

**Viorel Achim: *Munca forțată în Transnistria. „Organizarea muncii” evreilor și romilor, decembrie 1942 – martie 1944* [The Forced Labor in Transnistria. The “Labor Organization” for Jews and Roma, December 1942–March 1944].**

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In 1941-1944, the government led by Marshal Ion Antonescu deported parts of the Jewish and Roma (Gypsy) population to Transnistria, the Soviet territory between the Dniester and Bug rivers, at that time under Romanian occupation. These Jews and Roma (Gypsies) were victims of the persecution policy on ethnic and racial criteria promoted by the government in Bucharest. Among the approximately 160,000 Romanian Jews deported to Transnistria in 1941 and 1942, the vast majority were from the provinces of Bessarabia and Bukovina, while the approximately 25,000 Roma deported in 1942 were taken from all over the country. Until the spring of 1944, when the Romanian troops withdrew from Transnistria and the survivors returned to their

country, a high proportion of these Jews and Roma were murdered or died in the deportation places, of hunger, cold, disease, and privation. Researchers have calculated that between 104,000 and 121,000 Romanian Jews and approximately 11,000 Romanian Roma died as a result of the deportations to Transnistria. To this number must be added between 115,000 and 180,000 Ukrainian Jews who perished in Transnistria during the Romanian occupation.

The Romanian Jews and Roma deported to Transnistria during 1941-1944 performed forced labor not only for the Romanian occupation administration but also for the Romanian and German armies in this territory. To them were also added the local Ukrainian Jews and some of the local Roma.

During 1941-1942, the use of Jews for labor was not carried out systematically because the government in Bucharest and the Governorate of Transnistria regarded their deportation to Transnistria as a transitional stage. The Romanian leaders were hoping they would soon reach the “solution” provided by the Romanian-German agreement from Tighina (August 30, 1941)—based upon which the Soviet territory between the Dniester and the Bug came under Romanian occupation—in so far as the Jews displaced from Romania would be sent to the East. The Transnistria Governorate began to concern themselves with putting Jews to work only in the summer of 1942.

The most important moment in the history of forced labor in Transnistria was December 1942, when the Governorate of Transnistria regulated the Jewish and Roma labor through Decision no. 2927, dated to December 7, 1942, “on the labor organization of Jews in Transnistria” and Decision no. 3149 of December 18, 1942 regarding the Roma. The two decisions recorded comprehensive regulations on the status of the two populations, centered on the so-called “labor organization.” The “labor organization” included a series of legal and administrative measures, such as the ordinances and decisions issued by the Governorate of Transnistria and other deeds of the central administration of Transnistria, especially of the Labor Department, a sort of ministry that managed, among others, the forced labor of the two populations. However, there were also many measures that the occupation authorities in the territory, first of all the district prefectures and rayon praetor offices, had taken regarding the forced labor of Jews and Roma. The governorate decided to use the Jews and Roma for labor not only in order to exploit their workforce, but also to facilitate their alimentation and to relieve the governorate’s budget of significant expenses.

The present study deals especially with issues regarding the way in which the forced labor of Jews and Roma in Transnistria was regulated and organized. It details the Transnistrian legislation in the field and the administrative measures that directly concerned the forced labor of the two populations. The study reconstitutes the labor regime for Jews and Roma, shows the specifics of this regime compared to the labor that the local non-Jewish population performed for the governorate, states which the bodies managing the Jewish and Roma labor in Transnistria at district and rayon level were, and shows the way in which an essential aspect such as the labor remuneration was regulated.

The study also takes into consideration the way in which the measures taken by the governorate in the field were implemented and, generally, the way in which the forced labor of

Jews and Roma specifically worked. It provides a lot of information from archival documents, including a few statistics from several districts and rayons which show that between the spring and autumn of 1943 most of the Jews and Roma were used for labor in kolkhozes and farms, in workshops, on some construction sites, and as labor for the benefit of the German army, etc.

Decision no. 2769 of December 7, 1942, not only regulated the forced labor, but also partially modified the treatment which the Governorate of Transnistria enforced on the Jews deported from Romania, and on the local Jews. After December 1942, the Jews’ regime became in some ways different than before. Even if abuses continued to exist and life was still extremely hard for those who had been deported, when the Governorate of Transnistria began the “organization of the Jewish labor,” the situation for most of the Jewish groups improved. The documents indicate that starting at the end of 1942 the authorities were concerned—however unequally it was manifested in the territory—to keep those deported alive. There was some concern for improving the sanitary conditions in the ghettos and camps, and the inspections of the International Red Cross were accepted in ghettos and camps. Aid consisting of clothing, food, medicine and money sent from the country by families or the Jewish Center in Romania was authorized and correspondence between those deported and their relatives in Romania was allowed. Several repatriations were made. This does not mean that there was no more violence in Transnistria or that abominable acts no longer occurred during 1943 and 1944. What is most important, however, is that it was possible that most of the Jews who remained alive after the massacres in 1941-1942, could survive.

The present study links the initiation of the program of “labor organization” for Jews and Roma with the changes that occurred in the autumn of 1942 in the policy towards Jews of the Romanian government. In the complicated international context of that moment, the Romanian leaders, with Marshall Ion Antonescu at the forefront, became aware of the fact that continuing the policy of destruction against the Jews, both those in the country and those in Transnistria, would have disastrous effects on Romania’s position at the next peace conference and consequently, in September-October 1942, they abandoned the genocidal projects regarding the Jews. While in the case of the Jews of the Old Kingdom and southern Transylvania this meant giving up the project of deportation to the Nazi extermination camps in occupied Poland, as previously agreed upon with Berlin, in the case of the Jews deported to Transnistria, the Romanian leaders gave up the idea of physically destroying them and initiated a new regulation on the regime of the Jews in this territory, which from a practical point of view, meant the creation of conditions that made the survival of this group possible. This explains why starting late in 1942, the treatment of Jews in this territory was less harsh than before.