

**THE ‘RETRIAL’ OF MARSHAL ION ANTONESCU IN POST-COMMUNIST  
ROMANIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY**

by Chiriac Bogdan

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Supervisor: Professor Constantin Iordachi

Second Reader: Professor Michael Stewart

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to examine the remarkable turnabout in the interpretation of Ion Antonescu and his authoritarian regime in Post-Communist Romanian historiography. Specifically, I intend to analyze how the present-day apologists of Ion Antonescu reopened the discussions over the trial of the major war criminals (May 1946) with the purpose of uncovering its alleged procedural errors and ‘politicization’. The real motivation behind these efforts was to shift attention away from the real content of the charges that were brought against Ion Antonescu and cast the former ruler in the role of a ‘victim’ of the Communist takeover that was ‘undeservedly’ put on trial and ‘unjustly’ sentenced to death. I argue that these attempts to lessen the magnitude of Ion Antonescu’s crimes are part of a wider rehabilitation trend that aims to transform the wartime ruler into a patriot and anti-Communist of almost mythical proportions.

**Key-words:** Ion Antonescu, political trial, historiography, manipulation of history, rehabilitation.

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V.S.L.M.

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the last decades, there has been heated debate among Romanian and Western scholars about the causes, the nature and the far-reaching consequences of Romania's participation in World War II. Marshal Ion Antonescu (1882- 1946), Romanian head of state (1940-1944) and Hitler's wartime ally played a key role in the events that shaped Romanian history between 1940-1944; as a result, much of the debate has attempted to establish the Marshal's role in the events associated with this troublesome period, especially Romania's alliance with Nazi Germany, the country's participation in the war against the Soviet Union on the side of the Axis Powers and finally, the deportation and near destruction of Jews, Roma and Innocentists.

The lasting effects of these controversial political and military decisions, coupled with the strange mixture of sympathy, fascination or repulsion with which many Romanians regard the wartime leader, may account for the massive attention that the figure of Ion Antonescu has attracted over the years. As a result, the historiographical production on this topic not only tends to reflect a partisan point of view (either sincere admiration for his patriotism and the dignified way in which he faced his death or strong disapproval for his attitude towards ethnic minorities), but has also proven particularly susceptible to political manipulation. This 'politicization' of the figure of Ion Antonescu became obvious in the last decades of the Communist rule, when the 'recovery' of the national discourse determined a remarkable turnabout in the interpretation of the World War II period and ushered in the 'semi-rehabilitation' of the former Romanian ruler.

This 'backdoor rehabilitation' pales in comparison to what happened after 1989, when the controversial career of Ion Antonescu began to receive a more sympathetic approach from Romanian and Western scholars, specialists and 'untrained' historians alike. Driven by the desire

to ‘compensate’ for the biased Communist interpretation of Marshal Antonescu and to completely rehabilitate the former dictator’s memory, they have been inclined to exaggerate his achievements, minimize his military and political errors and question the validity of the charges that were brought against him in May 1946<sup>1</sup>. This ‘revisionist’ trend has not gone unchallenged and the ensuing debate over the merits and errors of Ion Antonescu led to the crystallization of divergent historical interpretations which reflected their proponents’ political choices and cultural affiliations. To a certain extent, the dispute between the apologists and the critics of Antonescu reflected the debates on larger, topical issues, ranging from self-interested political concerns to the controversy on the proper course of development that Romania should follow.

A similar trend of rewriting the contentious history of World War II also sparked heated debates on certain controversial political and military figures that collaborated with Nazi Germany and left behind a ‘stained’ war record. Ion Antonescu suffered a similar fate as Marshal Philippe Pétain, Ferenc Szálasi and Monsignor Jozef Tiso: shortly after 1945, he was tried and condemned for ‘war crimes’, ‘crimes against peace’ and crimes against humanity’. The circumstances of the fall of the Antonescu regime, amidst national humiliation and frustration ensured that the immediate historical judgments upon him and his regime would be harsh ones.

As in the case of the above-mentioned personalities that collaborated with Nazi Germany, distance and time have tended to soften judgments on the figure of Ion Antonescu and the ideas of the ‘revisionist’ trend extended to the Antonescu regime itself. The singularity of the ‘Antonescu case’, however, lies in the strategies employed by his present-day supporters to bring about his rehabilitation. The apologists of Antonescu were not only determined to produce a

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Deletant, *Hitler’s Forgotten Ally. Ion Antonescu and His Regime: 1940-1944* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 269.

more sympathetic interpretation on Ion Antonescu and bring about his reappraisal in the history books. They also went at great length to discredit the content of the charges brought against him in 1946 and put pressure on the Romanian judiciary system to reverse his conviction as ‘war criminal’. Considering the complexity of the situation, the present study addresses the following questions: What was there about Ion Antonescu’s career and trial that made it so susceptible to politicization? What are the main arguments in favour of Ion Antonescu’s rehabilitation? What is the significance of his ‘retrial’ in the court of law? And finally, does Ion Antonescu’s rehabilitation reflect a wider trend in present-day Romanian historiography?

The aim of this study is to analyze the way in which the debates around the trial of Ion Antonescu and his close collaborators of 1946, also known as the trial of the major war criminals influenced his posthumous rehabilitation in Romanian post-Communist historiography. It does not attempt to provide a full account of the strategies and methods used to exonerate Ion Antonescu and his regime; instead, my investigation focuses on the way in which the changes in the interpretation of the major war criminals influenced the rehabilitation of the former leader and his regime. The apologists of Antonescu focused their efforts on portraying the trial of 1946 as a ‘political trial’ by pointing to its alleged procedural flaws and the interference of the Communist-dominated Groza government. They hoped that once the legality and the ‘fairness’ of trial of the major war criminals would be discredited, the substance of the accusations brought against the Marshal and his close collaborators would also be dismissed as ‘unjust’.

My analysis will start from the hypothesis that the concept of a ‘politicized’ trial was used in order to emphasize Ion Antonescu’s ‘unjust treatment’ after his fall from power in August 23, 1944. The promoters of the rehabilitation drive stressed Ion Antonescu’s strong nationalism and anti-Communism in order to cast the former dictator in the role of a ‘victim’ that was put on trial

by the Groza government as a punishment for having joined the Axis Powers in the war against the Soviet Union. I intend to analyze the way in which this oversimplification of the reasons behind Ion Antonescu's conviction, promoted by certain apologetic articles and books of questionable objectivity, influenced the 'historical' vindication of Ion Antonescu and his regime.

To a certain extent, the role played by the trial of May 1946 in shaping Ion Antonescu's image as a war criminal justifies the attention that it received in post-Communist historiography. 'The Trial of the Great National Treason', as the trial of Ion Antonescu and his close collaborators on May 1946 came to be known during Communist, had a considerable impact in shaping Ion Antonescu's image in Communist historiography<sup>2</sup>. The Communist regime used the instrument of anti-fascist propaganda in order to justify the elimination of its political and ideological enemies. As a result, 'The Trial of the Great National Treason' played a key role in conceptualizing the language of the discourse build around Ion Antonescu<sup>3</sup>, which emphasized his fascist orientation and his responsibility for 'the disaster that had befallen Romania'<sup>4</sup>.

The post-1989 debates around the 'fairness' of the trial of 1946 have been closely connected with the trend to rehabilitate the wartime dictator. First of all, the apologists of Ion Antonescu had to tackle the troublesome legacy of the Second World War before the former ruler could be officially restored to 'rightful' place in the pantheon of national heroes and serve as an alternative political model for contemporary Romanian society<sup>5</sup>. Secondly, these debates went beyond the issue of the 'unbiased' reinterpretation of the past and acquired a broader

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 245- 261.

<sup>3</sup> Vladimir Tismăneanu, 'Fascism, Anti-Semitism and Mythmaking in East Central Europe' in Rudolf Braham ed., *The Destruction of Romanian and Ukrainian Jews During the Antonescu Era* (Boulder: The Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies Graduate Center/ City University of New York and Social Science Monographs, 1997), 332.

<sup>4</sup> Lucian Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2001), 255.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Shafir, 'Marshal Antonescu's Postcommunist Rehabilitation. Cui bono?' in *The destruction of Romanian and Ukrainian Jews during the Antonescu*, ed. Rudolf L Braham (Boulder: The Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies Graduate Center/ City University of New York and Social Science Monographs, 1997), 349-410.



significance, as the the re-evaluation of the ‘Antonescu case’ and the reassessment of the ‘Trial of the Great National Betrayal’ became directly linked to political efforts. Certain anti-monarchist or nationalist groups rallied behind the figure of Ion Antonescu in order to strengthen their own legitimizing discourse and discredit their political rivals. Mihai I, the former king of Romania and the ‘historical’ parties became the target of their full-scale attacks in the early 1990s, being accused of having tacitly collaborated with the Communists in the apprehension, prosecution of Ion Antonescu.

Constraints of length will not allow me to conduct an exhaustive investigation on the entire historiographical production on Ion Antonescu’s rehabilitation. Instead, I will focus on comparing the various interpretations that were ascribed to ‘The Trial of the Great National Betrayal’ in the post-1989 Romanian historiography. By doing so, I will attempt to examine the factors that contributed to the emergence of this rehabilitation trend, the place of the ‘reassessment’ of the trial of 1946 in their overall strategy and the role played by the various ideological orientations and political motivations in obscuring or glorifying certain aspects of Ion Antonescu’s career.

## CHAPTER 1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

### *1.1. Historiographical debates on Ion Antonescu and his regime*

Before proceeding to the main section of the thesis, I will briefly examine the various interpretations on Ion Antonescu in the post-Communist Romanian historiography and the importance that was attached to the trial of May 1946. The vast majority of scholars that have been engaging in the debates surrounding Ion Antonescu's political and military career have produced an impressive, yet biased literature. They dealt with a variety of topics, ranging from the Marshal's early political career to his controversial trial of 1946<sup>6</sup>, and still the arguments on the subject are far from exhausted. Some broad frames of interpretation may, nevertheless, be distinguished among this complexity: the deconstruction of historical myths and the minimization and denial of the Holocaust in Romania.

#### **1.1.1. The deconstruction of a historical myth**

The success of Ion Antonescu's work in restoring internal order and recovering northern Bukovina and Bessarabia gave rise in his own lifetime to a simplistic interpretation that portrayed him as the 'providential' statesman correcting the 'injustice' suffered by the country in 1940 and leading Romania to its rightful place. In addition, the manner in which he defended his actions during the trial of the major war criminals and the dignified way in which he faced his end further contributed to his portrayal as a 'national hero'. Obscured during the first decades of Communist rule, this tendentious interpretation was partially revived during the Ceaușescu

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<sup>6</sup> Paul E. Michelson, 'In search of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Marshal Antonescu and Romanian history- a review essay', *Romanian Civilization*, III/2 (Fall-Winter 1994): 72- 99.

regime and gain even more popularity after 1989. As several historians have pointed out, the rehabilitation trend contributed to the development of a ‘pseudo-sacred’ aura around the Marshal and turned him into a staunch patriot and incorruptible leader of almost mythical proportions. This trend, as Dennis Deletant pointed out, favored the emergence of a historical myth that further obscures and distorts the facts<sup>7</sup>.

A few general remarks regarding the definition and functions of ‘historical myth’ are in order before proceeding to the analysis of the ‘pseudo-sacred aura’ created around the figure of Ion Antonescu. Although the concept is currently employed by many historians, there is no general agreement on its precise meaning. Smaranda Vultur, for example, argues that historical myths play an important ‘formative role’ because they facilitate the understanding of historical facts and translate scholarly writing into common knowledge. Andrei Pippidi, however, stressed the fact that historical myths also refer to distorted perceptions over historical facts that tend to provide ‘canonical answers’ to major questions and hypothesis regarding Romanian history.<sup>8</sup> Myths play a significant role in explaining and ‘justifying’ the present order of things because they provide ‘canonical answers’ that tend to eschew certain aspects deemed ‘shameful’ and emphasize those that are ‘compatible’ with the nation’s self-image. Their main function ‘is not to describe but to imagine a reality in accordance with certain political interests.’<sup>9</sup>

Lucian Boia provides a good theoretical and methodological framework for analyzing the emergence and the continuity of certain myths associated with the Romanian historical grand-narrative<sup>10</sup>. His detailed analysis of the main historiographical trends during Communist times

<sup>7</sup> Deletant, *Hitler’s Forgotten Ally*, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Vultur, ‘New Topics, New Tendencies and New Generations of Historians in Romanian Historiography’, 251.

<sup>9</sup> Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation. Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 9.

<sup>10</sup> Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*.

amply illustrates how the legacy of the Communist overt manipulation of history still influences present-day historiography. He explores this issue in one of his articles about the negative role of the interplay between past and present in creating certain interpretations and stereotypes ('traps of memory') associated with the 'Jewish problem'<sup>11</sup>. He emphasized the role of the official Communist discourse and resurfaced nationalism in imprinting certain number of images and symbols in the consciousness of most Romanians, which still retain their influence and make the task of restoring the 'historical truth' extremely complicated.

Vladimir Tismăneanu offers one of the most detailed descriptions of the 'overall confusion' of Post-Communist societies and the factors that triggered the resurrection of past historical myths<sup>12</sup>. He argues that the origins of this mythological revival of nationalism and anti-Jewish attitudes is to be found in 'the deeply entrenched feelings of national humiliation experienced by all nations in the region as a result of their subordination to the Moscow center', on one hand, and the re-emergence of the narratives of martyrdom and glorification of the nation, on the other<sup>13</sup>. A significant part of his study is dedicated to the social and political functions of anti-Semitism, seen as a central motif of the scapegoating and national homogenizing myths.

The past still represents a viable source of political legitimization, according to Tismăneanu, which determined the demise of certain Communist class-based mythologies and their replacement with 'nationalist and anticommunist legends'. In many cases, this trend has led to the glorification of certain authoritarian and anti-Communist figures of the past. The strong relation between political myth and elite legitimization renders suspect any serious attempt to 'dispel' the 'pseudo-sacred aura' surrounding heroic figures of the past. In the case of Ion

<sup>11</sup> Idem. 'A historiographical controversy: the Jews of Romania during the Second World War' in Manuela Dobre, ed., *Istorie și ideologie [History and ideology]* (București: Editura Universității din București, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> Tismăneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation*.

Antonescu, the attempts to ‘demystify’ his actions are classified as efforts to diminish the Romanian national dignity, to offend their sense of honor and blacked their past<sup>14</sup>.

### **1.1.2. Re-evaluating the past and the debates about the issue the Holocaust**

The debates on the reassessment of Romania’s fascist and authoritarian past partly overlapped with a more general discussion of the delicate problem of the responsibility of the Antonescu regime in the deportation and destruction of ethnic minorities. The debates on this topic have recently gained prominence in Romanian historiography and led to the polarization of discussions between conflicting groups or trends. Constantin Iordachi, for example, identified two major trends of interpretation: the ‘functionalist’ trend, which emphasizes the role played by the external factors in the destruction of the Romanian Jews and the ‘intuitionalist’ one, which gives primacy to internal political factors and Ion Antonescu’s role<sup>15</sup>. Irina Livezeanu<sup>16</sup>, on the other hand, argues that the fall of the Communist regime ushered in a renewed interest in the issues associated with the deportation and near destruction of Romanian Jews and caused Romanian historians to split in two major camps. The ‘patriots’ have (re)embraced the nationalist discourse and strive to glorify Ion Antonescu by minimizing as much as possible or simply denying the magnitude of his anti-Jewish policy. The ‘cosmopolitans’ or ‘Westernized historians’ follow a different direction: their main aim is to break-down the deep-seated Communist stereotypes associated with the Antonescu regime and present a more accurate

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>15</sup> Constantin Iordachi, ‘Problema Holocaustului în România și Transnistria- Dezbateri istoriografice’ [The issue of the Holocaust in Romania and Transnistria. Historiographical Debates] in Viorel Achim and Constantin Iordachi eds., *România și Transnistria: Problema Holocaustului. Perspective istorice și comparative* [Romania and Transnistria: The Issue of the Holocaust. Historical and comparative perspectives] (București: Editura Curtea Veche, 2004), 75-76.

<sup>16</sup> Irina Livezeanu, ‘The Romanian Holocaust: Family Quarrels,’ *East European Politics and Society*, vol. 16 (Fall 2002), 934-947.

picture about the Holocaust in Romania. Throughout the paper, I will use Irina Livezeanu's taxonomy to assess the position that certain prominent scholars have adopted in respect to Ion Antonescu's role in the deportation and near destruction of ethnic minorities.

Most of the literature on Ion Antonescu produced in Romania during the late Communist and immediate post-1989 periods may be broadly classified as belonging to the 'patriot' historians. These historians have put forward a 'revisionist' discourse about the Antonescu regime that minimizes or even denies the former ruler's responsibility in the deportation and near destruction of ethnic minorities. The collection of documents on the Antonescu regime edited by Gheorghe Buzatu<sup>17</sup> and Iosif Constantin Drăgan<sup>18</sup> illustrate how this drive to over-compensate for Ion Antonescu's biased Communist appraisal turned the former wartime into a patriot and anti-Communist that was even cast into the role of 'the savior of the Romanian Jews'<sup>19</sup>.

The 'liberal' interpretation, supported by a smaller group of 'Westernized' Romanian historians and Western scholars, has attempted to provide a more accurate image on the situation of the Jews and Roma during World War II. They criticized the recent attempts to rehabilitate Ion Antonescu as an 'honorable' patriot and anti-Communist and pointed to the political and ideological ramifications of this 'revisionist' discourse about the causes and the dramatic consequences of the deportation policy.

The roots of this 'revisionist' discourse, as Rudolf Braham argues, go back to the Communist period, when the memory of the Holocaust was systematically distorted and the blame for the persecution and destruction of Romanian Jews was deflected on German troops

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<sup>17</sup> Gheorghe Buzatu ed., *Mareșalul Antonescu în fața istoriei* [Marshal Antonescu in front of history] (Editura Moldova: Iași, 1992).

<sup>18</sup> Iosif Constantin Drăgan ed., *Antonescu. Mareșalul României și Războaiele de reîntregire* [Antonescu. The Marshal of Romania and the wars of restoration]. Milan: Nagard, 1986.

<sup>19</sup> The works of these two authors will be analyzed in greater detail in chapter IV.

stationed in Romania or on Romania's neighbors<sup>20</sup>. Viktor Eskenazy's article on the treatment of the persecution of the Jews during World War II in Romanian historiography further details this critical analysis of the emergence of an 'exculpatory discourse' built around Ion Antonescu. The author stresses the fact that most of the 'revisionist' studies published in the beginning of the 1990s are usually the work of former Communist historians that have been committed, with very few exceptions, to the rehabilitation of Ion Antonescu. They hope to achieve this aim by denying or 'rationalizing' the reasons and the consequences of his anti-Semitic policy, his alliance with Nazi Germany and the campaign against the Soviet Union<sup>21</sup>. Eskenazy raised critical questions regarding the more or less deliberately distorted perception of the Antonescu regime in Romanian historiography and argued that nationalism, anti-Semitism and opportunism are the main reasons behind this drive.

The growing influence of the 'revisionist' discourse in Romanian historiography and the similarities that it shares with other forms of Holocaust denial in Post-Communist countries have been also explored by Michael Shafir<sup>22</sup>. His comparative study on Holocaust denial in contemporary East European countries stresses the fact that 'revisionism' comes in many forms, ranging from the open rejection of the fact that around 6 million Jews were murdered by Nazi Germany and its allies during World War II to 'disguised' strategies and methods that aim at casting doubt on the uniqueness and authenticity of the plight of the Jews during World War II. 'Competitive martyrdom' represents a form of trivialization by comparison that seeks to present

<sup>20</sup> Rudolph L. Braham, *Romanian Nationalists and the Holocaust: The Political Exploitation of Unfounded Rescue Accounts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> Viktor Eskenazy, 'Historiographers against the Antonescu Myth,' in *The Destruction of Romanian and Ukrainian Jews during the Antonescu Era*, ed. Rudolf L. Braham (Boulder: The Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies Graduate Center/ City University of New York and Social Science Monographs, 1997), 271-302.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Shafir, *Între negare și trivializare. Negarea Holocaustului în țările postcomuniste din Europa centrală și de Est* [Between Denial and Trivialization: Holocaust Denial in Post-Communist East Central Europe] (Iași: Polirom, 2000).

the injustice suffered by the Romanian people after 1945 as a genuine ‘Holocaust of the Romanians that equals or even surpasses the plight of the Jews during World War II.

Michael Shafir also focused on the political implication of the Holocaust denial and minimization trend. He argued that the intricate relation between political interests, resurfaced nationalism and manipulation of history has distinctively shaped the recent drive to ‘rationalize’ Ion Antonescu’s anti-Semitic policies and whitewash his wartime record<sup>23</sup>. He shed light on the connection between some of the most prominent apologists for the Antonescu regime and certain right-wing political groups that have gone to great length to present the former ruler as a ‘martyr’ sacrificed for his nationalistic and anti-Communist values and a political ‘model’ for contemporary Romania.

‘The Trial of the Great National Betrayal’ soon became part of the debates between the ‘patriot’ historians and the ‘cosmopolitan’ scholars. The nationalist historians made serious efforts to link the discussion on the reassessment of the trial of May 1946 with the legal and political context in which the Communists came to power in Romania in the aftermath of World War II. The lack of a balanced analysis of the trial of the major war criminals, coupled with the limited access to first-hand sources and the strong belief that the Communist administered justice was far from being impartial played a significant part in associating the events of May 1946 with ‘the victor’s justice’ and casting Ion Antonescu in the role of victim.

There are very few contributions to the way in which ‘the politics of retribution’ functioned in Romania immediately after the end of World War II<sup>24</sup> and even less dealing with the way in

<sup>23</sup> Idem, ‘Marshal Antonescu’s Postcommunist Rehabilitation. *Cui bono?*’ in *The destruction of Romanian and Ukrainian Jews during the Antonescu*, ed. Rudolf L Braham (Boulder: The Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies Graduate Center/ City University of New York and Social Science Monographs, 1997), 349-410.

<sup>24</sup> Rudolf Braham, *Genocide and retribution : the Holocaust in Hungarian-ruled Northern Transylvania* (Boston: M. Nijhoff, 1983). Ciucă, *Procesul Mareșalului Antonescu*. Ioan Dan, ‘Procesul’ Mareșalului Antonescu [The ‘Trial of Marshal Ion Antonescu] (București: Editura Lucman, 2005).



which Post-Communist historiography sought to reinterpret the trials of the war criminals<sup>25</sup>. The scholars who have dealt with these topics generally tend to regard the trial of May 1946 as part of ‘the politics of retribution’ in Eastern Europe after 1945<sup>26</sup>. Dennis Deletant, argues that the Communist-controlled Groza government, acting on the Soviet Union’s instruction, used the trial and the anti-fascist purges as a screen for ‘vilifying’ its past and present political adversaries and gain popular support for the coming parliamentary elections<sup>27</sup>. The ‘de-Nazification’ campaign, supervised by the Soviet Union, served as a tool for advancing the political and ideological ends of the Romanian Communist Party.

## **1.2. Methodological framework, sources and organization of the study**

My approach is both chronologic and thematic and stresses the complex nature of the production of political and historical discourse on controversial figures of the past. The methods I shall employ in this research will include an in-depth discourse analysis of several pro-Antonescu books and articles that have shaped in a significant way the discourse about the trial of the major war criminals of May 1946. Their strong anti-Communist rhetoric and common perceptions regarding the ‘unfairness’ of the trial will be subjected to close scrutiny.

I will also examine the background and possible ideological or political affinities of the proponents of Ion Antonescu’s rehabilitation. Lucian Boia’s<sup>28</sup> and Vladimir Tismăneanu’s<sup>29</sup> contributions on the emergence and evolution of historical myths will help me interpret the

<sup>25</sup> Eduard Mezincescu, *Mareşalul Antonescu şi catastrofa României* [Marshal Antonescu and Romania’s disaster] (Bucureşti: Editura Artemis, 1993);

<sup>26</sup> István Deák, Jan T. Gross and Tony Judt eds., *The Politics of Retribution in Europe. World War II and its Aftermath* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>27</sup> Deletant, *Hitler’s Forgotten Ally*, 245-259.

<sup>28</sup> Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*.

paradigms and terminology introduced by these pro-Antonescu works. Finally, I will look at the relation between politics, nationalism and historiographical discourse in Communist and post-Communist Romania in order to assess how the ‘politicization of the past’ influenced Ion Antonescu’s damnation as a ‘war criminal’ and his remarkable rehabilitation after 1989.

Different types of primary sources were used in order to pursue the aims of my research. Special attention was given to the records of the ‘Trial of the Great National Betrayal’<sup>30</sup> and the recollection of participants attending the trial<sup>31</sup>. The analysis of several articles reporting the proceedings of the trial helped me gain a deeper understanding of the manner in which Ion Antonescu’s contemporaries came to regard the trial of May 1946.

The methodological approach has also driven the organization of the study. Chapter 1 examines the main historiographical trends in the interpretation of Ion Antonescu and his wartime regime and brings into discussion the methods that will be used in assessing the complex factors that shaped the apologetic discourse on the former ruler. Chapter 2 briefly examines Ion Antonescu’s career and his trial of May 1946, focusing on the major directions of his internal and foreign policies (his relation with the Iron Guard, Romania’s alliance with the Axis Powers and participation in the campaign against the Soviet Union and the treatment of the Jews and Roma) and the way in which they were presented during his trial.

The next two chapters deal with the way in which Ion Antonescu and his regime were treated in Romanian historiography. Chapter 3 discusses in detail the manipulation of the figure of Ion Antonescu during the Communist regime, focusing on the way in which the variations in

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<sup>29</sup> Tismăneanu, ‘Fascism, Anti-Semitism and Mythmaking in East Central Europe’.

<sup>30</sup> The records of the trial of ‘Antonescu group’ of May 1946 were published in two editions: *Procesul marii trădări naționale: Stenograma desbaterilor de la Tribunalul Poporului asupra Guvernului. Antonescu* [The trial of the great national betrayal: the records of the People’s Tribunal on the Antonescu Government] (București: Editura Eminescu, 1946). Marcel Dumitru-Ciucă ed., *Procesul Mareșalului Antonescu. Documente* [Marshal Antonescu’s Trial. Documents]. 3 vols. (București: Editura Saeculum, Editura Europa Nova, 1995-1998).

the official discourse reflected the wider process of reinterpreting the past according to political and ideological purposes. Chapter 4 concentrates on the impact of the Post-Communist changes on the interpretation of Ion Antonescu and assesses the role played by various political groups and ideological trends in reconstructing and politicizing Ion Antonescu's image. Special attention will be given to the way in which the apologists of Antonescu used the reassessment of the trial of 1946 as a means to vindicate the former ruler and present him as a victim of the Communist takeover and a 'martyr of the Romanian people'. Finally, in the section dedicated to conclusions, I will explore the continuities and the discontinuities between the Communist and the post-1989 discourse on Ion Antonescu and the reasons behind the 'politicization' of 'the case of Antonescu'

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<sup>31</sup> Drăgan, ed. *Antonescu. Mareșalul României*

## CHAPTER 2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### ***2.1. General Ion Antonescu: the ‘providential man’?***

Ion Antonescu came to power in a time of great crisis, when the uncertain bases of the Romanian parliamentary system had already been seriously undermined by the Great Economic Depression, the rise of the extreme right movements, such as the notorious Legionary Movement (also known as the Iron Guard) and King Carol II's Royal dictatorship (1938- 1940)<sup>32</sup>. This new authoritarian regime tried to imitate Fascist Italy and reoriented the country's foreign policy in line with the recent developments in international affairs, but the outbreak of World War II and the fall of France in June 1940 left the country without the support of its Western Allies and at the mercy of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union<sup>33</sup>. Carol II's desperate efforts to align his foreign policy with The Third Reich in return for a formal German assurance against Soviet Russia and Romania's revisionist neighbors failed. Consequently, he was forced to give up almost one third of Romanian territory to the country's revisionist neighbors: Bessarabia and northern Bukovina to the Soviet Union (June 26-28, 1940), northwestern Transylvania to Hungary (The Second Vienna Award- August 30, 1940) and southern Dobroudja to Bulgaria (The Treaty of Craiova- September 7, 1940).

The circumstances required an authoritarian figure at the helm of the state and Carol II turned his attention towards General Ion Antonescu (1882- 1946), an austere career officer that has proven his remarkable determination and initiative, as well as his respect for discipline during World War I. In the early 1920s he served as a military attaché in Paris, London and

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<sup>32</sup> For a general overview of the political life in Romania during the interwar and World War II period, see Keith Hitchins, *Romania 1866-1947* (București: Editura Humanitas, 1996).

Brussels and held several positions after his return in Romania: commander of the Higher School of War (1927 and 1930), secretary in the Ministry of War, Chief of the General Staff (1933 and 1934) and Defense Minister (1937 and 1938)<sup>34</sup>. His uncompromising attitude towards corruption earned him both admirers and enemies and his failed attempts to modernize the Romanian army increased his dissatisfaction with the inefficiency and corruption of the Royal dictatorship. He also became convinced that he was the only one capable of saving Romania from the disastrous domestic and international situation it faced in 1940, for which he held Carol II personally responsible.

In early September 1940, Carol II called on him to form a new government in hope that his popularity within the army, the amiable relations with the Iron Guard and the 'democratic' parties (the National Liberal Party and the National Peasant's Party) and his 'connections' with the German Legation of Bucharest would help him restore order and save his throne. However, Carol II's unwise decision proved to be fatal because he had seriously underestimated Antonescu's ambition and adversity towards his regime. Ion Antonescu accepted the mandate of prime-minister only on condition that Carol II would grant him dictatorial powers. The king reluctantly accepted and the following day, after having consulted with the leaders of the democratic parties and the German Legation of Bucharest, Ion Antonescu demanded that the king should abdicate and leave the country immediately. Faced with a strong internal opposition and unable to draw any support from Nazi Germany, Carol II renounced the throne in favor of his son, Mihai on September 6, 1940 and left Romania on the same day<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> Bucur, Maria, 'Carol II of Romania' in *Balkan Strongmen. Dictators and Authoritarian Rulers of South Eastern Europe*, ed. Brend J. Fisher (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2007), 87-117.

<sup>34</sup> For a balanced analysis of Ion Antonescu's early stages of his career, see Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 37-51.

## 2.2. The Antonescu Regime (September 6, 1940- August 23, 1944)

The abdication of Carol II led to the establishment of the National Legionary State on September 13, 1940, with Ion Antonescu as ‘Conducător’ (leader) and Horia Sima, the leader of the Iron Guard, as vice-prime-minister<sup>36</sup>. This uneasy alliance between Ion Antonescu, an uncompromising career officer and Horia Sima, the ‘nominal’ leader of the Iron Guard began to show signs of great strain after it became clear that the two did not share the same political vision. This tensioned situation rapidly deteriorated into an open rivalry and struggle for power that culminated with the attempt of the Iron Guard to oust Antonescu by force<sup>37</sup>. Germany’s arbitration played a decisive role in the conflict and Antonescu ordered his troops to crush the Legionary rebellion (January 21-23, 1941) only after he had received Hitler’s approval to eliminate his undependable partners and create a new government.

The National-Legionary state was abolished on February 14, 1941 and was replaced with an authoritarian regime in which senior officers and ministers took orders directly from Ion Antonescu<sup>38</sup>. Although it adopted some trappings of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, the new

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 48-50.

<sup>36</sup> For a general overview on the National-Legionary state, see Dinu C. Giurescu, *Romania in the Second World War: 1939-1945*, trans. by Eugenia Elena Popescu (Boulder: East European Monographs), 2000. Armin Heinen, *Legiunea "Arhanghelului Mihail". Mișcare socială și organizație politică. O contribuție la problema fascismului internațional* [The ‘Archangel Michael’ Legion. Social movement and political organisation. A contribution to the problem of international fascism], trans. by Cornelia and Delia Eșianu (București: Ed. Humanitas, 1999), 401-424. Aurică Simion, *Regimul politic în România în perioada Septembrie 1940-Ianuarie 1941* [The political regime in Romania, September 1940-January 1941] (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia. 1976).

<sup>37</sup> Vlad Georgescu, *The Romanians. A History*, edited by Matei Călinescu, translated by Alexandra Bley-Vroman (Columbus: Ohio State University Press), 261-264.

<sup>38</sup> Dan Bancoș, *Social și național în politica guvernului Ion Antonescu* [Social and national in the policy of Ion Antonescu government] (București: Editura Eminescu, 2000). Ion Gheorghe, *Un dictator nefericit: Mareșalul Antonescu - Calea României spre Statul satelit* [An unhappy dictator: marshal Antonescu – Romania’s path towards satellization], București: Editura Machiavelli, 1996. Florin Muller, ‘The Antonescu Dictatorial Regime (September 6, 1940- August 23, 1944). Sociopolitical and Ideological Dimensions’ in *The Holocaust and Romania. History and Contemporary Significance*, ed. Mircea Soreanu (București: Institute for Political Studies of Defense and Military History, ‘Goldstein Goren’ Diaspora Research Center, Tel Aviv University, ‘Goldstein Goren’ Center for Hebrew Studies of Bucharest University, 2003), 19-41.

regime was, in fact, a military dictatorship. The monarchy was deprived of its most important prerogatives and transformed it into a symbol of Romania's statehood<sup>39</sup>. Ion Antonescu became the decisive factor in Romanian politics and he declared on several occasions that his authoritarian regime was not based on a mass political party or ideology, but followed the imperatives of the moment: to restore internal order, strengthen the economy and regain the territories lost in 1940 at all costs.

Although there was no fascist party in power, Ion Antonescu's rule consolidated the anti-Semitic measures adopted under king Carol II's dictatorship and the National Legionary State and enacted new anti-Jewish laws under the guise of the 'Romanization' of the economy and the professions. A closer look at Antonescu's caustic anti-Semitic comments in the Council of Ministers' meetings reveals a more comprehensive picture of the actual reasons behind the his policies towards ethnic minorities. On several occasions, Ion Antonescu presented his plans for the restructuring of the country's social and economic life, in which the 'need' to maintain public order and to 'Romanize' the economy were part of a more ambitious project of 'purifying' Romania of Jews and Roma and creating an 'ethnocentric' state<sup>40</sup>.

Antonescu's treatment of the Jews living in Romania and the liberated territories was ambivalent<sup>41</sup>. The anti-Jewish measures began to take a more systematic course after 1941,

<sup>39</sup> Florin Constantiniu, *O istorie sinceră a poporului român* [A sincere history of the Romanian people] (București: Editura Univers Enciclopedic, 1997), 394.

<sup>40</sup> Lya Benjamin, 'Anti-Semitism as Reflected in the Records of the Council of Ministers, 1940-1944: An Analytical Overview' in *The Destruction of Romanian and Ukrainian Jews during the Antonescu Era*, ed. Rudolf Braham (Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 1997), 10.

<sup>41</sup> For a more detailed discussion, see Lya Benjamin ed., *Martiriul Evreilor din România, 1940-1944. Documente și mărturii* [The plight of the Jews in Romania, 1940-1944. Documents and testimonies] (București: Editura Hasefer, 1991). Mathias Carp, *Cartea Neagră. Suferințele evreilor din România. 1940-1944* [The black book. The plight of Romania's Jews, 1940-1944], 2nd edition, edited by Lya Benjamin (București: Editura Diogene, 1996). Carol Iancu, *Shoah în timpul regimului Antonescu (1940-1944)* [Shoah during the Antonescu regime (1940-1944)] (Iași: Polirom, 2001). Dennis Deletant, 'The Holocaust in Transnistria: An Overview in the Light of Recent Research', in Rebecca Haynes ed., *Moldova Bessarabia, Transnistria. Occasional Papers in Romanian Studies*, Nr. 3, School of Slavonic and East European Studies (London: University College London, 2003), 143-161. Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in*

reaching its peak when the Antonescu regime joined the war against Soviet Russia and ordered the deportation of large segments of the Jewish population from Bessarabia and northern Bukovina and Roma from the Old Kingdom to the newly acquired province of Transnistria. The consequences were disastrous: as a result of summary executions, diseases and the appalling living conditions, around 250,000- 290, 000 Jews and between 10, 000 and 20, 000 Roma lost their lives ‘under Romanian jurisdiction’<sup>42</sup>. The year 1943 marked a turning point in Ion Antonescu’s policy towards ethnic minorities: as a result of the changes in the military situation after the battle of Stalingrad and the internal and international protests against the deportations, the Antonescu regime decided to halt the deportations and postponed sending other Jews to the Nazi death camps in Poland.

Ion Antonescu inherited the Axis alignment from Carol II and further strengthened the economic, diplomatic and military alliance with Nazi Germany<sup>43</sup>. His paramount aim was to regain the lost provinces of northern Bukovina and Bessarabia and convince Hitler to revise the provisions of the Second Vienna Award. However, his anti-Communism and his desire to do away with ‘the Soviet threat’ also played a role in bringing Romania to the Axis’ side. Romania contributed to the German war with oil and other raw materials and almost 600, 000 Romania soldiers took part in the attack against the Soviet Union in 1941<sup>44</sup>. The defeat at Stalingrad and

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*Romania: the destruction of Jews and Gypsies under the Antonescu regime, 1940-1944* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000). Alex Mihai Stoenescu, *Armata, mareșalul și evreii* [The army, the marshal and the Jews]. București: RAO International Publishing Company, 1998.

<sup>42</sup> Deletant, *Hitler’s Forgotten Ally*, 2.

<sup>43</sup> Ion Calafeteanu ed., *Români la Hitler* [Romanians meeting with Hitler] (București: Editura Univers Enciclopedia, 1999). Rebecca Haynes, *Politica României față de Germania între 1936 și 1940* [Romanian Policy Towards Germany, 1936-1940], trans. by Cristina Aboboaie (Iași: Ed. Polirom, 2003). Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitler, regale Carol și Mareșalul Antonescu. Relațiile româno-germane 1938- 1944* [Hitler, King Carol and Marshal Antonescu. Romania-German Relations 1938-1944], trans. Stelian Neagoe (București: Editura Humanitas, 1994).

<sup>44</sup> Duțu, Alexandru ed., *Romania in World War II. 1941-1945* (București: Sylvi, 1997). Florin Constantiniu, *1941. Hitler, Stalin și România* [1941. Hitler, Stalin and România], (București: Editura Univers Enciclopedic, 2002). Florin Constantiniu, Ilie Schipor, *Trecerea Nistrului (1941): O decizie controversată* [The crossing of the Dnieper (1941): a controversial decision] (București: Editura Albatros, 1995). Jipa, Rotaru and others, *Mareșalul Antonescu*



the subsequent Axis retreat before the advancing Soviet troops put serious strains on the German-Romanian military collaboration and Ion Antonescu initiated secret armistice negotiations with the Allies. However, his reluctance to break away with his German ally and his frail hope that the Soviet advancement could be halted long enough so that he could negotiate better armistice terms determined Michael I, in collaboration with the leaders of the ‘democratic’ opposition to plan his overthrow in August 1944<sup>45</sup>.

The *coup d'état* of August 23, 1944 led to the fall of the pro-German Antonescu regime and had considerable repercussions over the country's political, military and diplomatic situation of Romania<sup>46</sup>. The new Sănătescu government, appointed by King Mihai I, broke off diplomatic relations with Nazi Germany and joined the Allies' side to fight against the Axis Powers. But the hopes that the new alliance with the Allied forces and the contribution of the Romanian Army to the defeat of Nazi Germany would save the country from a Soviet occupation soon faded away. After 1944 the country became the scene of the desperate struggle between the traditional pro-Western political forces and the rising Romanian Communist Party<sup>47</sup>. King Mihai and the leaders of the ‘democratic’ parties hoped that the reversal of Ion Antonescu and the drastic change in the country's foreign policy would determine the Allies to recognize Romania's cobelligerent status. However, the Armistice Agreement that gave the Allied (Soviet) High Command considerable influence over the internal affairs of the country was soon turned into the main instrument used

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*la Odessa, Grandoarea și amărăciunea unei victorii* [Marshal Antonescu in Odessa. The grandeur and rancor of a victory] (București: Editura Paideia, 1999). Kurt Treptow ed., *Romania and World War II* (Iași: The Center for Romanian Studies, 1996).

<sup>45</sup> For a more detailed discussion on the events that led to the 23 August *coup d'état*, see Aurică Simion, *Preliminarii politico-diplomatice ale insurectiei romane din august 1944* [Political and diplomatic premises to the Romanian insurrection of August 1944] (Cluj Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1978). Ilie Ceaușescu, Florin Constantiniu and Mihail E. Ionescu, *Romania. 23 August 1944. Two Hundred Days Spared from World War II* (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1984).

to punish those held responsible for having launched the invasion against the Soviet Union and to extend the Soviet sphere of influence over Romania<sup>48</sup>.

The ‘balance sheet’ of the Antonescu regime is full of inconsistencies that reflect, to a great extent, the complex and contradictory personality of the *Conducător*<sup>49</sup>. As in the case of other Axis allies, the Antonescu regime tried to pursue its own interests within the framework of the current international situation and maneuvered between drawing the maximum benefits from his diplomatic and economic alliance with Germany and preserving some forms of economic and military independence. Even though he sent numerous troops to fight in the campaign against the Soviet Union, Ion Antonescu did not commit the entire army in this destructive campaign on the Eastern Front. The debates on the fate of ethnic minorities represent one of the most controversial aspects of the regime. Ion Antonescu’s role in the deportation and near destruction of ethnic and religious minorities, as well as his decision to halt the deportations in 1943 and postpone the implementation of ‘The Final Solution’ represent two sides of the same coin.

### **2.3. ‘The Trial of the Great National Betrayal’**

Ion Antonescu and several of his close collaborators were arrested on August 23, 1944 and taken into custody by a Communist militia. Fearing that the former regime still enjoyed some degree of support in the Romanian army, Ion Antonescu and four of his close collaborators (Mihai Antonescu, Constantin Z. Vasiliu, Constantin Pantazi and Mircea Elefterescu), also

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<sup>46</sup> Maurice Pearton and Dennis Deletant, ‘The Soviet Takeover in Romania, 1944-1948’ in *Romania Observed. Studies in Contemporary Romanian history*, eds. Maurice Pearton and Dennis Deletant (Bucharest: Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 1998), 145.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 145-146.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Sorin Alexandrescu, *Paradoxul român* [The Romanian Paradox] (București: Editura Univers, 1998), 151-156. Stoenescu, *Armata, maresalul si evreii*, 482-483.

known as ‘the Antonescu group’ were handed over to Soviet military forces on August 31 and transported to the Soviet Union<sup>50</sup>. Their detention in Russia lasted for almost 19 months (September 1944- April 1946), during which they were interrogated by the Soviet Military Counter Intelligence (*Smert Spionam* or ŞMERŞ, meaning ‘Death to Spies’). Extracts from these declarations were later on used by the Soviet prosecutor at the Nuremberg Trials<sup>51</sup>.

After the capitulation of Germany in May 1945, discussions about how to punish the suspected war criminals took a new seriousness. The victorious Allies supervised the trial and the punishment of suspected ‘Fascist collaborators’ and ‘war criminals’ in all parts of liberated Europe, including Romania<sup>52</sup>. According to Articles 13 and 14 of the Armistice Agreement signed with the Allies on September 12, 1944, Romania was required to collaborate with the Allied High Command in the apprehension and prosecution of those persons accused of war crimes. To this purpose, the Romanian government modified the existing legislation, enacted new laws and set up special courts, known as People’s Tribunals in Cluj-Napoca and Bucureşti.

The Soviet Union was planning to return the members of the Antonescu group in Romania custody and supervise their prosecution as soon as the Romanian Communist Party was able to secure its influence over the executive and make the necessary ‘preparations’ for the trial<sup>53</sup>. This happened on March 6, 1945 when the newly appointed Communist dominated government, led by Petru Groza, took the necessary steps to get the preparations for the trial of the suspected war criminals under way. The Groza government also took the ‘precaution’ of nominating docile Communist members of sympathisers in the panel of judges from the Bucharest People’s Court

<sup>50</sup> Radu Ioanid, ed. *Lotul Antonescu în ancheta ŞMERŞ, Moscova, 1944-1946* [The Antonescu group under the inquiry of SMERŞ, Moscow, 1944-1946], trans. Radu Părpăuță (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2006), 27.

<sup>51</sup> Deletant, *Hitler’s Forgotten Ally*, 247.

<sup>52</sup> István Deák, Jan T. Gross, and Tony Judt, eds. *The politics of retribution in Europe*.

<sup>53</sup> Ioanid, ed., *Lotul Antonescu în ancheta ŞMERŞ*, 31-32.

and censored those newspapers that made public facts considered ‘inconvenient’<sup>54</sup>. Feeling confident that the new government could carry on the punishment of war criminals, the Soviet Union informed the Romanian authorities on April 1946 about its decision to send Ion and Mihai Antonescu, C. Pantazi and C.Z. Vasiliu in Romania to stand trial<sup>55</sup>.

In an environment that was already highly ‘politicized’ by the coming parliamentary elections, it is not surprising that the trial of the major war criminals harnessed considerable attention from the media. This suited the interests of the Groza government, who planned to use the juridical system to legitimate the *coup d’état* of August 23, 1944 and openly discredit its past and present enemies. To this end, Iuliu Maniu and Constantin C. Brătianu, the leaders of the Peasant’s National Party and respectively, the Liberal National Party were turned by the Communist propaganda into the ‘main bourgeois collaborators’ of the Antonescu regime.

The trial began on May 6, 1946 and brought before the Bucharest People’s Court twenty-four key members of the former Antonescu regime, including the Marshal himself<sup>56</sup>. This institution was headed by Alexandru Voitinovici and included eight other people’s judges with little or no judicial background. The prosecution team was made up of Vasile Stoican, the chief prosecutor, seconded by the public prosecutors Constantin Dobrian and Dumitru Săracu and was entrusted with selection, presentation and examination of the evidence and the witnesses. From the very beginning, the prosecution made efforts to avoid any reference to ‘troublesome’ aspects of the Soviet conduct before and after the war and turned the issue of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina into a taboo subject<sup>57</sup>.

<sup>54</sup> Deletant, *Hitler’s Forgotten Ally*, 247- 249.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 249.

<sup>56</sup> Ion Antonescu promoted himself to the rank of marshal in August 1941.

<sup>57</sup> Tuvia Friling, Radu Ioanid, Mihai E. Ionescu eds., *Final Report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania; president of the commission: Elie Wiesel* (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2005) 320-321.

The Act of Indictment, read on the first day of the trial, presented a broad range of evidence to support the main categories of crimes to be prosecuted: ‘crimes against peace’, ‘war crimes’ and ‘crimes against humanity’<sup>58</sup>. The prosecution painted a vivid picture of the atrocities perpetrated by the Antonescu regime and held the members of the Antonescu Cabinet directly responsible for ‘responsibility for bringing upon the disaster of the country’ (Romania’s alliance with the Axis Powers). The prosecution stressed the role played by Ion Antonescu in the planning, preparation and waging war of aggression against the ‘peaceful’ Soviet Union, in close cooperation with Nazi Germany and the war crimes that were committed against the civilian population and war prisoners. Ion Antonescu’s anti-Jewish policy was described as being motivated by greed and racial hatred and the former *Conducător* was charged with ‘crimes against humanity’, which included the economic exploitation of the Jewish community, the pogroms of Iași and Odessa, the forced deportations to Transnistria and the extermination of thousands of Jews both within Romania and in occupied territories<sup>59</sup>.

Ion Antonescu’s cross-examination played a key role during the trial because it gave him the opportunity to react to the arguments of the prosecution and present his version of what had happen. The prosecution went at great length to portray the former ruler as the main responsible for ‘the disaster that befell the country’, a Communist cliché used to designate the German military and economic ‘occupation’ of the country under the guise of the German Military Mission and the ‘oppressing’ Romanian-German economic treaties. Romania’s participation, alongside Germany in the war of aggression against the ‘friendly Soviet Union’ represented another major count of the Act of Indictment. The prosecutors constantly referred to the

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<sup>58</sup> Ciucă, *Procesul Mareșalului Antonescu*. vol. 1, Doc 3, 54-103.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. (my translation).

campaign against the Soviet Union as ‘a war of no glory and no ideals’ and held the Romanian army accountable for numerous ‘war crimes’:

Ion Antonescu and his government are responsible for the crime of having waged a surprise attack on the Soviet Union, without a declaration of war, and only by this order: ‘I order you to cross the Prut!’ thereby breaking one of the fundamental rules of international law. They are responsible for going into this criminal association/ comradeship with the Germans against the great Soviet Union neighbor, who wanted a peaceful collaboration with the Romanian people. This unprecedented crime in history had catastrophic effects...<sup>60</sup>

Ion Antonescu’s vigorous defence presented a completely different side of the story, in which he sought to distance himself from the main counts of the Act of Indictment. He saw himself as a soldier, not a politician who did his best to serve his country and defend it in her greatest hour of need. He took responsibility for all the achievements and errors’ of the regime he presided, except the murders and the lootings:

Mister President, I was not a politician, I was not part of any political party in the old days. My allegiance was to my country, which I have always considered to be above the Crown and above political parties<sup>61</sup>

The Romanian-German alliance, he argued, was one of the main legacies of Carol II’s reign; it was also dictated by the international circumstances and the need to recover the lost territories of 1940. In the beginning of the war, Germany’s military strength was unmatched by any European country and Romania could not risk of standing alone against the Soviet Union. He also reminded the Court about the strained Soviet-Romania relations and the occupation of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina in 1940. When asked about the reasons that determined him to march alongside the German Army as far as Stalingrad, Ion Antonescu defended himself by claiming that he was following a general military principle:

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 76 (my translation).

When a country commits itself to a war, the country's army must go to the ends of earth to crush the enemy's forces and to win the war. It is a military principle of major strategic importance and has been put into practice from the times of the Romans to the present. Look at history and you will see that no one stopped at the frontier, but they pursued and destroyed armies<sup>62</sup>

Marshal Antonescu tried to eschew those aspects that would cast any suspicion on the real intentions behind his actions, especially in the case of his anti-Jewish policy. Although he admitted to having ordered the deportation of between 150, 000- 170, 000 Jews to Transnistria 'for military reasons and for their own safety', he argued that he had never ordered the extermination of a single person in his life<sup>63</sup>. He also tried to avoid any responsibility for the Iași pogrom by shifting the responsibility on the German troops stationed in the area<sup>64</sup>. Pressed by the public prosecutor to admit his role in the deportations and massacres, Ion Antonescu gave evasive answers and claimed lapses of memory in several instances. However, he admitted to having ordered the anti-Jewish reprisals of Odessa, arguing that this measure was dictated by the 'unwritten' laws of war. However, he did not think this 'repressive' order would be actually carried out and his entire policy did not encourage any kind of massacres:

When in October 1941 there happened what happened, that is the blowing up of the entire military command of the Odessa sector, I was asked to approve the taking of reprisals. There is provision for in international law when the enemy adopts measures unacceptable under the normal rules of war. I gave my approval for reprisals to be taken. I also stipulated the figure. I accept the entire responsibility for this. I have spent my whole life on the basis that the leader, when victorious, gains all the glory, even when the merits are not his, and when he loses, he accepts the entire responsibility, even if he is not guilty and others are. He is therefore accountable...Although I gave the order, I have never been in favour of massacres. And you will never find a signal from me for the massacre, not of thousands of people, but of a single person<sup>65</sup>.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., Doc. 7, 189 (my translation).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 205 (my translation).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, Doc. 6, 197.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 206 (my translation).

Ion Antonescu also took responsibility for the deportation of the Roma to Transnistria and justified this drastic measure by the need to reduce the alarmingly high rate of criminality in the cities. To his opinion, the ‘pressure’ of the public opinion, distressed by the looting and murders committed in Bucharest and other towns during the anti-aircraft curfews, represented the main reason behind the deportation of more than 20, 000 Roma to Transnistria:

Because of the black-out, in Bucharest and in other cities there were thefts and murders and public opinion was asking me to protect it [...]. After much research and inquiry, it was found out that they were Gypsies, of whom some were even armed with war weapons and were committing these attacks. All the Gypsies who had been displaced...some had as much as 17 sentences each. I displaced them to Transnistria. It has been my order and I assume the responsibility for this matter. And I justify myself for what I have done<sup>66</sup>.

Claiming that he did not have the time and the opportunity to present and develop his arguments during the cross-examination, Ion Antonescu submitted a memorandum to the Bucharest People’s Tribunal on May 15, 1946, in which he tried to shed light on several controversial aspects of his regime, including the measures taken against the Jewish population. The reasons behind the deportation of the Jews from Bessarabia, he argued, were dictated by ‘military and safety reasons’. He actually intended to save them from ‘a terrible faith’ at the hands of the German troops that were moving towards the front line and Guardist sympathizers behind the front lines. He refused to take responsibility for the ‘horrors’ that occurred in the ‘liberated territories’, blaming the troops assigned to carry out the deportations orders and the harsh winter conditions for the high number of casualties among the deportees:

These are the reasons that had determined the deportations of the Jews (the Germans asked us to hand them over all the Jews to take them to Germany and use them as forced labour. We refused. However, the execution was despicable, mostly because of the dominating attitude of the time. The harsh and early winter also played a role, and inflicted many casualties also among the belligerent armies and the Russian

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 246 (my translation).



population that was fleeing towards the Ural mountains as a result of the invasion [...] The fault lay with those charged with the implementation, because they did not stop the columns<sup>67</sup>.

His final plea did not influence the outcome of the trial in any significant way. After ten days of proceedings, the People's Tribunal found Ion Antonescu guilty and sentenced him and six other defenders (Mihai Antonescu, Constantin Vasiliu, Gheorghe Alexianu, Constantin Pantazi, Radu Lecca and Eugen Cristescu) to death on May 17, 1946. Ion Antonescu appealed against the decision of the People's Bucharest Tribunal and after being rejected, he turned to King Mihai. According to the Constitution of 1923, the monarch had the right to reduce or pardon punishment for crimes, but the intervention of the Communist Minister of Justice, Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu determined him to turn down the appeals for clemency that had been forwarded to him on Ion Antonescu's behalf. After having failed to receive a royal pardon, four of the defendants that had been sentenced to death (Ion Antonescu, Mihai Antonescu, C.Z. Vasiliu and Gheorghe Alexianu) were executed at the Jilava prison on June 1, 1946.

#### ***2.4. The 'greatest political trial of the time' and birth of the myth of 'unjust treatment'***

Contemporary observers were fully aware of the political implications of the trial of May 1946 and the press of the time occasionally referred to it as 'The Greatest Political Trial of the time'<sup>68</sup>. Ion Antonescu's 'heroic' stance during the trial and the dignified manner in which he faced his end expressed his firm conviction that his actions were justified by a sense of duty towards his country and the only judgment acceptable to him was the one of the posterity<sup>69</sup>. However, the judgment of his contemporaries was blurred by the 'politicization' of the trial and

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, Doc. 20, 175-176.

<sup>68</sup> See Buzatu ed., *Mareșalul Antonescu în fața istoriei*, vol. 1, Doc. 167, 365.

the presence of the ‘liberating’ Soviet Army, which did not encourage the emergence of a real debate on the achievements and downfalls of the Antonescu regime. Instead, these factors favored to crystallization of a popular mood that associated the trial with a disguised form of ‘victor’s justice’ and explained away Ion Antonescu’s indictment as an attempt made by the Soviet Union to ‘punish’ him and the entire nation for having invaded its territory in 1941. Rueben Markham, a foreign correspondent present during the proceedings of the trial, described the way in which the ‘guilty’ verdict strengthened the general feeling that Ion Antonescu embodied the injustice suffered by an entire nation that was ‘abandoned’ by the Western Allies to the Soviet sphere of influence:

The Romanian nation felt he [Antonescu] was being tried by Russia, whose army was occupying the country. They saw the judges as dupes of Russia and that the two [*sic*] Communist prosecutors were fanatic agents of Russia [...]. Most Romanians at that moment felt that they were in the Russian trap, along with the Marshal, and that it was they who were being tried, derided, condemned.<sup>70</sup>

A closer analysis may reveal that the trial of the war criminals was never an end in itself. The jargon used in the court, the avoidance of certain topics that might upset ‘Soviet sensibilities’ and the ‘veiled’ interference of the executive in order to influence the verdict point to a certain ‘politicization’ of the trial<sup>71</sup>. Accordingly, the prosecution’s case focused on the defendants’ role in waging war of aggression against the Soviet Union and the negative consequences of the military and diplomatic alliance with the Axis Powers.

The procedure, the character and the outcome of the trial of May 1946 were influenced, in a negative way, by the realignment of internal and international political factors. Although the expediency of the entire proceedings left some aspects of the Antonescu regime unexplored, the

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<sup>69</sup> Deletant, *Hitler’s Forgotten Ally*, 259-260.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>71</sup> *Final Report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania*, 319.

prosecution provided abundant evidence to support the count of ‘‘crimes against humanity’. Faced with the intention of the prosecution to reduce the complex of agencies involved in the implementation of his ethnic policies, Ion Antonescu refused to assume responsibility for the atrocities perpetrated against ethnic minorities. He tried to explain away the massacres as incidental ‘by-products’ of the war rather than the result of central planning and pointed to the role of ‘popular pressure’ and the exigencies of Nazi Germany in influencing his policies.

### CHAPTER 3. REWRITING THE PAST UNDER THE COMMUNIST REGIME

As it was shown in the previous chapter, the lacunae in the primary sources and the controversial issues associated with the World War II period rendered the assessment of the Antonescu regime exceedingly difficult. The politicized atmosphere surrounding the trial of the major war criminals in May 1946 further impeded the emergence of open and balanced debate about the merits and flaws of Ion Antonescu. The Communist-dominated Groza government made sustained efforts to obscure certain aspects of Ion Antonescu's rule, especially regarding the early stages of Romania's participation in the campaign against the Soviet Union and emphasized instead the former ruler's responsibility for 'the disaster that befell the country'.

This situation was further aggravated after the Communists took complete control over the country and the new leaders needed to legitimate their hold on power. As the past became the main vehicle of symbolic legitimization, the entire Romanian history was reinterpreted to suit the Party's political ends. The events that were directly connected with the Romanian Communist Party's rise to power received special attention, particularly Romania's participation in World War II and the *coup d'état* of August 23, 1944. Under these circumstances, it was no surprise that the Antonescu regime became one of the first 'victims' of this 'politicization' of the past. The following analysis explores the changes that the figure of Ion Antonescu underwent during the Communist regime and the way they reflected the major shifts in the larger framework of interpretation of Romanian history. Special attention will be given to the way in which the resurface of nationalism in the early 1970s and Nicolae Ceaușescu's intention to distance Romania from Soviet influence determined a major shift in the interpretation about the past and ushered in the rehabilitation of certain events and personalities of the pre-Communist past, including Ion Antonescu.

### 3.1. *The manipulation of history for political and ideological ends*

The half-century of Communist rule strands as a distinct stage in the evolution of Romania culture and historiography. Although the interpretation of the past has rarely been completely free from the influence of the national ideology, the post-1947 period represents a break with the past due to the Communist Party's efforts to gain complete control over the historiographical production<sup>72</sup>. By and large, the explanation for the significance that the Communist Party attached to historiography is twofold: first, dialectical materialism, the Marxist theory of history, holds that a suitable understanding of the past facilitates the foreseeing of the direction of historical development and therefore, provides the necessary guidelines for adopting future policies; second, the manipulation of history was part of the overall aim of the Communist Party to strengthen its own legitimacy and determine how the identity of the Romanian people was to be (re)constructed.<sup>73</sup>

The importance that was attached to the interpretation of the past and the subsequent efforts to bring historians under the control of the Party led to the transformation of historiography into a tool for ideological and political domination. The new regime not only 'purged' libraries and bookshops of 'fascist' writings, which included all those books that did not follow the official line of the Communist Party, but also closely monitored the access to archives. Once the 'native historiography' was either suppressed or 'recycled', the Party was able to impose its own interpretation of the past that restructured the entire Romanian history around the Marxist-Leninist reductionist paradigms and the alleged century-old Romanian-Soviet 'friendship',<sup>74</sup>.

<sup>72</sup> Papacostea, 'Captive Clio', 181.

<sup>73</sup> Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism. Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania*. (Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1991), 215-216.

<sup>74</sup> Papacostea, 'Captive Clio', 181-18

However, the interpretation of the past did not follow a linear course and reflected the attempts made by the Communist leaders to justify the course they adopted in domestic and foreign policy. These ‘changes of direction’ in the Communist discourse reverberated over the entire field of cultural and intellectual production. Lucian Boia distinguished three main phases in the evolution of the Communist discourse: the anti-national period (1947-early 1960s), which was characterized by the adoption of an uncompromising Stalinist approach and the downplaying of the genuine elements of the Romanian culture; the relative liberalization phase (early 1964-1971), marked by the regime’s attempts to ‘recover the national past’ and limit the damaging effects of the Russification of the Romanian culture; finally, the exacerbation of nationalism (1971-1989), which combined the exaltation of the Romanian nation’s origins, continuity, unity and strive for independence with the cult of Ceaușescu’s personality<sup>75</sup>.

### **3.2. *The anti-national period (1947- 1964)***

This canonical interpretation of the history of Romania was fully articulated in 1947, when the first edition of Mihai Roller’s *Istoria României* (*The History of Romania*, latter on changed in *The History of the Romanian People’s Republic*) was published<sup>76</sup>. The interpretation of World War II was shaped both by the precepts of dialectical materialism and the Romanian authorities’ apprehension of upsetting Soviet sensibilities<sup>77</sup>. Consequently, the Antonescu regime was described as an unpopular ‘dictatorial’ rule that benefited from the support of the leaders of the bourgeois-landlord Romanian parties, namely the National Peasant and National Liberal Parties

<sup>75</sup> Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, 64-82.

<sup>76</sup> Florin Constantiniu, ‘O fază sumbră a istoriografie românești: perioada rolleristă (1947-1958)’ in *Magazin Istoric*, no. 10 (October 2002) [http://www.itcnet.ro/history/archive/mi2002/current10/7\\_11.html](http://www.itcnet.ro/history/archive/mi2002/current10/7_11.html)

<sup>77</sup> Deletant, *Hitler’s Forgotten Ally*, 263-264.

in turning Romanian into a 'fascist state'. Romania's alliance with the Axis Powers was denounced as a form of 'economic bondage and exploitation' and the onerous responsibility for the 'criminal war against the Soviet Union' was placed on the shoulders of the 'imperialists', the Romanian 'capitalists' and 'fascists', and Ion Antonescu. This strategy 'allowed the Romanian regime to conveniently overlook those aspects of the prelude to Romania's war with the Soviet Union which did not fit the Marxist-Leninist thesis and might revive anti-Russian sentiment', like the loss of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina<sup>78</sup>.

The discourse about World War II and the deportation and destruction of ethnic minorities illustrates the 'selectiveness' of the Communist Party in dealing with certain sensitive topics of the past that did not suited its aims. The case of the 'posterity' of the trial of the major war criminals is very representative. Even though the same jargon was used to describe Ion Antonescu and his regime as 'fascists' and 'imperialists', a tendency to minimize the nature of his anti-Semitic policies was already visible in late 1946. For example, Mihai Roller's *Istoria României* made only passing reference to Ion Antonescu's anti-Semitic policy. In fact, Mihail Roller the persecution and deportation of ethnic and religious minorities was lumped together with the general persecution of the political contestants of the regime. This approach came to prevail in all subsequent textbooks, as Adrian Ciofâlcă argues in the following passage:

For the communists, when Jewish martyrdom was not assimilated to the general martyrdom of mankind, it vanished into that of specific nations. The Soviets encouraged amnesia around the Shoah in Eastern Europe, particularly since some of these states were implicated in the perpetration of the genocidal project. Their discourse on the Holocaust avoided striking any accusatory notes, partly to avoid arousing the hostility of populations about to undergo communization, and partly to channel whatever guilty sentiments that did exist in their own directions.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>79</sup> Adrian Ciofâlcă, 'A 'Grammar of Exculpation' in Communist Historiography: Distortion of the History of the Holocaust under Ceaușescu,' *The Romanian Journal of Political Sciences*, no. 2 (2004), 33.

### 3.3. *The period of relative liberalization (1964-1971)*

The Soviet Union served as a model for all the Eastern European Communist satellites throughout the 1950s. However, after Stalin's death in 1953, the leaders of the Romanian Communist Party took advantage of the inconsistencies of the détente policy promoted by Nikita Khrushchev and began to distance Romania from the overwhelming Soviet influence. In the early 1960s, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party adopted a 'new course' in domestic affairs that brought about significant changes in the sphere of culture. What began as a timid initiative of toning down the Russification of the Romanian language and the 'internationalist' discourse turned into a campaign of 'recovery, rehabilitation, and dissemination of such traditional values as posed no direct threat to its authority.'<sup>80</sup>

Although no genuinely political liberalization took place, the relaxation in the Communist Party's ideological control brought about certain changes in the intellectual and cultural life. This 'new course' gave rise to a new orientation in the field of history, as scholars were allowed to provide more accurate interpretations of historical events that did not always followed the Party's line to the letter. A sign of this new 'national communist' was the decline of Mihai Roller's influence in the field of historiography and the attempts made to restore Romanian personalities to their position of honor, within the limits of the Marxist ideology.

### 3.4. *The Ceaușescu regime and the 'recuperation' of the national discourse (1971-1989)*

After the death of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej in 1965, his successor, Nicolae Ceaușescu (1965- 1989) redoubled efforts to strengthen the Communist Party's monopoly on the

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<sup>80</sup> Georgescu, *The Romanians*, 247.



nationalistic discourse, but in a somehow different context. In 1971, Dej's successor decided to put an end to the short-lived period of relative liberalization, on one hand, and expressed his intention to re-establish the Communist Party's firm ideological control and re-assess the importance of national ideology in Romanian culture and politics, on the other. This mini-cultural revolution based on Ceaușescu's famous 'July Theses' of 1971 produced a more national-centered interpretation of history that emphasized the noble origins, continuity, unity and strive for independence of the Romanian nation<sup>81</sup>.

This change of direction had significant consequences in the field of historiography, since Nicolae Ceaușescu expected scholars to subordinate their creativity to the Communist Party's efforts to legitimize its own political and ideological domination. Romania was supposed to have a history of great achievements that culminated with the instauration of the Communist Regime. Being reduced to the role of a propaganda tool, history had the difficult task of lending substance to this new nationalist approach and integrating the evolution of Communist Party within the general course of development of the Romanian nation. However, the historiographical production was kept under strict control and any new detail of the official interpretation had either to originate from or to be approved by the Communist leaders.

As a result, the official historiography spared no effort to portray the Socialist Republic of Romania as a 'natural continuation' of the interwar national unitary state and place special emphasis on the importance and legitimacy of the events that brought the Communist Party to power. The 23 August *coup d'état*, usually described as an 'anti-Fascist armed insurrection' or even 'a national revolution' became the central event of the pre-Communist history. The role of the Communist Party in the alleged 'anti-Fascist' opposition to the Antonescu regime and the

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<sup>81</sup> Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism*, 240-248.

events leading to the overthrow of the ‘fascist regime’ were over-emphasized and the influence of other political actors (leaders of the democratic parties and king Mihai) was severely minimized<sup>82</sup>. Furthermore, the people’s enthusiasm at the popular enthusiasm stirred by the coup was grossly exaggerated, as well as the diplomatic and military effects of Romania’s *volte-face*. The official historiography advanced the extraordinary claim that Romania’s war effort against Nazi Germany in the last stage of the war has shortened hostilities by almost 200 days<sup>83</sup>.

These initiatives to consolidate the Communist Party’s legitimacy and emphasize the importance of the August 23 *coup d’etat* were paralleled by the partial rehabilitation of the interwar period. Historians began to praise the (limited) results of the social and economic reforms adopted by the ‘bourgeois regime’ in the early 1920s and the resistance of the Romanian democracy to the ‘assaults’ launched by extreme-right political organizations. This approach allowed the rehabilitation of the leaders of the National Peasant and National Liberal Parties as Romanian patriots that had fought for the unity and independence of the Romanian people<sup>84</sup>.

However, the ‘recovery’ of the leaders of the interwar period paled in comparison with the partial rehabilitation of Ion Antonescu from the mid-1970s<sup>85</sup>. Complex reasons lie behind this apparently paradoxical decision; Ion Antonescu did not seem like the best choice to ‘complete’ the gallery of ‘national heroes’, since he openly opposed both the Romanian Communist Party and the Soviet Union. It could be inferred that Nicolae Ceaușescu wanted to prove to the world that Romania was pursuing an independent political course from the Soviet Union and his vision of World War II and the issue of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina did not coincide with

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<sup>82</sup> For a even-handed analysis of the way in which the Communist historiography distorted the memory of the events and personalities associated with the *coup d’etat* of 23 August 1944, see Ștefan Borbély, ‘Politics as Memory Distortion: A case Study,’ *Caietele Echinox. Postcolonialism and Postcommunism*, vol. 1, 2001, 123-133.

<sup>83</sup> Ilie Ceaușescu, Florin Constantiniu and Mihail E Ionescu, *Romania. 23 August 1944. Two Hundred Days Spared from World War II* (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1984).

<sup>84</sup> Deletant, *Hitler’s Forgotten Ally*, 267.

Moscow's. He even went as far as to criticize the Romanian Communist Party's obedience to Moscow during the interwar period and the 'injustice' of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, on the basis of which Stalin annexed Bessarabia and northern Bukovina<sup>86</sup>. It seems that Ion Antonescu's paramount aim to reacquire Northern Transylvania from Hungary was also used in the early 1980s by Ceaușescu to give more weight to Romania's campaign against Hungarian claims over Transylvania<sup>87</sup>.

The past was used once more to legitimize Ceaușescu's ambition to portray Romania as an independent and unitary state. The 'refurbishing' of Ion Antonescu's wartime record and his re-emergence as a patriot that fought for his country's 'independence and unity' fully illustrated 'how mutable was the past in the hands of a regime well versed in the manipulation of Romania's history'<sup>88</sup>. The Communist Party entrusted this laborious task to Marin Preda, an acclaimed Romanian writer who was given access to Romanian archives in order to collect materials for his novel about the troublesome period of World War II. After a great deal of research, Marin Preda published the best-selling novel *Delirul* [The Delirium] in 1975<sup>89</sup>. The plot of the novel revolves around Paul Ștefan, a young man who left his native village and moved to Bucharest around 1940 to pursue his dream of becoming a journalist. The focus of the novel often shifts from the individual level to historical digressions on certain important events, like the Legionary rebellion of January 1941 and key personalities, like Ion Antonescu. In spite of the author's reservations about the former dictator's character and actions, Ion Antonescu is portrayed as a strong authoritarian figure that came to power in 1940 to save the country from collapse and was firmly

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>87</sup> For further details, see Rudolf L. Braham, *Romanian Nationalists and the Holocaust*, 49-51.

<sup>88</sup> Deletant, *Rewriting the Past*, 276.

<sup>89</sup> Marin Preda, *Delirul* [The Delirium] (București: Editura Cartea Românească, 1975).

determined to restore Romania to its former borders. He is presented as both the saviour of the nation from the violence of the Iron Guard and the main responsible for the disaster that befell the country after the Romanian Army crossed the river Dniester in 1941<sup>90</sup>.

Several of the themes introduced by Marin Preda were explored in more details by Aurică Simion's scholarly study on the evolution of the National-Legionary regime (September 1940-January 1941). The author follows the official party line when he plays up the Communist Party's popularity and role in the period of 1940-1941. However, the extensive use of archival documents and the close scrutiny of several key-questions about the rise, the nature and the fall of the regime set this study apart from the bulk of the propaganda materials on Ion Antonescu. The beginnings of the new 'direction' in the interpretation of the Antonescu regime are already noticeable. On one hand, Ion Antonescu's conservatory views, anchored in the national tradition were dissociated from the Iron Guard's 'fascism', which is rejected as an imported product. On the other, the blame for the atrocities committed against the Jewish population was placed exclusively on the shoulders of the Iron Guard. Nonetheless, Ion Antonescu was still held responsible for Romania's wartime alliance with Nazi Germany, the invasion of the Soviet Union and the persecution of the 'anti-fascist and democratic forces':

The general line pursued by the Antonescu regime in foreign affairs proved of complete subordination to the Axis proved to be totally disastrous. Bringing German troops in Romania, the signing of the German-Romanian economic treaty, followed by an increasing penetration of the German capital in Romanian economy and the 'infestation' of the country by all kinds of 'councilors' considerably indented the independency and sovereignty of the country<sup>91</sup>.

Stressing Romania's wartime 'exceptionalism' in the implementation of the Final Solution represented another strategy used to rehabilitate Ion Antonescu. This political exploitation of the

<sup>90</sup> Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 267-268.

<sup>91</sup> Simion, *Regimul politic în România*, 168.

deportation and persecution of ethnic minorities served to distance Ion Antonescu from his German ally and Horthy's Hungary. The Party-historians gave prominence to 'the opportunistic and moderate policies' pursued after 1942, when Ion Antonescu refused to implement the Final Solution and occasionally favored Jewish immigration to Palestine<sup>92</sup>. As a result, Ion Antonescu started to be portrayed as 'the savior' of the Jews that not only refused to send the Romanian Jewish to Nazi extermination camps, but also saved large numbers of Hungarian Jews by granting them refuge and facilitating their immigration to Palestine. As a rule, 'atrocities perpetrated on Romanian territory or Romanian-administered lands are either ignored or minimized, while the antisemitic policies of Horthy's Hungary are thoroughly scrutinized' in order to contrast them with Ion Antonescu's alleged 'humanitarianism'<sup>93</sup>.

In the 1980s, the official historiography pursued Ion Antonescu's rehabilitation further by establishing a 'qualitative distance' between the former ruler and the Iron Guard. Ion Antonescu's acts of repression against ethnic minorities were rationalized as actions motivated either by political or military circumstances. By contrast, the Iron Guard's ideology was considered nothing more than a cynical excuse for committing acts of violence and terrorism. Furthermore, historians begin to refer to the Antonescu's regime as a 'personal dictatorship', stressing its authoritarian rather than its 'fascist' character<sup>94</sup>.

It can be said that the interplay between the paradigms of material dialectics and the need to strengthen the symbolic legitimacy of the Communist Party deeply influenced Ion Antonescu's 'posthumous career' in Communist historiography. By and large, Ceausescu's intention to appropriate the 'national discourse' and 'enlarge' the pantheon of Romanian national

<sup>92</sup> Braham, *Romanian Nationalists and the Holocaust*, 42-43.

<sup>93</sup> Ciofălcă, 'A 'Grammar of Exculpation' in Communist Historiography', 42.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

heroes with those historical figures that had proven their staunch patriotism played a significant role in Ion Antonescu's reassessment in the mid-1970s. This remarkable change of attitude, also motivated by calculated political reasons, marked the beginning of an incipient 'exculpatory discourse'. The aim of this discourse was to whitewash Ion Antonescu's wartime record by obscuring his alliance with the Iron Guard and Nazi Germany, on one hand, and denying or rationalizing the reasons behind his anti-Semitic policies, on the other.<sup>95</sup>

Nevertheless, this rehabilitation trend had its own limitations. Even though the issue of the recovery of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina was tackled, the fear of upsetting Soviet sensibilities deterred Romanian historians from pursuing Ion Antonescu's rehabilitation further<sup>96</sup>.

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<sup>95</sup> Braham, *Romanian Nationalists and the Holocaust*, 40-51.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 268-269.

## CHAPTER IV. ION ANTONESCU'S REASSESSMENT AFTER 1989

The previous chapter briefly examined how historiographical production under the Communist regime was used to strengthen the political legitimization of the Communist Party and its leaders. The tone of the official discourse followed the major shifts in the political sphere. As the 1970s progressed and the nationalism discourse and the cult of personality reached their culminant point, the official historiography became even more 'politicized'. The trend to restore Romanian patriots and fighters for independence to their rightful place in the gallery of national heroes contributed to Ion Antonescu's partial rehabilitation in the mid-1970s. Falsified and distorted, Ion Antonescu's military and political decisions were selectively incorporated into the official discourse and served to emphasize the nation's vocation for unity and independence.

The fall of the Communist regime in 1989 did not completely free historiography from the influence of politics. The interpretation of the past is still subjected to the influence of nationalism and therefore, can still be used as a tool for strengthening or challenging political legitimization. This is particularly true in 'the case of Antonescu', where exaltation of the Marshal and exaggeration of his merits, combined with a minimalization of his political and military errors have been used by those who invoke nationalism as a weapon of propaganda against their political enemies. The following chapter will focus on the works three of the main apologists of Antonescu (Iosif Constantin Drăgan, Gheorghe Buzatu and Ioan Dan) and the way in which their strategy to challenge the 'fairness' of the trial of 1946 and cast Ion Antonescu in the role of a victim of the Communist takeover contributed to the posthumous rehabilitation of the former ruler.

#### 4.1. *The legacy of the Communist historiography*

The wider trend of rewriting history in Romania in the context of post-Communist transformation has been determined by a certain ‘dynamics of continuity and change’. The fall of the Communist regime brought about significant changes in the institutional framework of research and higher education. However, Romanian historians still encounter serious difficulties in breaking with the ‘legacy’ of the Communist regime, especially in terms of methodology and approach. Positivism remains the dominant research method and ‘the Nation’ is still the subject of the master narrative. This national-centered perspective did not remain unchallenged and the general reassessment of Romanian history after 1989 ushered in a trend towards questioning the ‘grand-narrative’ of Romanian history and the myths usually associated with it<sup>97</sup>.

The end of ideological control gave historians the possibility to extend the field of their research to events and historical periods that were previously taboos. In many instances, their interpretation of events and the conclusions they reached differed from the interpretation of ‘grand-narrative’ of Romanian history. In time, the challenge of the nationalist grand narrative became more systematic and adopted a programmatic character in the mid-1990s with the publication of Lucian Boia’s studies<sup>98</sup>. This, in turn, triggered the reaction of the ‘traditionalist nationalist historians’ who still prefer to place empirical research above any sort of theoretical approach. These historians rejected the deconstructionist approach promoted by Lucian Boia and his disciples, arguing that this ‘absolute relativism’ in history considerably diminishes both national values and national identity. Some historians compared Lucian Boia’s attempts to deconstruct historical myths to the Stalinist campaign to belittle Romanian values.



#### 4.2. *The premises of the rehabilitation trend.*

The desire to shed light over on this previously taboo topic and ‘do justice’ to a political figure that ‘fell victim’ to the biased Communist historiography were two of the main reasons that accounts for the increasing attention that the memory of Ion Antonescu had received in the first years of the transition period. The doors to the archives were opened and numerous books and articles were published in Romania and abroad that claimed to restore the truth about Ion Antonescu <sup>99</sup>. However, the drive to ‘uncover the truth’ about Ion Antonescu and the controversial issues associated with his rule soon brought the danger of over-compensating in the direction of glorifying the image of the former *Conducător*. As Dennis Deletant argued, ‘the case of Antonescu has become in the first instance a political matter and only at a secondary level a historical one’<sup>100</sup>. Historical studies about Ion Antonescu and his regime are not strictly confined to the field of history and, in fact, they concern larger issues, ranging from the search for ‘historical’ figures to serve as models to self-interested political reasons.

The resurfaced of nationalist feelings and the ‘need’ for national heroes may also account for the drive to exaggerate Ion Antonescu’s merits<sup>101</sup>. The end of the Communist regime in Romania saw the fast growth of a number of movements that sought to gain popularity by exploiting the deep disillusion with the policies of post-Ceaușescu governments and promoting a nationalist and xenophobic discourse. The ‘recuperation’ of the ‘genuine’ national values that had been obscured under Communist rule represented one of the themes that became

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<sup>97</sup> Murgescu, ‘The Romanian Historiography in the 1990s’, 40-43.

<sup>98</sup> Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*.

<sup>99</sup> A thorough, even-handed survey of the treatment of Ion Antonescu in the first years after the fall of the Ceaușescu regime is Victor Eskenasy, ‘Historiographers against the Antonescu Myth’ in *The destruction of Romanian and Ukrainian Jews during the Antonescu*, ed. Rudolf L Braham (Boulder: The Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies Graduate Center/ City University of New York and Social Science Monographs, 1997), 271-302.

<sup>100</sup> Deletant, *Hitler’s Forgotten Ally*, 269.

increasingly popular. This search for national symbols to replace the ‘fabricated’ Communist national heroes turned Ion Antonescu, a staunch patriotism who fought to restore Romania to its borders of 1918 and to contain the spread of Communist, into a ‘natural’ candidate<sup>102</sup>.

The historiographical reassessment of Ion Antonescu soon acquired political overtones as certain nationalist groups found in Ion Antonescu’s staunch patriotism and sense of duty a ‘model’ for the contemporary Romanian society<sup>103</sup>. Drawing on Antonescu’s ‘partial rehabilitation’ during the late Communist regime, these groups made attempts to appropriate the image of Ion Antonescu and use it as a propaganda tool for discrediting Romania’s ‘historical parties’ and the monarchy. Mihai, the former king of Romania, has been accused of having consented to the Marshal’s arrest and imprisonment in 1944, thereby becoming the moral perpetrator of his ‘unjust’ execution<sup>104</sup>.

The legacy of the Communist historiography should also be taken into consideration. It is not surprising that after almost four decades of methodical distortion of the past, historians found it difficult to engage in a critical debate about Ion Antonescu. The Communist historiography either concealed or severely distorted basic information about several aspects of the Antonescu regime, such as Romania’s participation in the campaign against the Soviet Union or the near destruction of ethnic minorities. Drawing upon the Communist official discourse that obscured Romanian participation in the Holocaust, several historians preferred to overlook the destructive effects of Ion Antonescu’s anti-Jewish and anti-Roma policies and reiterate the Communist discourse that equalled Romania with a wartime ‘oasis of humanitarianism’.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Tismăneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation*.

<sup>102</sup> Shafir, *Marshal Antonescu’s Posthumous Rehabilitation*, 362.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 270.

<sup>104</sup> Deletant, *Hitler’s Forgotten Ally*, 269.

<sup>105</sup> Braham, *Romanian Nationalists and the Holocaust*, 44-45.

### 4.3. *The main promoters of the rehabilitation trend*

The drive to rehabilitate Ion Antonescu benefited from the support of a very heterogeneous group (journalists and some well-intended scholars, whose support can largely be attributed to lack of information; war veterans and ‘nostalgic’ military historians who genuinely believe that Ion Antonescu was a victim of the Communist injustice; and finally, nationalist politicians, like Corneliu Vadim Tudor, that saw in Ion Antonescu’s figure a model of political legitimization). As it gained momentum, the rehabilitation trend acquired certain political connotations. Some of the apologists of Antonescu adhered to certain right-wing political movements, like Partidul Unității Naționale Române (Party of Romanian National Unity) and Partidul România Mare (Greater Romania Party) or decided to set up separate organizations, like ‘The Marshal Antonescu League’ or the ‘Pro Marshal Antonescu League’<sup>106</sup> in order to lobby more efficiently for the juridical rehabilitation of Ion Antonescu.

Certain Romanians émigrés also brought their contribution to Ion Antonescu’s posthumous glorification. Iosif Constantin Drăgan, a prosperous Romanian businessman living in Italy, has been one of the leading forces behind the rehabilitation drive. Former sympathisant of the Iron Guard, Drăgan became a semi-official collaborator of Ceaușescu regime during the 1970s and gained access to archival documents and unpublished memoirs pertaining to the Antonescu regime. His publishing house, Nagard, sponsored the publication of four massive volumes of documents that were widely circulated in Romania in the early 1990s<sup>107</sup>. Historians with first-hand experience in the field raised serious objections to Drăgan’s questionable sources and even more questionable methods. Important passages from allegedly official records are quoted

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<sup>106</sup> Shafir, *Marshal Antonescu’s Postcommunist Rehabilitation*, 362-364.

<sup>107</sup> Drăgan, ed. *Antonescu. Mareșalul României*.

without attribution and important statements ascribed to Ion Antonescu or his close collaborators are not tagged to the listed sources<sup>108</sup>.

After the fall of the Communist regime, Drăgan began to express more clearly his intention to support the juridical rehabilitation of Ion Antonescu<sup>109</sup>. He argued that Ion Antonescu's indictment in 1946 was legally unsound, the proceedings were 'a judicial masquerade' and the former ruler's execution was equal to a political assassination. The main charges that were brought against Ion Antonescu, according to Drăgan, were unfounded and therefore, his conviction as a 'war criminal' and 'traitor' needs to be reversed:

It is beyond doubt that the trial of the Marshal and his close collaborators needs to be reexamined. If not in the law court, then at least in the new history books about Romania's tumultuous history. The unjust verdict of 1946 affected more than just some people and denigrated more than a regime; it struck and denigrated an entire country whose prestige was and is still damaged before the eyes of the entire world<sup>110</sup>.

Although these arguments were not fully supported by historical evidence, Drăgan's ideas were adopted by several specialists in Romanian contemporary history, like Gheorghe Buzatu. A former member of the 'A.D. Xenopol' Institute of History in Iași and a senator in the 2000- 2004 Romanian parliament, Gheorghe Buzatu became one of the most persistent apologists of Ion Antonescu after 1989<sup>111</sup>. His major contribution to the rehabilitation trend lies in the publication of a series of contemporaneous documents on Ion Antonescu collected from Romanian and Russian archives<sup>112</sup>. Although the author's purported intention was to provide a balanced perspective on this highly controversial epoch, based on 'objective' historical evidence, the

<sup>108</sup> Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 269.

<sup>109</sup> Iosif Constantin Drăgan, *Cuvânt înainte* [Foreword] in Ciucă, *Procesul Mareșalului Antonescu*, vol I, 5-8.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 8 (my translation).

<sup>111</sup> Shafir, *Marshal Antonescu's Postcommunist Rehabilitation*, 383.

<sup>112</sup> Buzatu, *Mareșalul Antonescu în fața istoriei*.

selection of the documents was done with the intention of portraying Ion Antonescu in a positive light.

The author stressed the fact that his collection of documents was intended to re-open the discussion about Ion Antonescu and re-examine his merits and flaws<sup>113</sup>. However, the documents that were designed to be used for the reassessment of the trial of May 1946 illustrate his intention to fully exonerate Ion Antonescu. Gheorghe Buzatu strived to clear Ion Antonescu's wartime record by rationalizing or justifying his controversial military and political decision. For example, Ion Antonescu's alliance with Nazi Germany against was presented as 'defensive alliance' against the state that had forced Romania to give up Bessarabia and northern Bukovina in 1940. This attempt to rationalize Ion Antonescu's decisions is paralleled by a denial of the real magnitude of his anti-Semitic policies. The persecutions and the deportations of the Jews are seen as the result of the anti-Romanian attitude displayed by the Jewish population of Bessarabia and Bukovina during the retreat of the Romanian army in the summer of 1940.

As for the trial of the major war criminals, Gheorghe Buzatu claims that the documents that he had included in his collection provide sufficient arguments to challenge the validity of the charges brought against Ion Antonescu in May 1946. He tries to explain away the magnitude of Ion Antonescu's crimes by claiming that the former ruler's conviction as a war criminal was the result of Stalin's desire to punish Romania for its participation in the Barbarossa campaign. As a result, Ion Antonescu is cast in the role of a victim of the Communist takeover:

In the same way, the conclusions that we had reached lead quasi-automatically to the annulment of all counts of indictment pronounced in May 1946 and taken over later by Communist propaganda on the basis of very simple factor: the Marshal had dared to wage war against the Soviet Union, the first Communist state in the world...<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., vol 3, 281.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, IX (my translation).

The publication of Gheorghe Buzatu's first volumes of documents stirred up fresh debate surrounding the Antonescu regime and drew the attention of specialists and 'untrained historians' alike. In 1993, General Ioan Dan of the Prosecutor's Office military section, who was said to be examining 'the case of Antonescu', published a critical study on the trial of the major war criminals<sup>115</sup>. Although it claims to 'restore the truth' about Ion Antonescu and present 'The Trial of the Great National Betrayal' from an objective perspective, the book turns out to be an apology for Marshal Antonescu's exoneration. The trial of 1946 is seen as a 'political trial' orchestrated by Soviet Russia in order to satisfy its thirst for revenge and prepare the way for the Communist takeover. The author criticizes both the preparations and the proceedings of the trial. He argues that Ion Antonescu's political and military decisions were interpreted in a tendentious way by the Court and the panel of judges was under the influence of the Communist Party:

I reserve the privilege to make some rectifications. That the judgment was unfair and partial was beyond doubt. This judgment was not passed by the Romanian people. An unconstitutional tribunal, even though it called itself 'popular', could not pass judgment in the name of the people. That alleged tribunal represented the victor's justice, not the Romanian people, a victor that was blinded by his hatred and bitterness against a great personality that refused to yield to him.

The Romanian people are guilty of having forgotten Marshal Antonescu too soon and of having allowed his cowardly assassination in his own country<sup>116</sup>.

Although he raised some interesting questions about the legality of the trial itself, Ioan Dan's evaluation of the events is highly debatable. He tends to present Marshal Antonescu's statements in an uncritically manner and overemphasizes the 'unfairness' of his trial. He follows Dragăn and Buzatu when he argues that the trial needs to be re-examine and identifies Ion Antonescu's dramatic end with the martyrdom of an entire nation that had the courage to stand against the Soviet Union.

<sup>115</sup> Dan, *Procesul' Mareșalului Antonescu*.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 442.

#### 4.4. *The rehabilitation of Ion Antonescu: continuity and change*

This brief analysis has shown that the post-Communist trend to rehabilitate Ion Antonescu has roots in the Communist ‘exculpatory discourse’ that emerged in the mid-1970s<sup>117</sup>. The most prominent apologists of Ion Antonescu have been close collaborators of the Ceaușescu regime or members of institutes of historical research that were in a position to gain access to important archival documents. Although the ideological and political control over historiography faded away, the Communist propaganda is still hard to dispel. Ion Antonescu is still seen as the embodiment of the Romanian nation’s striving for territorial unity and independence:

As this author has shown elsewhere, the Marshal’s rehabilitation has been a creeping process ongoing since 1990. Furthermore, that process can be traced back to the Ceaușescu regime and its ‘national-communist’ policies, which were part and parcel of a search for an alternative formula of legitimation, from which the regime hoped to emerge as the embodiment of traditional ideas and values<sup>118</sup>.

Some of his controversial political and military decisions are ‘rationalized’ in the same way as they were under the Communist regime, especially his anti-Semitic policies. All the authors discussed in the previous section strived to minimize the magnitude of the atrocities committed against the Jewish population. They still reproduce the Communist interpretation about Romanian ‘exceptionalism’ during World War II when they focus solely on the ‘moderate’ anti-Jewish policies that the Antonescu regime had adopted starting with 1942 and minimize the magnitude of the deportation and near destruction of the Jewish population<sup>119</sup>.

These authors have also proved the ability to distance themselves from the Communist interpretation when needed and to adapt their apologetic discourse to the present-day realities. Specifically, they capitalized on the resurgence of nationalism in post-1989 Romania and began

<sup>117</sup> Ciofâlcă, ‘A Grammar of Exculpation’, 29.

<sup>118</sup> Shafir, *Marshal Antonescu’s Postcommunist rehabilitation*, 351.

to place great emphasize on Ion Antonescu's anti-Communist feelings.<sup>120</sup> The war against the Soviet Union became more that a military campaign justified by the need to recover Bessarabia and northern Bukovina: it was turned into 'a crusade against Bolshevism',<sup>121</sup> that was meant to keep the 'Soviet threat' at bay and protect Romania.

A common denominator that links the attempts made by Iosif Constantin Drăgan, Gheorghe Buzatu and Ioan Dan to rehabilitate Ion Antonescu is their common aim to discredit the trial of the major war criminals. They exploited the procedural flaws of the trial and pointed to the Soviet interventions in order to ensure the harsh punishment of the defendants. To a certain extent, Ion Antonescu's trial and conviction was seen as the last episode of the 'unjust treatment' that the former Romanian ruler had been subjected to after his fall from power. The dignity with which Ion Antonescu pleaded his case at the trial and the courage with which he faced his executioners was stressed in order to cast the former ruler in the role of a Communist victim. The 'victimization' of Ion Antonescu had a double effect: it diluted Ion Antonescu's crimes in pity and compared his dramatic destiny with the injustice endured by the entire Romanian nation<sup>122</sup>.

#### **4.5. *Reactions to the rehabilitation trend.***

This downplaying of Ion Antonescu's political errors, coupled with his glorification and victimization transformed the former ruler into a national icon that attracted a growing number of supporters. The rehabilitation trend, however, did not go unchallenged and encountered the

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<sup>119</sup> Ciofâlcă, 'A Grammar of Exculpation', 45-46.

<sup>120</sup> Murgescu, 'The Romanian Historiography in the 1990s', 44.

<sup>121</sup> Mezincescu, *Mareșalul Antonescu și catastrofa României*, 3-5.

<sup>122</sup> Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 259.



opposition of various Romanian and Western scholars and intellectuals. Certain specialists in the history of World War II, like Dumitru Șandru, raised questions about the quality and the tendentious interpretation of the collections of documents edited by Gheorghe Buzatu and Iosif Constantin Drăgan<sup>123</sup>. Others, like Eduard Mezincescu<sup>124</sup>, tried to provide an alternative interpretation on the Antonescu regime. Using a journalistic rather than a historical method, the author rightfully identified nationalism and anti-Communism as the main components of the new interpretation on Ion Antonescu and criticized the efforts to rehabilitate the former ruler. He also strives to demonstrate that the war against the Soviet Union was, in fact, a war of aggression and Ion Antonescu's alliance with Hitler reflected the Romanian ruler's options in domestic affairs.

Historians like Dinu C. Giurescu<sup>125</sup>, Lya Benjamin<sup>126</sup> and Radu Ioanid<sup>127</sup>, belonging to the Westernized or cosmopolitan group of historians, sought to provide a more detailed image on the Antonescu regime and the treatment of ethnic and religious minorities<sup>128</sup>. For example, Dinu C. Giurescu's balanced book introduces the reader to all the major political and military events that occurred in Romania during the Second World War<sup>129</sup>. The author uses a wide range of sources in order to explain the intentions of the decision-makers of the time, and adopts a neutral position towards Ion Antonescu as he presents both his merits and his mistakes as a leader. He also points to the short-term and long-term implications of the rehabilitation trend and urged for a dispassionate analysis of the World War II period.

<sup>123</sup> Dumitru Șandru, 'Impostura în cercetarea istorică are la Iași un nume: GH. BUZATU.' [ Deception in historical research has a new name in Iași: GH. BUZATU]. *Monitorul*, Iași, no. 127/ 20 (June 1992).

<sup>124</sup> Mezincescu, *Mareșalul Antonescu și catastrofa României*.

<sup>125</sup> Dinu C. Giurescu, *Romania in the Second World War: 1939-1945*, trans. by Eugenia Elena Popescu (Boulder: East European Monographs, 2000).

<sup>126</sup> Benjamin, 'Anti-Semitism as Reflected in the Records of the Council of Ministers, 1940-1944'.

<sup>127</sup> Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*.

<sup>128</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the group of Westernized or cosmopolite historians, see Irina Livezeanu, 'Family Quarrels' and Constantin Iordachi, 'Problema Holocaustului în România și Transnistria'.

<sup>129</sup> Giurescu, *Romania in the Second World War*.

#### 4.6. *Ion Antonescu's reassessment and beyond*

In spite of the efforts of some earnest historians to present a more balanced image on the evolution of the Antonescu regime, the rehabilitation process has gained momentum since 1990s and Marshal Antonescu's 'new image' became more visible. Local town halls and military academies in Iași, Piatra Neamț and Slobozia and other Romanian towns erected statues or busts in Ion Antonescu's memory. Streets were named after him and even three films dealing with Ion Antonescu have been produced: *Destinul Mareșalului* [The Marshal's Destiny], a documentary produced by Felicia Cernăianu; *Oglinda*, a motion picture directed by Sergiu Nicolaescu and a faked 'documentary' on Antonescu's betrayal by king Mihai in 1946<sup>130</sup>.

This unveiling of monuments and the production of films dealing with Ion Antonescu's career received a wide coverage in the Romanian media and revealed the deep ramifications of the rehabilitation trend into politics. As Dennis Deletant argued, the debate over the faults and merits of the former ruler turned into one of the most sensitive issues on the political agenda<sup>131</sup>. Less conspicuous, but all the more consequential, were the attempts made by several groups to lobby for Ion Antonescu's juridical rehabilitation. In 1990, Iosif Constantin Drăgan and Corneliu Vadim Tudor, the leader of the Greater Romania Party (Partidul România Mare), established the Marshal Antonescu League (Liga Mareșalului Antonescu) with the declared purpose of lobbying for the judicial rehabilitation of Marshal Antonescu and his close collaborators<sup>132</sup>. To this purpose, a number of apologists of Antonescu forwarded appeals to the Prosecutor General and to members of the government, demanding the reassessment of the trial of 1946. In June 1992, the Marshal Antonescu League asked to the Prosecutor General to start the procedure for the re-

<sup>130</sup> Shafir, *Marshal Antonescu's Postcommunist rehabilitation*, 351-357.

<sup>131</sup> Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 4.

examination of ‘the case of Antonescu’ and demanded that the Romanian Parliament should nullify the trial of the major war criminals.

Faced with this strong lobby, the Prosecutor General’s Office began to consider the possibility of a retrial of Ion Antonescu and his collaborators. In 1994, Petre Țurlea, a member of the Chamber of Deputies, officially asked Vasile Manea Drăgulin, the Prosecutor General, to start the procedure for the retrial of Ion Antonescu. But the international reaction to the initiative of formally exonerating Ion Antonescu temporarily deterred the Romanian authorities to nullify Ion Antonescu’s trial.

The discussion over Ion Antonescu’s conviction as war criminal re-emerged in 2006, when the Bucharest Court of Appeal partially exonerated the former ruler of the charges that were brought to him in 1946. Specifically, on December 5, 2006, the Bucharest Court of Appeal decided to acquit marshal Ion Antonescu, the head of the Iron Guard Horia Sima and another 19 members of the Romanian Government from 1940, for certain war crimes appropriated as a result of the military collaboration between Romania and Germany in the aggression “against the Soviet Russian peoples”. However, the High Court of Cassation and Justice decided to nullify the decision of the Bucharest Court of Appeal on May 6, 2008.

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<sup>132</sup> Shafir, *Marshal Antonescu’s Postcommunist Rehabilitation*, 356-358.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this study, I have examined the role played by the debates over the trial of the major war criminals in the overall rehabilitation and glorification of the figure of Ion Antonescu. I have focused my efforts on two directions. In the first part, I have briefly examined Ion Antonescu's political and military career and the way in which the major directions adopted by the Antonescu regime in domestic and foreign policy were presented during the trial of the major war criminals. This analysis has revealed the presence of the necessary 'ingredients' that were required to turn the former *Conducător* into a historical figure susceptible to contradictory interpretations that were not completely separated from ideological inclinations and political interests. His 'politicized' trial further complicated the situation; instead of providing a balanced appraisal of the Antonescu regime, the prosecution, following the instructions laid down by the Romanian Communist Party, focused its efforts on 'vilifying' the former *Conducător*.

In the second part, I looked at the treatment of the Antonescu regime and Ion Antonescu's trial in Romanian historiography. Special attention was given to the evolution of the official Communist discourse about the Antonescu regime and the way in which these variations reflected the wider process of the manipulation of the past for political ends. In addition, I examined how the end of censorship after 1989 and the publication of numerous apologetic books and collections of sources contributed to the reappraisal of Ion Antonescu and his regime. The apologists of Antonescu challenged the 'fairness' and legality of the trial of the major war criminals with the purpose of shifting attention from the real content of the Act of Indictment to the procedural errors of the trial. They also emphasized the 'politicization' of the trial in order to portray the Marshal as a 'victim' and a 'martyr of the Romanian people'.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of the factors and circumstances that shaped Ion Antonescu's remarkable reassessment in Romanian historiography. Given the variety of contributions cited in this paper, it is striking how uniformly distorted were the interpretations of Ion Antonescu and his regime during Communist and post-Communist times. Although the tone of the official historiography usually reflected the shifts in the regime's profile, the discourse on Ion Antonescu and his regime was generally mobilized in the service of political and ideological interests. The controversial figure of Ion Antonescu has been used not only to strengthen the legitimacy discourse of the political party in power, but also as a powerful propaganda weapon against certain political adversaries, like the former king Mihai and the Romanian parliamentary regime.

Although there is a continuity of methods and overall purpose, the 'partial rehabilitation' of Ion Antonescu during the Ceaușescu regime pales in comparison with the scope of the recent drive to glorify the former wartime ruler. If fear of upsetting Soviet sensibilities deterred the Communist authorities from taking Ion Antonescu's rehabilitation too far, the present-day apologists of Ion Antonescu do not have such inhibitions. They did not simply ignore the troublesome aspects of Ion Antonescu's war record, but constructed an elaborate 'exculpatory discourse' which 'rationalizes' all of Ion Antonescu's political and military decisions. Furthermore, Ion Antonescu's patriotism, anti-Communism and desire to restore the borders of Greater Romania are presented as justification for all his policies.

The same apologists of Antonescu made their demand for the Marshal's full exoneration public in a number of books, collection of documents and articles that were published immediately after the fall of the Communist regime. Using carefully selected archival materials and a biased interpretation of historical facts, specialists and untrained historians alike made

efforts to discredit the legality and ‘fairness’ of the trial of the major war criminals and cast Ion Antonescu in the role of ‘victim’ of the Communist takeover in Romania.

Although no systematic examination of the juridical proceedings has been produced so far, the reappraisal of the trial of May 1946 has gained momentum and ushered in the emergence of a very powerful historical myth. By and large, the portrayal of Ion Antonescu as a staunch patriot that fought for the restoration of Romania’s borders, kept the Soviet Union at bay and even ‘saved’ thousands of Jews from certain destruction became popular mainly because it obscures those aspects of the past deemed ‘shameful’ (persecution and near destruction of ethnic and religious minorities) and emphasizes those that are compatible with the nation’s self image (‘defensive war’ against the Soviet Union and the ‘Romanian exception’ in the treatment of Jews during World War II). The various attempts to dispel this ‘pseudo-sacred’ aura built around the figure of Ion Antonescu have yet to produce the expected results and this distorted interpretation of the past still finds a receptive audience in the younger generation that has grown up without access to a ‘demystified’ interpretation of the national past.

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