

Final Report

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Jews as propaganda tool and bargaining chip in Romania's foreign policy during the Cold War - What do we learn about the Romanian Jewish minority from the OSA Archive?

My research in the OSA Archive concentrated on the Romanian Jewish minority during the Cold War period, and on the methods which were used to exploit them for money, as well as for economic and political benefits. It's common knowledge that Romania sold out its Jewish and German citizens to Israel and West Germany however in the meantime it also used them to better Romania's image in the west and obtain economical support, most importantly the Most Favored Nation status from the United States. My research during the OSA Archive examined the launched political, diplomatic and propaganda campaign for the MFN status and the employed propaganda techniques.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty constituted my main source of inquiry. In the light of multiple constructed natures of the RFE/RL's documents it is obvious that these documents do not provide pure facts and do not present true events about the history of communist countries. So instead focusing on what happened (the actual legislation, decision and implementation of the Jewish policy) I rather focused on the process of constructed image by the Romanian state and the narrations of the western news agencies, press, and Jewish refugees/informants. In this respect my most important question was: How did the Romanian regime treat the Romanian Jews and what kind of picture did they depict in parallel about the minority group?

The OSA archive brings two new perspectives into this research:

The first considers the available sources and literatures. Most of the documents related to this question are classified in the Romanian and Israeli archives, so researchers have no accessible source to survey. Thus, only one book appeared about the topic. Radu Ioanid's book¹ about the "ransom of the Romanian Jews" highlights the financial and political motivation of why the Romanian government allowed the Jewish emigration to Israel. His findings clearly show that the Romanian Communist Party, chiefly Nicolae Ceaușescu obtained a remarkably large financial compensation by selling its Jewish citizens. Radu's work is unique of its kind; however his sources are unverifiable and totally exclude other researchers. It is due to the fact that Radu Ioanid, who is an internationally renowned scholar with high social connections, had access to primary documents which cannot be seen by anybody else. He notes, "In Romania I was permitted access to highly classified documents that officially do not exist". It is imperative to supplement and include new sources to Radu Ioanid's work.

The second perspective relates to the formation of the RFE's documents. During the Cold War this core propaganda for the USA was the Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. These two institutions had dual task, first these collected any available information from the Communist countries including newspapers, refugees' statements, radio broadcast, tourists' reports, secondly using the obtained information, they broadcasted the 'true news' back to the countries. Consequently the OSA Archive contains the propaganda machine of the Cold War from both sides.

Files consulted

My research period in the OSA lasted for two months. During this period I consulted various documents, including collected information by the RFE (item reports), reports of western news agencies, reports of human right organizations and Romanian and western press. High percentages of the documents were written in English and Romanian (some in German and French), allowing me to grasp all the information.

¹ Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies under the Antonescu Regime, 1940-1944*. (Ivan R. Dee, 2000).

The following archival boxes contained the analyzed documents:

HU OSA 300-60-1 Romanian Unit, Subject Files

- 1100 Ethnic minorities/ Jews (1948-1989): 193, 194, 95 box
- 1205 Exile: Possibilities of emigration (1953 – 1989): 202, 203, 204, 205 box
- Foreign Relations: Relations with Other Countries: Israel: General (1952-1989): 277,278 box

HU OSA 300-60-4 Romanian Monitoring,

HU OSA 300-60-5 Romanian Press Survey

HU OSA 318 Records of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights

Results

I tore down my research to three major areas of interest. These are the following: dynamic of emigration, contradicted narratives about the Romanian Jews, and Jews as propaganda tool (most notably the case of Moses Rosen). In addition, my findings demonstrate the existence of other minor characteristics of the “odd policy”. These included the existence of the money trail, Israeli and Jewish organizations support for Romania MFN status or Moses Rosen’s reasons for supporting the communist regime.

1). Dynamic of emigration

Continuing the debates in the Romanian Communist Party about emigration, the international environment and the Romanian-Israeli relations constantly changed the course of emigration during the period of 1953-1989. The documents were able to show how precisely the emigration was organized in Romania, despite the Cold War situation, where Israel practically was member of the opponent block. Mass emigration started in 1958 and after a short break restarted and remained almost constant until 1989, but limited restriction and special taxes were imposed on it, which sometimes slowed down the rhythm of emigration. After Israel and Romania concluded in the first agreement about emigration (and others followed it later) the dynamic of emigration remained almost constant, it did not exceeded the annual limit of 2000.

2). Contradicted narratives about the Romanian Jews

The analyzed documents clearly show two totally paradoxical narratives about the Romanian Jews and their emigration. On one hand the narrative of the Romanian Communist regime pressed that the Romanian Jews possess cultural and religious autonomy, they are allowed to emigrate freely from the country and they do not suffer any negative discrimination or anti-Semitic attacks. However on the other hand the western news agencies, item reports (with mostly Jewish informants), and human rights organizations opposed to the Romanian narrative and asserted that the Romanian Jewry are oppressed and even persecuted. Talking about the free emigration these reports pointed out the limited number of emigrants who are allowed to go and the applied restrictions against the emigrants-would-be. Especially the item reports give insight into the harsh treatment of the Jews. According to these reports, the authorities rejected many emigration applications, fired applicants from the education institutions or jobs and arrested Jews for no reason.

3). Jews as propaganda tool (Moses Rosen)

RFE/RL materials suggest a fierce propaganda campaign which was launched first to better the political image of Romania especially in the area of human rights and later to obtain the MFN status. It was evident to use the Jewish minority for these purposes, primary because from the holocaust they were seen as a minority group should that be protected and the MFN status contained a provision (Jackson-Vanik amendment) denying most favored nation status to certain countries with non-market economies that restrict emigration. Thus the Romanian Communist regime did everything in its power to convince the west that it meets the human rights expectations and provision of the Jackson-Vanik amendment.

It was surprising that I did not find the Romanian press and radio broadcasting soaked with the Romanian narrative about its Jewish community, especially their alleged right to emigrate freely from the country. I think it is due to the fact that Romania maintained a cordial relation with Arab countries during the Cold War, so the political leadership did not

want to jeopardize that by unleashing propaganda in the Romanian press. Instead they relied on one prominent Jewish leader in the country, Moses Rosen the chief rabbi of Romania.

From the beginning of 1960 Rosen visited Jewish organizations and events in western countries, where he propagated strongly the Romanian regime's narrative about the Romanian Jews. After Romania obtained the MFN status, Rosen's focus of activity shifted to politics. His main aim from now on was to convince the congressmen and other politicians in the USA to approve the extension of the MFN status, despite Romania's continuous violation of human rights and the restriction of emigration. When the US president and congress put pressure on Romanian regime and threatened with the termination of the status, Rosen increased the extent of propaganda.

It was a successful campaign, as Romania obtained the MFN status from 1975 until 1988 in every year. In the meantime the number of annual emigrants did not increase and the conditions of human rights worsened.

a) Moses Rosen's reasons for supporting the communist regime

One could ask: Why did the chief rabbi support the regime so ardently if the conditions of the Jews did not improve over time? As he explained it in one interview:

"I work by two principles. That I do everything I can to help the Jewish state and the people who want to go there and, at the same time, I try not to bring catastrophe to the people who still live here and love their native land."

So it seems that Rosen's support was meant to facilitate the emigration of the Romanian Jews, because he knew if Romania doesn't get money from Israel and doesn't obtain the MFN status Ceausescu won't let the Jews go.

b) Money trail

The most interesting part of the Jewish emigration is financial aspects of the negotiations between Israel and Romania. This is interesting only in my research to see if the USA political leadership and its intelligence agencies (which possessed the report of the Radio Free Europe) knew about the secret deals and financial aspects of emigration. As can be expected the RFE/RL documents provide an insight about the bilateral negotiations concerning the emigration and the process of organization. I found indications of five agreements between

Israel (or a Jewish organization within the state) and Romania. Except one all of them indicated a specified or unstated amount of money in exchange for Jews. Thus, the US political leadership and intelligence agencies knew about (at least partially) the secret deals between Romania and Israel.

c) Israeli and Jewish organizations support for Romania MFN status

During the Romanian propaganda campaign in the US, the B'nai B'rith Jewish organization intervened on Romania's side. Its leader, Jack Spitzer testified during congressional hearings on behalf of Romania, stressing the relative welfare and freedom of the Romanian Jews. This act highly contributed to the annual extension of the MFN status. However this act was rather unique and peculiar knowing that other western Jewish organizations opposed the extension of the status for Romania. However I found several newspaper clippings reporting about the meeting between Ceausescu and Jack Spitzer. Therefore this observation suggests another secret deal between Ceausescu and this organization, and in the background possibly Israel. Nevertheless this conjecture needs more research to prove.

My research enabled me to get an insight into the Romanian Communist propaganda techniques during the Cold War, and their policy toward the Jewish minority. The most important conclusion of the research is that the Romanian Jews were subjugated to the regime in every level and they were exploited in multiple ways, ways we have not known about. The findings of this research expected to be published at the end of this year in a Hungarian journal called "*Múlt és Jövő*" later will be incorporated in my broader research about the Romanian Jews.

Finally, let me express my gratitude to the Open Society Archive and the International Visegrad Fund for this scholarship, which allowed me the opportunity to carry on my research in Budapest. I would like to thank for my supervisor András Mink for his support and advices, Katalin Gádoros for her kind understanding and administrative support. I would also like to thank Robert Parnica and Judit Hegedűs for their assistance in the reading room.