpetration. During the early August debate on the Holocaust and the media in Romania, for example, young historian Adrian Cioroianu described Iliescu as “the victim of the generation to which he belongs and the victim of [his] counselors”. Cioroianu said that he does not “believe that Iliescu is an antisemite, and neither does he lack sensibility vis-a-vis the Jewish problem”. However, he added, “Iliescu belongs to a generation that does not know how to speak about this. He possesses neither the knowledge, nor the appropriate [political] discourse. On top, these aspects were aggravated by electoral interests as well”.<sup>63</sup>

There is certainly a lot to speak in favor of this perspective. As a young communist, Iliescu had been educated in a system that started by presenting the victims of the Holocaust as having been “progressive fighters for freedom” rather than Jews, went on to ignore the Holocaust altogether, and ended in indulging into “deflective negationism”.<sup>64</sup> Towards the end of the Nicolae Ceaușescu regime in Romania, history in general was taught in hilarious patriotic tones and was employing utterly distorted conceptual misconstructions. Those are far from having vanished with the regime. Among would-be history students, whose university entry examinations he must read in his capacity as university lecturer ignorance is quite incredible, as Cioroianu showed in a recent book. Hand-in-hand with it, he writes, the aspiring students write their tests under the presumption that they can “implicitly count on an implied nationalism and on an apriori xenophobia” on the part of the person who would mark them. The assumption, in turn, is a reflection of the “hypocrisy of public discourse (according to which a kike is that Jew who just left the room)”. In other words, he adds, the examiner “is being winked at, as if signaling: ‘now that we are between ourselves, we know what the truth is, regardless what others may say and regardless of what we might be obliged to say officially.’”<sup>65</sup>

Which category do Romania's post-communist leaders belong to? Are they the victims of ignorance or are they its perpetrators? The question is most likely wrong. They are both. It is not that historical research and data concerning Romania's role in the Holocaust are missing. The FCER's Center for the Study of the History of Jews in

<sup>62</sup> See, for example, the editorials by journalists Cornel Nistorescu, “Evenimentul zilei”, 28 July 2003 and Petre Mihai Băcanu, “România liberă”, 1 August 2003. For a counter-argument, see the editorial by Călin Nicolescu in “Jurnalul național”, 30 July 2003.

<sup>63</sup> “Curentul”, 7 August 2003.

<sup>64</sup> See the discussion in Shafir, *Between Denial and “Comparative Trivialization”*, p. 4-13 and *Între negare și trivializare*, p. 19-32.

<sup>65</sup> Adrian Cioroianu, *Focul ascuns în piatră: despre istorie, memorie și alte vanități contemporane*, Iași, Polirom, 2002, p. 207-208.

Romania has published *in Romanian* numerous tomes documenting the *Shoah* in that country.<sup>66</sup> The FCER's publishing House Hasefer has also translated many works on the history of the Holocaust in general and of the Holocaust in Romania in particular. Other publishers have also printed relevant works. These books are either altogether ignored or are distortedly presented in book-reviews addressed to a public anyhow reluctant to read them, and certainly too poor to purchase them. More significant, the curriculum of history teaching in Romanian schools is either ignoring the subject altogether or presenting it in a distorted manner, exculpating Romania's wartime leaders of any responsibility for the Holocaust's perpetration when not presenting them as saviors of local and even foreign Jews.<sup>67</sup> Attempts to tackle the subject from a different perspective during a short-lived possibility granted to history teachers to choose among "alternative text-books" met with criticism (including the call to have those books "burned in public squares" by a Romanian PSD senator and film director who specialized in Ceaușescu-time history-manipulation and who produced in 1994 a motion picture whose hero was Marshal Antonescu<sup>68</sup>). That Romania's post-communist elites share the general public's ignorance on the Holocaust there can be little doubt. As Cioroianu explained during the debate on the Holocaust's treatment in the media, "[T]he problem is that Romanians appear largely indifferent to their wartime past, or else unable to come to terms with this unpleasant chapter in the country's history". Cioroianu was also quite accurate in observing that due to the Ceaușescu national communist legacy, Romania is lagging behind other former communist countries in attempts to come to terms with the Holocaust legacy.<sup>69</sup>

But Iliescu, Năstase and those close to them (no less than the members of the rightist counter-elite that governed Romania between 1996-2000) are to the same extent perpetrators of ignorance. For they "wink at" Romanian public opinion, using one political discourse for domestic, and a different one for foreign consumption.<sup>70</sup> One simply cannot engage in that performance out of ignorance. Culture and Cults Minister Răzvan Theodorescu, who, as shall be discussed below, played a crucial role in the June scandal, is himself a historian and a member of the Romanian Academy. Iliescu's close

<sup>66</sup> See Federația Comunităților Evreiești din România, *Evreii din România între anii 1940-1944: legislația antievreiască*, vol. I, Bucharest, Hasefer, 1993; *Evreii din România între anii 1940-1944: problema evreiască în stenogramele Consiliului de Miniștri*, vol. II, Bucharest, Hasefer, 1996; *Evreii din România între anii 1940-1944: 1940-1942: Perioada unei mari restriști*, vol. III, Part I and II, Bucharest, Hasefer, 1997; *Evreii din România între anii 1940-1944: 1943-1944: Bilanțul tragediei – renașterea speranței*, vol. IV, Bucharest, Hasefer, 1998. See also Federația Comunităților Evreiești din România, *Izvoare și mărturii referitoare la evreii din România*, 2 vls., Bucharest, Hasefer, 1999; Idem, *Centrul pentru Studiarea Istoriei Evreilor din România, 1941: Dureoasa fracturare a unei lungi conviețuiri*, Bucharest, C.S.I.E.R., 2001, and Lya Benjamin, *Prigoană și rezistență în istoria evreilor din România 1940-1944*, Bucharest, Hasefer, 2001.

<sup>67</sup> See Felicia Waldman's excellent *Reflectarea "problemei evreiești" și a Holocaustului în manualele școlare românești (1998-2000)*, in *Identitatea evreiască și antisemitismul în Europa centrală și de sud-est*, Bucharest, Goethe Institut Inter nations and Editura META, 2003, p. 269-288. As historian Lya Benjamin pointed out at the debate on the Holocaust and the media in Romania (see *supra*), while the Holocaust in Europe is well-covered in courses taught in the eleventh grade, when students advance to the 12th grade, where they study Romanian history, the Holocaust is not mentioned at all. See Mediafax, 6 August 2003.

<sup>68</sup> It must, however, be specified that the treatment of the Holocaust was by no means the only "unpatriotic" aspect leading to the call to burn the "alternative textbooks." See Cioroianu, *Focul ascuns în piatră*, p. 43-44, 47-49, and Dan Pavel, *The Textbooks Scandal and Rewriting History in Romania: Letter from Bucharest*, in "East European Politics and Societies", vol. 15, No.1, 2001, p. 179-189. On Nicolaescu's motion picture "Oglinda" see Shafir, *Marshal Antonescu's Postcommunist Rehabilitation*, p. 354.

<sup>69</sup> See *Holocaust Memories Dim in Romania*, in "Divers", No. 66, 18 August 2003, [www.divers.ro](http://www.divers.ro)

<sup>70</sup> See Shafir, *Între negare și trivializare*, p. 100, and *Memory, Memorials and Membership*, forthcoming.

counselor is historian Ioan Scurtu, who is also director of one of Romania's most prestigious history institutes—the Bucharest-based Nicolae Iorga Institute. But many Romanian historians cultivate that tacit note Cioroianu was writing about when describing the would-be students' entrance tests. As Iași-based journalist Florea Ioncioaia observed, Theodorescu and Scurtu are not far distanced from historians such as Gheorghe Buzatu and those circles of Romanian historians “known for their adherence to totalitarian political culture”.<sup>71</sup> When the Romanian Academy's history section is headed by Dan Berindei, a Holocaust-denier blackmailed (on account of his youth-membership in the Iron Guard) into becoming an informer of the dreaded Securitate and a Ceaușescu propagandist abroad, and when Iliescu comes out in praise of the Academy's national-communist old-new version of the *History of Romania*, is the president mislead or is he misleading?<sup>72</sup>

The dilemma of opting between ignorance and mischief is a false dilemma. Ignorance is prompted by a lack of information. *Opting* for being misinformed is not ignorance, but self-defense. However, *manipulating* information and employing it for purposes that are at odds with one another is neither ignorant nor self-defensive. It is simply to engage in cheating.<sup>73</sup> This “cleverer than thou” propensity—which ordinary Romanians call *șmecherie* (swindle) seems to have powerfully re-emerged once NATO membership has been put behind, with Romania having proved its allegiance to the North Atlantic Alliance during the Iraqi war. With the approaching electoral contest, the PSD and Iliescu were wary of alienating the nationalist segment of the electorate. They could not possibly go back on promises made to the West and materialized in Ordinance 31/2002, but they could signal to domestic audiences – as in fact they did when the ordinance was approved – that they would attempt to minimize its impact.

The 12 June governmental announcement was the first step in that direction. By claiming that “between 1940-45 no Holocaust took place within Romania's boundaries,” the government was clearly leaving out of what it chose to define as events pertaining to the Holocaust not only anti-Jewish legislation dating back to as early as December 1937, but also the 1940 pogroms in Dorohoi and Galați; the 1941 pogroms in Bucharest and Iași; the extermination of Jews in Herța in 1941; the internment of Jews in ghettos and concentration camps in Moldavia and Muntenia and enforced labor in those regions; or the deportation to Transnistria of some 12,000 Jews from southern Bukovina (Suceava, Câmpulung, Rădăuți and Siret, of whom at least half perished) and from Dorohoi County, of suspected communists, and even of a few hundreds Jews from Bucharest itself, though most of the latter survived deportation.<sup>74</sup> It would eventually be

<sup>71</sup> “Ziarul de Iași”, 23 June 2003. On Buzatu see *infra*.

<sup>72</sup> On Berindei's past see Marius Oprea, *Banalitatea răului: O istorie a Securității în documente 1949-1989*, Iași, Polirom, 2002, p. 410-412 and “Evenimentul zilei”, 4 and 5 August 2003. See also RFE/RL Newline, 6 August 2003. During the debates on Ordinance 31/2002, Berindei stated that Romania needs no legislation against Holocaust denial, because “there has been no Holocaust in Romania. There have been some deportation to Transnistria, [Romania] was a anteroom of the Holocaust, but not [the place of the] Holocaust.” See “Jurnalul național”, 8 May 2002. On the significance of the new version of the *History of Romanians* and the responsibility of politicians towards historiography in general and the history of the Holocaust in particular see Victor Neumann, *Holocaustul și responsabilitatea intelectuală a politicianului*, in “Observator cultural”, No. 182, 20 August 2003.

<sup>73</sup> I shall, however, return to re-examine this aspect in the last part of this study.

<sup>74</sup> See Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies under the Antonescu Regime, 1940-1944*, Chicago, Ivan R. Dee, 2000, p. 3-175 and Jean Ancel, *Contribuții la istoria României*, Vol. I, Part 1, p. 65-98, 199-261, 332-372, 400-440, Part 2, p. 22-64, 230-316. On the deportation of the Bucharest Jews see also the memoirs of Sonia Palty, *Evrei, treceți Nistrul!*, Bucharest, Libra, 2000. See also the FCER protest statement in “Realitatea evreiască”, no. 189, 6-23 June 2003.



“explained” behind closed doors and in private conversations with foreign journalists<sup>75</sup> that this had been the fault of Public Information Minister Vasile Dâncu, who had allegedly left out of the governmental announcement its second part, one that would have explained what the Romanian cabinet had in mind. Dâncu, however, flatly denied this version, insisting that his staff had just disseminated the governmental communiqué as handed to him by the government's spokeswoman; neither he himself, nor the staff of his ministry had any hand in it, he insisted.<sup>76</sup> Foreign journalists were told that Dâncu had been “punished” and had been dismissed from the government.<sup>77</sup> This, again, was a *șmecherie*. On 16 June, the cabinet underwent a long-awaited reshuffle, being trimmed from 23 to 14 ministers.<sup>78</sup> Dâncu was just one of nine ministers who lost their portfolios. But while other ministers indeed left the cabinet, Dâncu was one of those whose ministerial rank was changed to that of department head. He is now chairman of the Agency for Governmental Strategies.<sup>79</sup>

But what was the alleged second part of the press release supposed to have included? According to Culture and Cults Minister Theodorescu, that part should have explained that the 1940-1944 Romanian authorities were guilty of participation *in* the Holocaust's perpetration, but that the crimes were not committed *on* Romanian territory. There was nothing novel in the allegation, Theodorescu having made it ahead of the debates on Ordinance 31/2002.<sup>80</sup> He “explained” that in 1941 Bessarabia and Bukovina, as well as the re-annexed Herța district, had not been officially reintegrated into Romanian territory, those provinces being under a military occupation regime. It was indeed in those regions, and particularly in occupied Transnistria to which Romania has never laid claim, that most of the Jewish (Romanian and Ukrainian) and Romany victims perished, subjected to atrocities ranging from point-blank shooting to extermination through malnutrition, enforced labor and the breakout of epidemics under appalling medical conditions. Estimates range between 250,000 (Ioanid) and 420,000 (Ancel). To understand the significance of the contention, however, one must take a look at the definition of the Holocaust proposed by Romania's foremost “selective negationist”. Within the framework of the debates in the Senate's Defense and Judicial committees on Ordinance 31/2002, historian Gheorghe Buzatu, who is also deputy chairman of the PRM and a deputy chairman of the Senate, proposed that the Holocaust be defined as “*the systematic massive extermination of the Jewish population in Europe, organized by the Nazi authorities during the Second World War*”. In other words, *by definition* there has been no Holocaust in Romania, since the extermination of Jews there had not been “organized by the Nazi authorities”.<sup>81</sup> Should the plenum of the Senate approve the amendments proposed by the two committees – and should the Chamber of Deputies, whose committees have not yet debated the ordinance also heed them – the government's emergency ordinance would be emptied of relevance.

But to a certain extent, Theodorescu's “reading” of the Romanian Holocaust is even more perverse than Buzatu's. For if his terms are accepted, Nazi Germany might have claimed that its crimes are not genocidal either. After all, only a few camps had

<sup>75</sup> See the account by FCER parliamentary deputy Dorel Dorian at a meeting in Haifa, Israel, with Israelis of Romanian origin in the Internet Romanian-language daily “Bună dimineața, Israel!”, 29 June 2003.

<sup>76</sup> “România liberă” and “Evenimentul zilei”, 17 June 2003; “Adevărul”, 19 June 2003.

<sup>77</sup> Personal inquiry by Israeli journalist to the author.

<sup>78</sup> See RFE/RL Newslines, 17 June 2003.

<sup>79</sup> See “Cotidianul”, 25 August 2003.

<sup>80</sup> For details see Shafir, *Între negare și trivializare*, p.102, and “Memory, Memorials and Membership,” forthcoming.

<sup>81</sup> Mediafax, 5 June 2002. Emphasis mine.

been on German territory proper, and none of those was in the category defined by the most authoritative Holocaust historian, Raul Hilberg, as “extermination centers” (*Vernichtungszentren*).<sup>82</sup> Second, the war alongside the Nazi allies had been launched by Romania to liberate Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, which had been forcefully annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940. Thousands of Jews were exterminated as the Romanian troops marched back into those lands. Were those territories Romanian or not?

Theodorescu, a former chairman of the Israel-Romania Friendship Association, is no negationist. As a historian, he knows Buzatu's definition is absurd. Yet as a politician representing his party's interests, he “winks” (to use again Cioroianu's metaphor) at the Romanian electorate, providing a referential framework he hopes would appease Western demands that Romania meet its responsibility in coping with its past, all while fending that responsibility off the ears of domestic audiences. For, as former Foreign Minister Adrian Severin (a marginalized member of the PSD) pointed out, the Holocaust cannot be perceived in terms of “territoriality”, since universal human norms are never “territorial”. Severin might have been correct in concluding that what the government's press release of 12 June did was not to call in question the Holocaust, but rather the “seriousness, profundity and professionalism of political leaders on the banks of River Dâmbovița”.<sup>83</sup>

One can therefore agree with the journalist Ovidiu Nahoi, who called the government's 12 June communiqué a display of “jugglery... aimed to attract the supporters of the PRM on the side of the government and of the ruling party,” while at the same time reflecting “the famous Romanian political inconsistency... [of] playing for both teams and speaking two languages at the same time”. The Romanian rulers, Nahoi noted ironically “proved to be really courageous: until NATO accession became a fact, they were all admitting the existence of the Holocaust, they were all more than willing to collaborate with the Holocaust Museum in Washington and to ban by law any manifestation, inscription or monument having anything to do with Antonescu”. However, “[O]nce the Americans ratified NATO's entry, there was no more Holocaust on Romanian territory!”<sup>84</sup> Precisely the same censure would be directed at Bucharest by Ioanid. The “explanations” provided by Theodorescu, Ioanid said in an interview with the BBC, were a display of “duplicity”. In the months ahead of NATO's Prague summit, he said, one did not hear such statements; the opposite was heard whenever Năstase and Iliescu were speaking up. “We would not agree to play the game of having Bessarabia and Bukovina belong to Romania when they like it, but not belonging to it when it comes to the Holocaust – not to mention Transnistria, which was under Romanian jurisdiction”.<sup>85</sup>

The conclusion, then, was singularly simple: the “change” of hearts on the eve of NATO accession, embodied as it were in Ordinance 31/2002, had been simulated. The “simulated change” and the “change to change” were no display of ignorance, but the shipment of radically different “goods” at radically different times to radically different clienteles. In a book published many years ago I was pointing out that Ceaușescu's Romania was employing a policy of simulated reformism at home and of a “simulated presence” in the Warsaw Pact.<sup>86</sup> On the eve<sup>87</sup> of Romania's accession to NATO it

<sup>82</sup> See Raul Hilberg, *Die Vernichtung der europäischen Juden*, Frankfurt am Main, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1994, Band 2, p. 956.

<sup>83</sup> “Ziua”, 18 June 2003.

<sup>84</sup> “Evenimentul zilei”, 17 June 2003.

<sup>85</sup> “Cotidianul”, 18 June 2003.

<sup>86</sup> Michael Shafir, *Romania: Politics, Economics and Society. Political Stagnation and Simulated Change*, London, Frances Pinter, 1985.

<sup>87</sup> The accession treaty must yet be approved by several parliaments of NATO's current members.

would be too early to speak of a simulated presence in the Atlantic Alliance. Eagerness to ensure accession has turned Romania into a leading contributor to NATO-led international military (or “peace-keeping” as they are oddly called) missions. But is it too early to speak of a simulated presence into the organization's democratic values?

### 3c. Deconstructing the Trivialization Misconstruction

By “comparative trivialization” of the Holocaust I understand the willful distortion of the record and the significance of the Holocaust, either through the “humanization” of its local record in comparison with atrocities committed by the Nazis, or through comparing the record of the Holocaust itself with experiences of massive sufferings endured by local populations or by mankind at large at one point or another in recorded history.<sup>88</sup> As I pointed out above, Iliescu's interview with *Ha'aretz* indulged into both deflective negationism and into denial by comparative trivialization.

In stating that “the Holocaust was not unique to the Jewish population in Europe. Many others, including Poles, died in the same way”, Iliescu, as Andrei Cornea<sup>89</sup> would eventually observe, was embracing the postures of his adversaries on the political right (and particularly the radical right), who repeatedly accused Jews of an attempt to “monopolize suffering”. In Marxist-like manner, I would add, the president was setting the record of World War II “on its feet,” as it were. This dialectical game was by no means novel among those who share communist roots. Right after the war, the Soviet authorities had vetoed the distribution of the famous (to some, *infamous*<sup>90</sup>) *Black Book* by Ilya Ehrenburg and Vassily Grossman, precisely because (according to Agitprop head G. Alexandrov), the tome reflected “[t]he idea that the Germans murdered and plundered Jews only”.<sup>91</sup> For propagandistic purposes, however, what was *unkosher* for Soviet eyes was deemed suitable for distribution among Western readers. Obviously, for a dogmatic Marxist like Alexandrov, who was Andrei Zhdanov's man in the Soviet *aparatus* at that time, annihilation prompted by racial struggle made no sense whatever and the Nazi's war could have been driven only by class-struggle motivations. Throughout Soviet-dominated East-Central Europe, this perception of the Holocaust was reflected for many years to come, including the Auschwitz memorial, where Jews (*zydi*) were listed last in a “democratic” alphabetical order of “progressive”<sup>92</sup> nationals from different countries who had perished in that extermination center.<sup>93</sup>

How close Iliescu was to his staunchest political adversaries is demonstrated by the fact that he chose to insist on Poles as an illustration of “other victims”. This is

<sup>88</sup> Shafir, *Between Denial and “Comparative Trivialization”*, p. 60.

<sup>89</sup> Cornea, *Iliescu negaționist?*

<sup>90</sup> See Paul Goma, *Basarabia*, Bucharest, Editura Jurnalul literar, 2002, p. 136-140.

<sup>91</sup> Cited in Zvi Gitelman, *Politics and the Historiography of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, in Zvi Gitelman (ed.), *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1997, p. 19. See also Shafir, *Despre ignoranță, memorie selectivă și Holocaust*, in “Dilema”, No. 519, 7-13 March 2003.

<sup>92</sup> In Hungary, for example, “World War II was officially remembered as the era when ‘communists and other progressive elements’ had struggled heroically against, or became victims of, ‘Hitlerite and Horthyate fascism.’ Somehow there seemed to have been no Jews among these heroes and victims; instead, all were ‘anti-fascist Hungarians.’” István Deák, *Anti-Semitism and the Treatment of the Holocaust in Hungary*, in Randolph L. Braham (ed.), *Anti-Semitism and the Treatment of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Eastern Europe*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 111.

<sup>93</sup> Michael C. Steinlauf, *Poland*, in David S. Wyman (ed.), Charles H. Rosenzweig, Project Director, *The World Reacts to the Holocaust*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, p. 117-118.

precisely what Paul Goma, the most courageous anti-Communist dissident under Ceaușescu and an uncompromising critic of the post-communist Romanian political landscape, did from his Paris exile. Having (alas!) joined that category of Holocaust deniers who place the blame for the Holocaust on the Jews themselves, Goma would complain that “for the last half-century”, the Jews “monopolized the Word, monopolized suffering: for them, there is just one genocide in History, that genocide whose victims were they themselves and they do not accept that in Nazi camps perished Gypsies and Slavs, in general, and, in particular, Poles *starting with September 1939*”.<sup>94</sup>

In his response to Iliescu's letter, President Katzav went to the core of the “comparative trivialization” dimension, writing that:

“Many citizens of European countries were killed during the Second World War. The Nazi regime acted brutally toward many nations, but only the Jews<sup>95</sup> were persecuted and massacred because of their origin and because of the morbid ideology called “Racist Theory”. Not all the victims of the war were Jews, but all Jews were victims. This must be remembered. The Nazi genocidal plan was directed only at the Jewish people and the Nazis used the terrible expression “Final Solution” [only] for the annihilation of the Jewish people. The Holocaust is a dark chapter in European and mankind's history. Denying the Holocaust, reducing [its significance] or the attempt to compare it with other tragic events is in contradiction with historic truth and a serious offense at the address of victims, of the legacy of the Holocaust and endangers the struggle against racism, xenophobia and antisemitism. Depicting Europe as a whole as a wartime arena of assassinations shrinks the historical responsibility for the terrible occurrence whose significance must be faced by all European nations, Romania included.”<sup>96</sup>

The significance of the Romanian president's comparative trivialization did not escape the attention of local observers. Journalist Dan Tapalagă went as far as to compare Iliescu with Holocaust-denier Roger Garaudy, noting that they share a common communist past and the joint denial of the uniqueness of the Holocaust. But while Garaudy had been sentenced for his claims and his Holocaust-denying books had been banned, Tapalagă wrote, in Iliescu's Romania “Garaudy's books are on display at bookstands side by side with Iron Guardist books and nothing happens to their publishers”.<sup>97</sup> Historian Adrian Cioflâncă ventured the opinion that Iliescu was giving vent to “a widespread [Holocaust]-minimizing attitude”. It is not a “monopoly over suffering” that Jews are demanding, he wrote, but a recognition of the fact that Nazi ideology left no room whatever for any Jew to seek salvation by converting into a Nazi

<sup>94</sup> Paul Goma, *Basarabia și “problema”* (II), in “Vatra”, no. 5-6, 2002, p. 38. Emphasis in original, word and history capitalized in original. On Goma's Holocaust-denying postures see also Radu Ioanid, *Paul Goma între Bellville și București*, in “Observator cultural”, no. 177, 15-21 July 2003.

<sup>95</sup> The unfortunate omission of the Roma by Katzav is unacceptable and unwittingly provides munition to the partisans of “monopolization of suffering”. Some historians claim that the Nazis and their allies made a distinction between nomadic and sedentary Roma, slating only the former to annihilation and on these grounds rule out comparability. Since the distinction has never been applied in practice, it seems to me that it is an irrelevant one. For the Romany Holocaust (*Porrajmos*) in Romania see Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, p. 225-237; Viorel Achim, *Țigani în istoria României*, Bucharest, Editura Enciclopedică, 1998, p. 141-143 and *passim* and *Die Deportation der Roma nach Transnistrien*, in Mariana Hausleitner, Brigitte Mihok, Juliane Wetzel, *Rumänien und der Holocaust: Zu den Massenverbrechen in Transnistrien 1941-1944*, Berlin, Metropol, 2001, p. 101-111; Lucian Nastasă, *Studiu introductiv*, in Lucian Nastasă, Andrei Varga (eds.), *Țigani din România (1919-1944)*, Cluj, Centrul de resurse pentru diversitate etnoculturală, 2001, p. 9-24 and the relevant documents and annexes in this volume.

<sup>96</sup> Mediafax, 30 July 2003. See also RFE/RL Newslines, 31 July 2003.

<sup>97</sup> “Evenimentul zilei”, 30 July 2003.

«New Man». Herein lies the difference between Nazism and communism, for “the aim of Nazi terror was extermination, not conversion; it was not aimed at individuals, but was relentlessly focused at a wholesale category of mankind”.<sup>98</sup> Likewise, Cornea noted that “[T]he Poles, the Czechs, the French had not «died in the same way» in World War II, even if they were interned by the Germans in camps or tortured. They died fighting on the front-line or were exterminated because they resisted or because they opposed Nazi occupation (sometimes with arms in their hands, as in the Polish insurrection). They were not gassed en masse as *Poles, Czechs or French* for belonging (be it only through one out of four grandparents) to a «race» considered by definition to be unfit to exist, *regardless of the deeds or merits of the individuals making it up*. In the case of the Poles, the Czechs, the French, there was no «Final Solution», no systematic, deliberate, complete extermination plan embracing the population singled out for that purpose—man, women, children, converted Jews [side by side with] pious or assimilated Jews.”<sup>99</sup>

Cornea quite rightly insisted also on the fact that the reference to Iliescu’s father as having suffered like a Jew during the war and having died as a result shortly after, was another instance of “trivialization” by comparison. Romania’s communists, he wrote (and Cornea’s own father had been one of them), were treated by the Antonescu regime as “‘normal’ political prisoners in a state of military dictatorship involved in war against the USSR”. The regime had neither forced them into “death trains” moving them on rail tracks until they suffocated or were forced to drink their own urine, as it happened in the wake of the 1941 Iași pogrom, nor did it deport their bulk to Transnistria. “That Antonescu massacred the Jews under the *pretext* of being communists is one thing, and it is another thing that those interned for genuine anti-communist conspiracy were not massacred at all, returning home [at the end of the war],” he noted.<sup>100</sup>

Indeed, as historian Șerban Radulescu-Zoner would also observe, the “deportations to extermination camps in Transnistria had been carried out *on purely ethnic criteria*, without any previous sentencing. On the other hand, the several dozens of communists (the so-called anti-fascists) had been sentenced as Moscow agents, respectively as agents of the NKVD or the Kommintern... and had the status of political prisoners (visits by relatives, food parcels, newspapers, books, and the right to refuse work)”. The Târgu-Jiu internment camp where Iliescu’s father had been detained, Rădulescu-Zoner noted, was under no stretch of imagination a facility “where detention would be based on ethnic criteria, where a Holocaust-like extermination would be carried out, as was the case of Transnistria”. The communists interned there, he wrote ironically, “had been so badly treated” that once the front-line neared Romania’s borders, “they all got out safe-and-sound and healthy and, with the help of the Soviet troops, imposed the ‘red terror’, proceeding to set up extermination camps themselves”.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, it was from Târgu-Jiu that Romania’s future communist leader, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, would escape on the eve of the coup against Antonescu (one in which, incidentally, he played no role whatever). And, as one of the inmate-colleagues of Romania’s both future communist leaders (Dej and Ceaușescu) testifies in his memoirs, communists interned in Antonescu’s prisons enjoyed preferential treatment and could engage in such activities as commerce, the profits of which were divided between prisoners and jailers. This was a far cry from what Jews and Roma deported to

<sup>98</sup> “Ziarul de Iași”, 31 July 2003.

<sup>99</sup> Cornea, *Iliescu negaționist?*. Emphasis author’s. I feel honored that Cornea, Cioflâncă and Pavel cited my work in support of their arguments.

<sup>100</sup> Cornea, *Iliescu negaționist?*. Emphasis in original.

<sup>101</sup> “România liberă”, 30 July 2003. Emphasis in original.

Transnistria had to face. Furthermore, when some communists ended by being sent from Antonescu jails to Transnistria, “selection”, again, was on pure ethnic criteria.<sup>102</sup> Even Cristian Tudor Popescu (see *supra*), while remarking that he did not agree with “the idea of Holocaust uniqueness”, wrote that comparing the death of someone deceased in the wake of time “spent in a *detention* camp with the death of Jews systematically decimated in *concentration* camps” was “false”. The president’s father, Popescu explained, “was a communist out of his own free will... was engaged in dangerous politics as a prominent member of a... subversive political party directly led from Moscow, whose activity was overtly directed against the Romanian state. This was an assumed risk”. Unlike him, the Jews sent “to Auschwitz or Birkenau were people picked up on the street, with no other fault but that of having been born Jewish”.<sup>103</sup>

But Cornea insists on an additional, highly-important aspect of Iliescu’s interview with *Ha’aretz*: by placing on par communist and Jewish victims of the Holocaust, Iliescu was unwittingly inviting a resurrection of the misplaced “Holocaust vs. Gulag competition”.<sup>104</sup> For, as Cornea pointed out, if the “relatively moderate” suffering of Antonescu’s communist political prisoners was being placed on the same level as the suffering of Jews in the Holocaust, then-were it only on grounds of sheer numbers-the suffering and decimation of Gulag victims would certainly be a more legitimate comparison.<sup>105</sup> As Mircea Mihăieș, a Timișoara-based professor and journalist put it:

“The truly shocking part of Ion Iliescu’s irresponsible outburst is the negation of the Holocaust by comparing it with the suffering of underground communists. Not [by comparing the Holocaust with the suffering] of representatives of democratic parties sent to prison and exterminated by the communists, but [by comparing it] with [the suffering] of Bolsheviks in the service of a foreign power. In other words, it is Gheorghiu-Dej, who was justly sentenced for undermining state order who deserves compassion (and homage!) and not Iuliu Maniu, who died as a martyr in the Sighet prison! [The reader is invited to] compare the extermination regime of the 1950s with the internment of communist chiefs in camps where they benefited from all the rights of political prisoners, in order to grasp the colossal dimension of the ill will that animates Ion Iliescu throughout his far too long career.”<sup>106</sup>

Likewise, journalist Tia Șerbanescu – hardly one who displays compassion for Holocaust victims in Romania, but an active militant for the condemnation of communist crimes – would eventually note that Iliescu was “attempting to transform the communist henchmen into victims” and was thus guilty of “fraud”.<sup>107</sup> The Golem had turned against its maker.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>102</sup> See Pavel Câmpeanu, *Ceașescu, anii numărătorii inverse*, Iași, Polirom, 2002, p.53.

<sup>103</sup> “Adevărul”, 29 July 2003. Popescu is obviously unaware of the difference between concentration camps (which he equates with extermination centers) and detention or enforced labor camps.

<sup>104</sup> For my own position in this artificial dispute see Shafir, *Între negare și trivializare*, p. 105-132, and “*Competiția postcomunistă Holocaust versus Gulag: Obstacol insurmontabil în calea reconcilierii?*”, în “*Revista de istorie militară*”, No. 5-6, 2002, p. 8-14.

<sup>105</sup> Cornea, *Iliescu negaționist?*

<sup>106</sup> Mircea Mihăieș, *Perimetru roșu cu antisemiți*, in “*România literară*”, no. 32, 2003. This is an excellent article. I can only regret that the author carefully avoided to cite the analytical categories he employed. However, as I have repeatedly criticized the “sliding” into negationism of that publication’s director and some of its former and current regular contributors, I believe I know the reason why Mr. Mihăieș chose to omit my name.

<sup>107</sup> “*Curentul*”, 27 August 2003.

<sup>108</sup> See also Rădulescu-Zoner’s reaction in “*România liberă*”, 12 August 2003, to the rejection by a Bucharest tribunal of a lawsuit in which the ICAR Foundation, the Association of Former Political Prisoners in Romania and the Civic Alliance Movement (of which Rădulescu-Zoner is chairman) demanded that the

### 3d. Deconstructing a presidential prevarication

It would be misleading to conclude that the media as a whole rallied against the government or the president's positions. The daily *Curentul* was noting on 17 June that the cabinet had run into trouble with Jewish organizations for “rightly denying the existence of a Holocaust in Romania between 1940-1945” and on 31 July was calling Katzav's response to Iliescu's letter “a gratuitous lesson in history”. Another newspaper, the daily *Cronica română*, was dubbing *Ha'aretz*-Israel's most liberal daily – as “a gazette with a strong nationalist orientation” (the description would fit hand in glove its own makers) and was accusing Iliescu's domestic critics of “inflating” a statement that “at no point minimized the suffering of the Jewish people”.<sup>109</sup> In turn, Antonescu-apologist Ion Cristoiu claimed that Iliescu had fallen into a “trap” set up with the purpose of forcing Romania to agree to Jewish property restitution. A “banal” case of misunderstanding that could have been easily clarified at diplomatic level, Cristoiu wrote, was thus being turned into an occasion to bash Romania's president. The Israeli government, he went on to conclude, would be well-advised to ask itself if the “humiliating treatment of a state that stood by Israel in difficult times, risking its independence for Israel's survival, does not run the risk of hurting the Romanian people's sensibility”.<sup>110</sup>

With the benefit of hindsight, these appear to have been a prelude to the preparations of a presidential “counter-attack”. On 15 August, the private *Realitatea TV* channel aired excerpts from the discussion on the treatment of the Holocaust in the media (see *supra*) which had taken place ten days earlier. In support of his argument that the presidential interview with *Ha'aretz* was part of a political calculation aimed at domestic audiences, Oișteanu had pointed out that presidential interviews with foreign journalists are not spontaneous events, being rather well-prepared in advance, listing and agreeing on questions and clearing the final version of the interview ahead of publication. One week later, on 22 August, as Iliescu was visiting China, a grim-looking presidential office staff, reading a statement under the presidential seal in the name of “right of reply”, denied on *Realitatea TV* Oișteanu's assumptions and went on to accuse the social scientist of being in league with *Ha'aretz* in a conspiratorial attempt to discredit Romania's head of state. What the initial presidential reaction to criticism at home and particularly abroad had described as “distortions” and citations taken “out of context” (see *supra*) was now being turned into a well-prepared international Jewish conspiracy. Oișteanu does not know anyone on the staff of the Israeli daily.<sup>111</sup>

The same text (minus the mention of Oișteanu's name) would be released to the media by the presidential office three days later.<sup>112</sup> In it, the Israeli daily and the journalist who interviewed Iliescu were accused of having committed a “fraud”. The

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Romanian state publicly apologize for the crimes of communism, based on the precedent of the apology extended by former President Emil Constantinescu for the crimes of the Holocaust. For details on Constantinescu's apology see Shafir, *Între negare și trivlizare*, p. 120. For details on the lawsuit, see “România liberă”, 1 August 2003.

<sup>109</sup> “Cronica română”, 5 August 2003.

<sup>110</sup> “Jurnalul național”, 4 August 2003. The reference to standing-by in difficult time is probably to 1967, when Bucharest refused to follow the Warsaw Pact into breaking off diplomatic relations with Israel, but the alleged risk of losing independence due to that position is a gross exaggeration on the part of someone accusing others of blowing things out of proportion.

<sup>111</sup> Personal communication. I am grateful to Andrei Oișteanu for providing me with the text of the presidential statement, printed, once again, under the official presidential seal.

<sup>112</sup> Mediafax, 25 August 2003.

reporter who interviewed Iliescu, it was claimed, did not submit questions in advance, as is usual in such cases. Nonetheless, “out of politeness”, the president accepted to respond to questions, provided the text would be submitted to his office ahead of publication, it was further stated. However, the journalist failed to respect the pledge, “responding to goodwill with ill will”. The daily had thereby indulged into a “deplorable political provocation”. What is more, such behavior was “unlikely to contribute to the traditional friendship between the Romanian and the Israeli people”. Quite the contrary, it was likely to “boost suspicion and bring water to the mills of antisemitic elements and [encourage] antisemitic sentiments”. The communiqué also added that, as a result of the scandal, President Iliescu had received many “solidarity messages”, from Romania and from abroad, including some “whose [antisemitic] demeanor he does not share or approve of”. The editors of the daily *Ha'aretz* [and Mr. Oişteanu in the version broadcast on *Realitatea TV*] “and those entailed in the trap of a provocation stemming from obscure interests are invited to meditation over the [possible] consequences of this politicking approach,” the statement concluded.

It does not take a great connoisseur of antisemitism to observe that the presidential communiqué was imbued with antisemitic stereotyping. First, the international conspiracy assumption, then the implication that the Jews themselves are guilty of creating and inflating antisemitism, and finally the use of terminology derived from the political discourse of the Iron Guard – though stopping one step short of it: indeed, whereas the Legionnaires used to speak of the “international occult”, the presidential communiqué “merely” spoke of “obscure interests”. There was also in it an implied threat, and, almost unavoidably so, the implied “I am not an antisemite but...”. Does that make Iliescu into an antisemite? No, not necessarily so. But it does make him into a “victim of his counselors” and assuming that the statement had been cleared with the president before it was released – it certainly shows him oblivious to antisemitic nuances; and as Cioroianu noted (see *supra*), it reveals a head of state lacking the sensitivity and the political discourse suited for coping with these matters. We shall yet dwell on the reasons.

What is more, Iliescu was consciously inventing a scenario. On the very next day of the presidential communiqué, the daily *Evenimentul zilei* printed a transcript of the controversial parts of Iliescu's 25 July interview, publishing them under the headline “At the Age of 73, Iliescu Is Lying!” The daily said it had received the tapes from Israeli correspondent Grig Davidovitz, who had interviewed the president, and went on to place the tapes of the filmed interview on its real-audio web page ([www.evenimentulzilei.ro](http://www.evenimentulzilei.ro)).<sup>113</sup> Davidovitz himself told *Evenimentul zilei* that he and *Ha'aretz* are “100 percent” abiding by the rules of professional journalism. He also denied there had been an agreement to have the interview cleared prior to publication. It was true, he added, that Iliescu made that request after the interview ended, but week-long attempts to reach presidential spokeswoman Corina Creţu in order to satisfy the request had ended in failure. If anything, the transcripts published on 26 August in *Evenimentul zilei* show that Davidovitz softened the 25 July controversial presidential statements, rather than exacerbating them or taking them out of context. In turn, *Ha'aretz*'s editorial board described the “fraud” allegation as “ridiculous and baseless”. It added that the paper had “published his exact words,” and that Iliescu had been “firm

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<sup>113</sup> “Evenimentul zilei”, 27 and 28 August 2003; “România liberă”, 28 August 2003; see also RFE/RL Newswire, 27, 28 and 29 August 2003.



and consistent” in his comments about “the Holocaust and the Jewish tragedy”. And it then noted that it was “[m]ystifying that the president chose to wait for a full month after the interview was published in *Ha'aretz* before issuing a statement refuting it”.<sup>114</sup>

Any guess is as good as other as to why Iliescu chose to do so. The daily *Curentul* thought to have found the answer in the intention of Democratic Party Deputy Chairman Emil Boc to launch procedure for Iliescu's “suspension from office” on grounds of his having infringed on the provisions of Ordinance 31/2002.<sup>115</sup> As nothing in that party's record shows the Democrats being either very democratic or much of a party, the explanation was tempting: the Democrats could be seeking to build abroad the political capital they are lacking at home. This would explain Iliescu's outburst against “politicking”. But the explanation collapses when realizing that the text of the presidential communiqué had first been aired on *Realitatea TV* on 22 August, while Boc announced the possible initiative on 24 August!<sup>116</sup>

If anyone was “politicking,” then, it was Iliescu himself. In so doing, he had overstepped the boundaries of “mere” utilitarian antisemitism. That he was courting a certain segment of the Romanian electorate, that he was “winking” once more at that segment, and that in so doing he did not hesitate to prevaricate is beyond dispute. What is disputable, however, is to what extent Iliescu, and other Romanian politicians is/are aware of the implications of his/their political behavior and whence that behavior could be deriving from.

#### 4. Reconstructing Motivation: Holocaust Denial as a Function of Shame-Culture

Memory is always a function of “group”, the French social scientist Maurice Halbwachs argued. Whether this is singularly so is more than questionable. It is not my intention to engage in this debate - one that would take us far beyond the limited scope of this study. However, Halbwachs' distinction between individual, historic and collective memory, and his insistence that all three are a function of group<sup>117</sup> may serve the purpose of providing not a *different*, but an *additional* analytical perspective than the one thus far used. In stating that utilitarian antisemitism is at work in Romania, or that President Iliescu's pronouncements reflect both deflecting and trivializing facets of Holocaust denial, we have achieved little more than a hopefully heuristic taxonomy. We might know (or believe to know) what Iliescu and the PSD are after (the electorate), but we have still not explained either what would make them choose this particular strategy, nor why would they believe the strategy stands a good chance to strike a responsive chord in the electorate. To put it differently – we might know the “ends”, we might have discovered the “hows,” but we do not know the “whys”. Halbwachs' distinctions may help for this latter purpose.

Let us first note that all three dimensions are part of a socialization process. According to Halbwachs, the first corner stones of memory are being laid in childhood. What individuals “remember” is how to read the past and the present through the

<sup>114</sup> “Ha'aretz”, 27 August 2003.

<sup>115</sup> “Curentul”, 26 August 2003.

<sup>116</sup> RFE/RL Newslines, 25 August 2003.

<sup>117</sup> See Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1997. For an English-language collection of some of the sociologist's relevant works on this aspect see *On Collective Memory*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1992.

spectacles of parents, grandparents and the circle of their immediate friends. In other words, the Halbwachsian category of individual memory does not involve choice, as people cannot choose the family into which they are born or that family's immediate circle of friends. The experiences of this restricted circle would become "their" personal experience. How they relate to events occurring in their childhood is also "remembered" through the experience they undergo by being part of this restricted circle.

If this indeed is so, then President Iliescu's reference to his father who was "similarly victimized" being sent to a camp as a communist and dying one year after liberation acquires a different perspective than that of trivialization of the Holocaust. Is the drama of a 15-year old boy losing his father after having had him imprisoned comparable with the traumatic experience of survivors of a people being slated for extermination as a whole? It is certainly not – *from the perspective of the survivors*. It is far less certain that this is so from the perspective of the "boy" speaking through the mouth of the 73-year old president. Similarly, the outraged reaction of Iliescu's current political adversaries, who had seen their grandparents, parents and siblings imprisoned, tortured and exterminated by the regime Iliescu's father and the president himself helped bring about and entrench, reflects *their* childhood socialization. Is the comparative trivialization with the Holocaust they indulge into more legitimate? It certainly is so when things are judged from a quantitative perspective. After all, the Gulag made far more victims than the Holocaust did.<sup>118</sup> Survivors of the Holocaust and their descendants, however, would argue that Gulag victims were not exterminated "for the sin of being born" (which is arguable, since people were decimated in the Gulag because they happened to be born in a "social class" like the kulaks) or that (and this is less arguable) whereas theoretically one could escape decimation in the Gulag by faking or undergoing a real process of transformation into a communist "New Man", Jews had no such chance, as no Jew could become a Nazi "New Man". I see no need to repeat my own position, beyond specifying that the "Holocaust-Gulag competition" is artificial, serves neither side, and contributes to sidestepping crucial moral questions.<sup>119</sup> But this is not the point I wish to make now. Rather, I wish to emphasize (with Halbwachs) that memory is always subjective *unless...* I am perfectly aware that I have not finalized the sentence. I will do so shortly.

Collective memory, according to Halbwachs, is the sum total of experiences an individual undergoes as a member of a group larger than the family and his/her immediate circle of friends and acquaintances. Belonging to this category is not necessarily, but may become, a matter of choice. People do not choose to be born as part of one particular nation more than they choose to be born as part of a particular family. But to a large extent, they might opt for belonging to peer-groups and associations. They might not have chosen to be born in a social class, but some move from one social class into another. All these factors would impact their memory. Seen from this perspective, it is no wonder that from their respective exiles in Paris and New York, two Romanian-language writers would use a radically different magnifying glass to read the past. Goma (born 1935), would remember Antonescu as "the liberating Marshal", the "hero" who freed Bessarabia from the killers of his uncle and from those who deported his father – a teacher in a school village – and who, after his 1946

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<sup>118</sup> According to Stéphane Courtois' estimations, some 100 million can be counted as victims of communism. See his *Introduction: The Crimes of Communism*, in Courtois et al., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 4.

<sup>119</sup> See Shafir, *Între negare și trivializare*, p. 124-132.

execution, became a “martyr”.<sup>120</sup> For Norman Manea, deported to Transnistria with his family and returning from there without his maternal grandparents who perished in the Holocaust, Antonescu would be the author of his first exile at the age of five—the author of the second (at the age of 50) being Ceaușescu.<sup>121</sup>

If my reading of the French sociologist is correct, it is wrong to speak of collective memory. Rather, one should use the term of collective *memories*, which compete not only among themselves, but often enough within the same individual. When President Iliescu warns against the “skinning” (according to the tapes reproduced in *Evenimentul zilei* twice repeating the word and syllabizing *ju-pu-im* to emphasize the meanness of restitution demands), he is expressing the leftist values into which he had been socialized as part of the collective memory of the group he belonged and belongs to. He might, or might not, be aware of the fact that he is indulging into antisemitic political incitement; but quite obvious, that consideration seems to him to be of secondary importance.

Yet the opposition National Liberal Party (PNL), in its official reaction to Iliescu's interview with *Ha'aretz*, did little else when insisting only on the president's enmity to restitution, but ignoring all other (far more important) parts of the interview.<sup>122</sup> Both were representing the values of the social class with which they identify. On 23 June, PNL Senator Norica Nicolai, reacting to Israeli criticism of the government's 12 June statement, had dismissed any other motivation for that criticism but the drive to “incriminate Romania” in order to make possible large restitution demands by “influential circles with powerful capital”. There was little difference between Iliescu's 25 August warning against “occult interests” at work and Nicolai's “conspiracy theory” built on the assumption of “people outside Romania who are interested in undermining our relations with Israel” to gain access to large properties in Romania.<sup>123</sup> As it turned out, what Iliescu was worried about was restitution as such, while what worried the PNL was both non-restitution to *Romanian* claimants and Jewish competition for restitution. They otherwise saw eye to eye.

This brings us to the third component of memory-historic memory. Paul Ricœur is rightly pointing out that, while also an important part of the socialization process, historic memory is the only component of the Halbwachs triangle that is induced from outside the individual's personal experiences.<sup>124</sup> It is, so to speak, a “bridge” between individual and collective memory on one hand, and the respective society's memory on the other hand. Or it might be an obstacle to the bridging operation, whenever individual and collective memory experiences contradict historic memory. “[T]he major reference of historic memory remains the nation,” according to Ricœur, who reproduces in support Halbwachs' affirmation “generally, history starts where tradition ends”.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>120</sup> Goma, *Basarbia și “problema”*, p.43. See also Paul Goma, *Din calidor*, Bucharest, Albatros, 1990.

<sup>121</sup> See Norman Manea, *Casa melcului (Dialoguri)*, Bucharest, Hasefer, 1999, p. 91 and *Întoarcerea huliganului*, Iași, Polirom, p.68 and *passim*. See also Shafir, *The Man They Love to Hate*, p. 63. For a discussion of both Manea and Goma as exiled writers see Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu, *Exil, disidență și a “doua cultură”*, in Eva Behring (ed.), *Deutsch-Rumänisches Symposium der Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft und der Fundația Culturală Română*, München, Aus der Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft, 1999, p. 51-64 and Behring (ed.), *Rumänische Exilliteratur 1945-1989 und ihre Integration heute* (München, Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft, 1999.

<sup>122</sup> See the statement by PNL spokesman Eugen Nicolăescu, Mediafax, 27 July 2003.

<sup>123</sup> See “Evenimentul zilei – Ediția de Transilvania”, 24 June 2003.

<sup>124</sup> Paul Ricœur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2000. For the purpose of this article, I am using the Romanian translation of Ricœur's work, *Memoria, istoria, uitarea*, Timișoara, Editura Amarcord, 2001, p. 479-480.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p.482.

Learning history begins in school. When individual and collective memories socialized individuals bring to school-and learning institutions in general-come in conflict with institutionalized historic memory, cognitive dissonance is inevitable. The Romanian communist regime had well-grasped this aspect in the mid-1960s, where the roots of its national communism may be traced back to. But within a relatively short period, one lasting less than a decade, the Ceaușescu regime had moved from constructing bridges to society and its past into manipulating that past to the benefit of the “extended” presidential family.

It seems to me, however, that both Halbwachs and Ricœur miss an important aspect of this socialization process. That contradicting individual and collective memories might come into conflict with historic memory is true. However, it is no less true that historic memory might become totally subservient to individual and collective memory. This is particularly acute in societies undergoing an identity crisis, as is the case of the post-communist polities. These societies find themselves in a situation in which the “single” official history has been displaced, Not necessarily so its institutionalized representatives. We have dwelt above on the consequences. What we have not discussed, however, is the fact that in these crises situations, personal memories tend to replace historic research. While Leopold von Ranke's famous call on historians to reproduce the past “*wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*” might be unattainable, memory is subjective by definition. As Cioroianu has put it, history is uncertain, memory is always certain.<sup>126</sup>

This goes a long way to explain (*not* to excuse) not only President Iliescu's description of his father's ordeal, but also statements by respectable Romanian intellectuals situated on the center-right side of the political spectrum. PNL Senator Alexandru Paleologu, for example, is a liberal spirit and a former opponent of the Antonescu regime. Yet Paleologu had much earlier than the June-July scandals denounced Marshal Antonescu's perception as a fascist. Antonescu's rule, he wrote, was “at most” one that can be qualified as “a national regime with authoritarian features”.<sup>127</sup> This is a perfect illustration of “subjective memory,” as for the bulk of ethnic Romanians, the Antonescu regime had been indeed little else.

But it is also an illustration of the absence in Romania of “guilt-culture” and the dominance of the “shame-culture,” as cultural historian Sorin Antohi has pointed out, using the distinction first made by Ruth Benedict. This absence, Antohi writes, “[m]akes difficult tackling such subjects, since doing so would disturb triumphal anthems or introduce the theme of individual responsibility in a discourse regularly attributing Romania's tribulations to external causes. It seems to me that we are dealing here with a significant silence, with a gigantic national lapsus that makes us consider the rare tirades of some pathetic authors in search for local or individual responsibility for any public misfortune or fault as being just as many betrayals or perversions.”<sup>128</sup>

In several publications,<sup>129</sup> I have used the concept of “externalization of guilt” to describe the same propensity, but I have come to realize that on two grounds, the

<sup>126</sup> Cioroianu, *Focul ascuns în piatră*, p. 29. The chapters in this volume where these aspects are dealt with are at p. 13-79.

<sup>127</sup> Cited in Totok, *Der revisionistische Diskurs*, p. 117.

<sup>128</sup> Sorin Antohi, *Civitas imaginalis: Istorie și utopie în cultura română*, Bucharest, Litera, 1994, p. 233. Author's emphasis.

<sup>129</sup> The first dates back to 1991. See Shafir, *Anti-Semitism without Jews in Romania*, in *Report on Eastern Europe*, vol. 2, no. 26, p.20-32.

Benedict-Antohei distinction is more encompassing. First, unlike my own “externalization of guilt,” the “shame-culture” vs. “guilt-culture” dichotomy introduces motivation, not only outcome. Indeed, “shame-culture” relates to the pressure faced by individuals to abide by the rules of social conformism, thus avoiding “shame” of “loosing face” and becoming the subject of social opprobrium, particularly the opprobrium of one's own peers.<sup>130</sup> This might provide a partial explanation for the ignoring by Romanian historians of the numerous works on the Holocaust published in their country after 1990 (see *supra*). Second, Antohei's reading of “shame culture” introduces – though it does not dwell on – the further distinction between *individual* and *collective* responsibility, a distinction that is crucial for the purposes of the present discussion. I hurry to add that Antohei's points are not made in connection with the treatment of the Holocaust, being rather part of a far more generalized debate.

At this stage, it should have become obvious that my “deconstruction” has run into apparent difficulties. After all, I have concluded above that manipulating information and employing it for purposes that are at odds with one another is neither ignorant nor self-defensive, being simply an act of cheating. This has now to be amended to read as follows: “manipulating information and employing it for purposes that are at odds with one another rules out ignorance. It may, however, be an act of *cheating self-defense*”. When Iliescu said in his interview with *Ha'aretz* that “Antonescu also has his positive side”<sup>131</sup> he was not as much engaging into a defense of the wartime dictator as he was “externalizing guilt” by comparison-the referential term being horthyate Hungary. Yet he was also giving in to the pressure of “shame-culture”. After all, against the background of the approaching elections, his political adversaries were bound to remind him one way or another that he and his PSD had stepped into “guilt-culture” by admitting responsibility for Romania's wartime crimes and enacting ordinance 31/2002. It little mattered for that the admittance was issued in “double-talk”<sup>132</sup> language, for that political discourse could not be publicly outcoded due to apprehensions of Western ears. And the political foe did not include only the PRM<sup>133</sup>, but also the PNL, many of whose senators had supported the Buzatu definition of the

<sup>130</sup> Antohei, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

<sup>131</sup> “Ha'aretz”, 25 July 2003.

<sup>132</sup> For details see Shafir, *Între negare și trivializare*, p. 97-103.

<sup>133</sup> It is interesting to note that Tudor's weekly “România Mare” kept a relatively low profile on the June and July dispute, being in no need to prove to its supporters where it stood on these matters and, at the same time, trying to mend its own image in the West. Indeed, it went as far (see “România Mare”, no. 681, 1 August 2003, p. 12) as to carry a statement by Tudor on the “First 10 measures I shall be taking as Romanian president” which, at point 5 insisted that, while “there has been no Holocaust in Romania...painful and regrettable pogroms have been carried out, and we must assume our responsibility for them and to do everything humanely possible for such misfortunes to be never and nowhere repeated.” Furthermore, the aspiring president wrote, “Numerous times I wrote and spoke publicly about Jerusalem as being the heart of Judaism, a city founded 3000 years ago by King David, so that I do not understand why the Palestinians, who are not mentioned in the Bible, are also laying claim to it.” It was only after *The Jerusalem Post* attacked Iliescu (see *supra*) and mentioned the PRM's antisemitic activities, that Tudor burst out. He did not conceal his satisfaction at seeing Iliescu in trouble: “It must have been noted that up until now, I have kept silence. I am not defending him, the more so as he jumped himself into this saga by his display of an ever-duplicious behavior, and now harvests its poisoned results. I have lived so long as to see Iliescu accused of antisemitism by the Israelis, after he and his team carried out a vile campaign [against me] between the two runs of the 2000 presidential elections.” He went on to promise that if the CIA and the “Tel-Aviv” and Washington administrations would help Romania regain the Transdnier, the PRM would then accept that a Holocaust has taken place on Romanian territory as well. See *ibidem*, no. 685, 29 August 2003, [www.romare.ro/revro/curent/editor.htm](http://www.romare.ro/revro/curent/editor.htm).

Holocaust in committee debates.<sup>134</sup> The “utilitarian antisemitism” explanation provided above remains valid and in force, but must be integrated into the more general “shame-culture” vs. “guilt-culture” dichotomy.

That dichotomy also explains Iliescu's insistence in the interview on the fact that “it is impossible to accuse the Romanian people and the Romanian society” of the crimes committed by Antonescu's regime. A favorite of post-communist antisemites all over East Central Europe, this adds up to an unwarranted mixture of guilt (which, as established at the Nuremberg 1945 trials can only be individual) and collective responsibility, which belongs to the process (*not the trial*) of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. But within a “shame-culture” there can be no room for the acceptance of collective responsibility. This returns our “deconstruction” attempt straight to the above-mentioned “unless” and to Halbwachs' concept of historic memory. It is the task of intellectuals in general and of historians in particular to facilitate society's moving from a “shame-culture” into a “guilt-culture”. This is far from being an easy mission. But in the aftermath of the Holocaust, unless this task is undertaken *willingly and consciously*, Julien Benda's *trahison des clercs* becomes a *trahison des historiens*. Theodor Adorno once wrote that poetry became impossible after Auschwitz. That Paul Celan proved him wrong is far less important than is that Czeslaw Milosz showed he was mistaken.

As peers elsewhere in former Communist East Central Europe, following the collapse of communism, Romanian historians are searching for a “usable past”. It may not be entirely accidental that this concept has been forged by a political scientist, rather than by a historian.<sup>135</sup> One needs some distance from the object of one's study. To my knowledge, Jacques Rupnik, who first coined the term, has never defined it. Nor have those who employed it marching in his footsteps.<sup>136</sup> Under “usable history” I understand the search for positive past referents for the purpose of forging self-confident national identities. For as Antohi shows, post-communism entails, among other things, a crisis of national identity.<sup>137</sup> And, as Romanian historian Lucian Boia put it, “The past means legitimation and justification. Without having a past, we can be certain of nothing”.<sup>138</sup> Which past, however? I have elsewhere pointed out that the search of a “usable past” in post-communist East Central Europe involves the contradictory endeavor of having to overcome the immediate past without leaning on what preceded it, namely the authoritarian past antedating communism.<sup>139</sup> Thus far, only a few Romanian historians have dared attempt doing that, and the outcome of their efforts is far from clear.

Some, while professing to engage in the endeavor by admitting Antonescu's and his government's responsibility for the wartime atrocities, opaquely seek to deflect responsibility and to find justification for motivations. Historian Florin Constantiniu's *A Sincere History of the Romanian People* is a good illustration of “insincerity in sincerity”, as is the previously-published *Romania In the Second World War* by historian Dinu Giurescu. In the eyes of the latter author, Antonescu's rule had been of the

<sup>134</sup> For details see Shafir, *Memory, Memorials and Membership*.

<sup>135</sup> See Jacques Rupnik, *Revoluție-restaurație*, in “Lettre internationale”, Romanian edition, no. 4, 1992/1993, Winter, p.4.

<sup>136</sup> For example, see Constantin Iordachi and Balazs Trencsenyi, “In Search of a Usable Past: The Question of National Identity in Romanian Studies, 1990-2000,” in *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 17, no. 3, 2003 p. 415-453, which employs “usable history” in its title, without, however, defining it.

<sup>137</sup> See Antohi, *Exercițiul distanței: discursuri, societăți, metode*, Bucharest, Nemira, 1997, especially p. 292-316.

<sup>138</sup> Lucian Boia, *Jocul cu trecutul: istoria între adevăr și ficțiune*, Bucharest, Humanitas, 1998, p. 7.

<sup>139</sup> Shafir, *Varieties of Antisemitism*, forthcoming.

“paternalist traditionalist” type, with “strong nationalistic accents, safeguarding private property, as well as the mechanisms of a market economy, as much as those mechanisms could function in those years”. The “repressive apparatus functioned at a very moderate level, if one takes into consideration wartime conditions”. Giurescu admits, however, that there was “a single major exception: the antisemitic policy and the treatment imposed on the Jews from Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, out of whom over 108,000 died or were killed in Transnistria”. Nevertheless, he writes, Antonescu “has the merit of having saved from the final solution the life of over 300,000 Romanian Jews”.<sup>140</sup> The best response came from Boia: “The Antonescu regime exterminated just over 100,000 Romanian Jews and ‘saved’ some 300,000. Strictly arithmetical, the merit would be three times higher than the guilt. Were it not for the fact that it is no merit not to kill and it is criminal to do so”.<sup>141</sup> Like Giurescu, Constantiniu insisted that Antonescu had been “no fascist,” since he did not head a single fascist party:

“It was a dictatorial rule, which was entrenched in an ideology inspired by the traditional themes of autochthonous nationalism...The antisemitic component was not lacking either; it was vigorously expressed between 1940-1942, but would fade away and even disappear as the situation deteriorated on the eastern front and the marshal would understand that protecting Jews could be turned into a significant political capital in negotiations with the Anglo-Americans (the numbers on dead Jews are subject of controversy; at this stage, available information seems to indicate that approximately 200,000 Jews, most of them from Bessarabia, Bukovina and Transnistria, perished as a result of Romanian or Romanian-German troops' actions).”<sup>142</sup>

Constantiniu went on to note that “an analogy” could be established between Antonescu and French Marshal Philippe Pétain: both had fought against Germany in the previous world war, both had taken over power “at a moment of national tragedy,” both were persuaded that collaboration with Germany might partially improve their countries' situation, and both had used a “nationalist paternalistic discourse using as motifs: fatherland, work, family; neither had a political party of his own. Only their end was different: Marshal Pétain [was] sentenced to death, was pardoned and died in detention” whereas Antonescu was executed.<sup>143</sup> This is more than “subjective memory” at work, as is the case of Paleologu and possibly Giurescu. It is contributing to Antonescu's mythicization by transforming him into a martyr. As a staunch anti-communist, Antonescu presents a tempting referential alternative. And, as historian Andrei Pippidi—perhaps the most consistent opponent of Antonescu's rehabilitation drive among Romanian historians<sup>144</sup>—wrote, choosing between different “memories” is also a choice on different options for the future.<sup>145</sup>

It is this choice, hand in hand with the need of a “usable history” that is at the center of Antohi's attention. He speaks of the need to rid Romanian historiography of the sentiment of “stigmatic identity” by placing it in a comparative perspective that would enable it to do away with both inferiority complexes towards the West (or, as he

<sup>140</sup> Dinu Giurescu, *România în al doilea război mondial*, Bucharest, ALL Educational, 1999, p. 70, 91.

<sup>141</sup> Lucian Boia, *România: țară de frontieră*, Bucharest, Humanitas, 2001, p. 194.

<sup>142</sup> Florin Constantiniu, *O istorie sinceră a poporului român*, Bucharest, Univers enciclopedic, 1997, p. 394.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 394-395.

<sup>144</sup> I have dwelt on the importance of Pippidi's position in *Memory, Memorials and Membership*, forthcoming.

<sup>145</sup> Andrei Pippidi, *Despre statui și morminte: pentru o teorie a istoriei simbolice*, Iași, Polirom, p.78.

terms it, “cultural Bovarism”) and with the complex of Romanian mystified superiority and alleged uniqueness.<sup>146</sup> The endeavor is laudable. I am less confident about the outcome.<sup>147</sup> That outcome may well depend on “models”. This study has shown, I believe, that the “institutionalized” models of Romanian cultural historians and historians are unable to perform this task. And while non-institutionalized historians may be either aging<sup>148</sup> or must fight battles they more often lose than win,<sup>149</sup> Antohi’s own example (he teaches at the Central European University in Budapest, not at Bucharest University where he once taught) shows that the struggle is far from nearing victory.

This does not only sound pessimistic, it *is* pessimistic. Yet the jury is still out. A number of young historians such as Cioflâncă and Cioroianu demonstrated in their reactions to the June-July scandals that they are ready to “face the dragon” and speak up. Some political scientists (Dan Pavel, Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, Stelian Tanase, George Voicu) can also be counted in this category. Two examples would suffice.

Cioflâncă was noting after the government’s June “omission” that its “clarification” in the wake of the scandal “reiterated the myth of the ‘salvation of Jews’... and worriedly signaled the danger of a collective indictment of Romanians”. At which point, he added:

“As a matter of fact, the Jews and the democratic regimes do not speak of guilt in its penal sense, but about responsibility or, in Karl Jasper’s terminology, about a metaphysical guilt (which is different from both criminal and political guilt) – in other words, about that form of solidarity of human beings as species, which induces the joint responsibility of each [of us] for any injustice in the world. The memory of the Holocaust poses a great moral problem: what would I have done in that situation and what would I do in similar situations? Criminally and politically, the guilt is that of the authorities and of the political actors in the Holocaust period, as well as of the descendant Romanian state – and must therefore be officially assumed. The metaphysical guilt, responsibility, however, is ours, particularly when we refuse to sincerely respond to the moral dilemma raised by the memory of the Holocaust.”<sup>150</sup>

Pavel was pointing to the problem of failure in the search for “usable history,” noting that the problems faced by contemporary Romania were not merely a reflection of its incomplete institutional political reforms. Rather, these problems were induced by “a political culture lacking the moral dimension [needed for] comprehending the gravity of mass crimes committed by generations of politicians, whose malefic inheritance remains unaltered, be that [the inheritance] of Antonescu or the Legionnaires or [the inheritance] of the communists”. Denying or diminishing the past crimes of either the Holocaust or of the Gulag, he concluded, have forged in the present “an enormous space

<sup>146</sup> *Exercițiul distanței.*

<sup>147</sup> My doubts stem particularly from my friend Antohi’s attempt to search for a “Third Discourse,” were it only for the fact that past attempts to do so in Romania and other places have landed those indulging into them either in the camp of the extreme left or in that of the extreme right, despite initial intentions. See Sorin Antohi, and Adrian Marino, *Al treilea discurs: cultură, ideologie și politică în România. Adrian Marino în dialog cu Sorin Antohi*, Iași, Polirom, 2001.

<sup>148</sup> I am thinking of such authoritative and prestigious figures as Șerban Papacostea or Adrian Marino. On Papacostea’s position vis-a-vis the Antonescu cult see Shafir, *Marshal Antonescu’s Rehabilitation: Cui Bono?*, p.372. By Marino see in particular *Politică și cultură: pentru o nouă cultură română*, Iași, Polirom, 1996.

<sup>149</sup> The letter of resignation of Andrei Pippidi as director of the Romanian Institute for Recent History in 2003, of which this author has received a copy, is a dramatic example of the obstacles encountered by non-“established” historians in Romania.

<sup>150</sup> Cioflâncă, *Memoria duplicitară*, in “Ziarul de Iași”, 19 June 2003.



of ambiguity, turning any distinction between good and bad, right and wrong, moral and immoral, into a relative matter. An ethical and political hodge-podge”.<sup>151</sup>

### Look-Back

Our deconstructionist endeavor has come full circle. It started on a lighter note and ended in a serious one. The author would feel far better if it were the other way around. The cucumber season is over. Alas, not so the cucumber salad's ingredients. Let us recapitulate them. We have started by pointing out to “utilitarian antisemitism” as the object of the exercise. That assumption was never proven wrong. We went on to point out that once at work, utilitarian antisemitism may be accompanied by selective negationism and by a comparative trivialization of the Holocaust. We observed that a second, accompanying aspect is dissimulation or “double-talk”. While this assumption also remains valid, we had to amend our initial reading of its context, inasmuch as engaging in dissimulation might be a manifestation of “cheating self-defense”. With the third dimension of our deconstruction operation we stepped into a far more serious and at the same time actor self-defeating aspect: the comparative trivialization of the Holocaust. We have observed how, in indulging into that attempt, President Iliescu has unwittingly triggered a renewed debate over the “Holocaust vs. Gulag” debate—one that could hardly be beneficial to him. We then went on to demolish the president's maladroit attempt to deny the veracity of his own words, and observed how in so doing, Iliescu succumbed to the temptations of a political discourse involving “conspiracy theory” and deflecting the blame for antisemitism on the Jews. Having scrutinized the objects and the instruments used in the two Holocaust scandals, we had not, however, yet clarified the motivations driving their actors. Those motivations, it turned out, are to be mainly attributed to socialization processes which actors undergo from childhood to maturity, when they act in an environment in which “shame-culture” is predominant. When they do so, they are both *subjects* and *objects*, both inputting and outputting. This vicious circle may be the most serious impediment on the path of Romania's *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Otherwise, the salad may become edible.

*Prague, 1 September 2003*

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<sup>151</sup> Pavel, *Miza politică a reutilizării trecutului*, in “Ziua”, 28 July 2003.