

who refused military service on religious grounds.

Translation from the German by John Kenney

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Reception of the Final Report of the International Commission for Investigation of the Romanian Holocaust ("Wiesel Commission")

by William Totok, Berlin

The history of the scholarly and journalistic reception of the events of the years 1941 to 1944 is part of the history of the Romanian Holocaust. The creation of an international commission in the autumn of 2003, which investigated the Romanian Holocaust and one year later issued its final report, was preceded by scores of press campaigns, in which there was some demand for the rehabilitation of the military dictator Ion Antonescu and those members of his cabinet who had been convicted as war criminals after 1945. To the post-communist cult sparked by Antonescu was added an extremely questionable interview in which then Romanian president Ion Iliescu relativized the Holocaust. The interview, published in the Israeli newspaper "Ha'aretz" on 25 July 2003, took the international public by surprise. So as not to politically strain and potentially

jeopardize Romania's intended European integration, an international commission for the investigation of the Holocaust was created in the fall of 2003. One year later, acting under the chairmanship of Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel, the commission presented its final report, which was subsequently published on the internet in both English and Romanian. Later the final report was published in book form by the Romanian publisher Polirom. The publication of the report and in particular the conclusions and recommendations contained within it brought about a variety of reactions.

In the public reception four tendencies became apparent: 1.) positive-factual; 2.) distanced-ironic; 3.) historical-critical; and 4.) dismissive-revisionist. However, a key statement in the conclusion of the commission's fi-

nal report played a crucial role in the perception and representation of events: “Of all the countries allied with Germany, Romania was – after Germany itself – responsible for the largest number of victims. The murders in Iași, Odessa, Bogdanovka, Domanevka, and Peciora were among the cruelest which were committed against Jews during the Holocaust. Although Romania had actually sent fewer Jews to Nazi Germany than neighboring Hungary, this does not mean that it did not commit genocide against the Jews. The problem of the Holocaust in Romania is in the first place a Romanian problem, which should be acknowledged and dealt with by Romanian society.”

1. THE POSITIVE-FACTUAL RECEPTION

The articles published in the press after the official presentation of the report summarized the reasons for the establishment of the Commission. The historical events were well-described, but the role of Romania was cautiously left aside. A striking feature of the newspaper reports published in Autumn 2004 is that the above-quoted conclusion was not mentioned.

2. THE DISTANCED-IRONIC RECEPTION

A few days after the publication of the report several newspapers published commentary, in which the authors used the strikingly polemical formulation “Red Holocaust” – as opposed to the “Brown Holocaust” – and suggested in this way the equivalence of the Holocaust and the Gulag. Basically, these journalistic contributions conveyed the idea, often formulated after 1990, that the historical process of coming to terms with the past should prioritize the four decades of communist dictatorship, and only focus secondarily on the four years of the

Antonescu dictatorship and the related racially motivated atrocities against Jews and Roma. Concurrently the pejorative designation of the report as the “Iliescu-Wiesel Report” appeared in this context, thereby making apparent a political alienation from the post-communist president and also indirectly questioning the historical and political credibility of the holocaust report.

3. THE HISTORICAL-CRITICAL RECEPTION

Of course, the report also led to a number of serious accounts, reviews, and debates. Studies drawing on the commission’s report have, however, only appeared in relatively small numbers and have only reached a narrow circle of readers. Many of them also come from the pens of members of the commission, whose work has been called into question by increasingly ostentatious rejection.

4. THE DISMISSIVE-REVISIONIST RECEPTION

From a purely statistical standpoint, in the period from 2004 to 2011 more hostile articles were published than ones which actually sought to promote a critical process of coming to terms with the past on the basis of the final report. These articles, which have appeared again and again since 1990, have put into circulation conspiratorial, trivializing, relativist, and holocaust-denying theories which are now also particularly expressed and disseminated by active internet users in electronic forums, numerous blogs, and countless letters to the editor. The most commonly expressed views include the following indisputable assertions:

- Romania did not exterminate the Jews and Roma; the Romanian state in the time of Antonescu had in fact saved the Jews;

- The Romanian state facilitated the emigration of the Jews to Palestine and in this manner preserved them before the annihilation;
- Hungary and Germany were in reality the only states responsible for the destruction of the Romanian Jews, because there were no extermination camps in Romanian-administered (occupied) Transnistria;
- Synagogues and Jewish schools and cultural institutions had been able to function undisturbed under Antonescu;
- Antonescu had not yielded to German pressure and the Romanian Jews had not been delivered to Nazi Germany;
- Antonescu had actually maintained friendly relations with the leaders of the Jewish community and ultimately saved Jews from the attacks of the anti-Semitic fascist organization, the "Legion of the Archangel Michael" (also known as the "Legionnaires" and the "Iron Guard");
- As evidence for this claim a nonexistent testament of Wilhelm Fildermann is repeatedly cited;
- During the pogrom of January 1941, no Jews had been suspended on meat hooks in the Bucharest slaughterhouse, but rather Legionnaires;
- The rebellion of the Legionnaires against Antonescu in January 1941 had basically been nothing more than a production of the military dictator, who was secretly supported by Communists and Freemasons;
- The authors of the report, along with the earlier dissident writer Paul Goma, were given the derogatory name "Holocaustologists" and it was insinuated that their investigation of events under Antonescu was intended to prove Romania's anti-Semitic policy so as to place the country in the "New World Order," dominated by Jewish organizations, and rob it of its national identity;

- The casualty figures of 28,000 to 38,000 Romanian and Ukrainian Jews given in the final report are portrayed as exaggerated, and the report described as an attempt to find historical cover to impute Romanian blame for the Holocaust, so as to finally force the Romanian state to pay spurious reparations;
- Radical nationalist politicians and intellectuals, like avowed Holocaust denier Ion Coja, the chairman of the Bucharest branch of the organization "Vatra Românească" (Romanian Home) and head of the League to Fight Anti-Romanianism (LICAR), and Corneliu Vadim Tudor, the chairman of the far-right Greater Romania Party (PRM), continue to plead for a rehabilitation of the former fascist military dictator Ion Antonescu, whom they describe as the victim of a Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy.

CONCLUSION

The publication of the final report of the International Commission to Investigate the Romanian Holocaust has not necessarily led to a new culture of debate free from nationalistic clichés and prejudices.

Perhaps the most important success of this document is the official recognition of the responsibility of the Romanian state for events under Antonescu and the favorable adoption of its conclusions and recommendations by the Romanian authorities. The final report's recommendations were partly put into practice. In Romania 9 October is Holocaust Remembrance day; in most textbooks, the events of the years 1941-1944 are depicted accurately; and in Bucharest, the so-called "Wiesel Institute" was established, which deals with the history of the Romanian Holocaust, finances publications, and organizes memorial events and conferences. In addition, a Holocaust memorial was established in-

the Romanian capital, which commemorates the persecution of Jews and Roma.

Although in 2002 a government decree (ratified in 2006 as a law) made Holocaust denial, the glorification of war criminals, the public dissemination of fascist symbols, and the establishment of fascist organizations and parties into criminal offenses, in Romania there have been no prosecutions against either Holocaust deniers or extreme right-wing organizations.

Translation from the German by John Kenney

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William Totok, M.A., born 1951, lives as a freelance writer in Berlin. He was a member of the International Commission to Investigate the Romanian Holocaust, which submitted its final report in 2004, which came out one year later in book form. Recent publications: *Episcopul, Hitler si Securitatea. Procesul stalinist împotriva "spionilor Vaticanului"* in România [The Bishop, Hitler, and the Securitate: The Stalinist proceedings against the "Vatican Spies" in Romania], Iasi 2008; and the study "The Timeliness of the Past: The Fall of Nicolae Paulescu" in Peter Manu and Horia Bozdoghina, ed. *Polemica Paulescu: stiinta, politica, memorie* [The Paulescu Polemic: Scholarship, Politics, Remembrance], Bucharest 2010.

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Perceptions of the Holocaust in Contemporary Romania: Between Film and Television

by Victor Eskenasy, Frankfurt am Main

In spite of the relatively large number of studies and collections of documents published in the twenty years since scholarly research in Romania was liberated, be it under the aegis of the Elie Wiesel Institute for the Study of the Holocaust or the Hasefer Publishing House (of the Jewish community), the Holocaust and its perceptions continue to be subjects of controversy, contestation, and confrontation.

The limited impact of studies completed or advanced in the two decades following the opening of Romanian archives, whether they come from Germany, Israel, or Romania itself, has at least three major explanations.

The first is denial of the Holocaust, one of the faces of the well rooted anti-Semitism that has a long history in Romania. The second may be the constant refusal of influential and

widely popular public intellectuals, made known particularly by television, to take part in debate. In contrast, these opinion leaders – admirers and students of the philosophy of the interwar cultural figures Mircea Eliade and Constantin Noica, among others, who in their youths were followers of the pro-fascist movement the Iron Guard – have distanced themselves as much as possible from debating the Holocaust. Their excuse has most often been to put an equals sign between Nazism and Communism, enabling their insistence on supporting the study of what, through abuse of analogy, has been called "the Red Holocaust." Finally, a third explanation for resistance and indifference manifested towards the results of the research on the Holocaust as it happened during the war years in Romania