

# The antisemitic measures of the Goga-Cuza government and the impact of their application outside the capital.

## Case study: Sălaj County

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GRIGORE BUDA

THE GOGA-CUZA government, which assumed power on December 28, 1937, marks yet another moment in the dissolution of democratic political life in inter-war Romania. The National Christian Party, led by the two ultranationalist political leaders, O. Goga and A. C. Cuza, had received only 9.15% of the votes in the parliamentary elections of December 20, 1937; nevertheless, king Carol II decided to allow it to assume power. As it is well known, this was the first step in establishing an authoritarian monarchy, at the beginning of 1938.<sup>1</sup>

During the brief period of National Christian government (December 28, 1937 – February 9, 1938) a series of markedly antisemitic measures were adopted in accordance to the party programme, which seriously affected the political, economic and social stability of the country.

*The Law-Decree on revising the citizenship status*, signed on January 21, 1936, which remained in effect even after the government fell, was the most impactful such measure, resulting in withdrawing citizenship rights to 225,222 Jews (36.7%). Citizenship rights were annulled to 20,384 family heads and adult bachelors in Transylvania.<sup>2</sup>

Another series of normative acts were aimed at excluding Jews from the participating in the economic and social life of the country, from jobs in the press and liberal professions, etc. putting such measures into force also indirectly affected the non-Jewish population, which led to occasional protests on their part.

In what follows, we wish to present only a few aspects concerning the way in which the effects of the antisemitic legislation adopted by the Goga-Cuza

government were felt outside the Romanian capital, using Sălaj County as our case study.

In January 1938, the Oradea Labour Office informed the Sălaj County prefect, in memo no. 3466/13.01.1939 that the Decision of the Ministry of Labour no. 103412 of January 4, 1938 stipulated that no Jew could employed or could continue to employ Christian women under the age of 40 as servants, maids, nannies, etc. This decision was justified by the fact that there might be Jewish employers who hired young Romanian women for "*traffic of human flesh*". The prefect was required to take adequate measures, while the women who were made redundant should contact the Public Job Placement Offices or should work exclusively for Christian employers.<sup>3</sup> Shortly after receiving the new decision, the authorities started implementing it throughout the county, a fact proven by the reports received from the local authorities in the villages of Camăr, Adoni, Buciumi, Băsești, Galoș-Petreu, Otomani, Moftinu Mare, Uileacu Șimleului, Crasna, Adrid, Halmășd, Bogdana, Boianu Mare, Căuș, Cristur, Crișeni, Ariniș, Morești, Sărmășag, Ulmeni, Sălățig, Pișcolț, Cuceu, Cehu Silvaniei, Jibou. The report sent by the authorities from Cehu Silvaniei shows that there were a few old, incapacitated Jews in the village who were granted a "*small extension*". The Praetor's Office of Jibou region also informed the county prefect that the government measure caused discontent among Romanians, who were denied an important source of income: "*it was not the wealthy house owner who sent his daughter to serve, but the poor one who is now left without means of providing for the family on the eve of winter.*" The negative impact of this measure was noticed by the authorities, as one can see from memo no. 3703/January 28, 1938, sent by the Oradea Labour Office to the county prefect, informing him about the Order of the Ministry of Labour no. 137176 of January 25, 1938, which annulled Decision no. 103412/1938 regarding the maids who were working in cities, precisely in order to avoid the winter unemployment of people from rural areas, until agricultural activities started again. The Jibou local authorities also asked for an extension like the one granted to urban communities, but the Prefect's Office denied their request, stating that the suspension granted to cities would soon cease, so that Decision 103412/1939 would be applied without discrimination. The fact that this decision remained in effect even after the fall of the Goga-Cuza government created some confusion for both the authorities and the population. Apparently, the local authorities, especially the Gendarmerie, wanted to maintain this interdiction; this is the reason why a group of Jews from Valea lui Mihai, including dr. Gluk Alexandru (lawyer), Gluk Eugen (factory owner), Berkovits Adalbert (expeditor), Weisz Vasile (dentist), Fisch Geza (factory owner), Grosinger Emanoil (butcher), sent a memo to the Prefect's Office, both personally as on behalf of "*our own citizens*", asking that the

Gendarmerie document forbidding them as “*Romanian citizens of Mosaic faith*” to hire or keep Romanian servants.<sup>4</sup> This required a new intervention of the Oradea Labour Office, in memo no. 4262/March 8, 1938, which sent a copy of the Ministry of Labour Order no. 155168/1938 clarifying the application of art. 2 of the Law on job organisation and placement. The memo showed that article 2 stipulated that the Placement Offices were open to all those interested, “*without discriminations regarding nationality or religious faith*”. This law was supposed to be respected and, moreover, the document implied that Decision 103412/1939 had been adopted in violation of the respective law (a ministerial decision was not permitted to alter a law). The logical conclusion was that Romanian servants could work for Jewish employers as well. Although the Prefect’s Office informed the local authorities about the clarifications from Oradea, the confusion was not dispelled, a fact proven by memo 8925 of April 6, 1938, sent by the Gendarme Legion to the Prefect’s Office, which asked for a clarification concerning whether or not the “*decision concerning the interdiction for Jewish employers to hire Romanian servants*” was still maintained. The Prefect informed them about the annulment of the decision in question by memo no. 11330/1938.<sup>5</sup>

Abusive measures were also adopted in education, by closing several Jewish confessional schools. An example in this respect can be found in Tășnad, where the local *Yeshiva* was closed by the decision of the Praetor’s Office no. 108/1938 on account of the fact that it did not comply with the Decision of the Ministry of Arts and Religious Denominations no. 13203/1937, which stipulated the obligation of having qualified staff for teaching Romanian, at least at primary level. Another decision, no. 154/1938, was responsible for closing the local Jewish confessional school *Heder*, following a series of *abnormalities* observed by the school inspector Augustin Crespai.<sup>6</sup> Some of these abnormalities include: being located in an unsafe location, the absence of Ministry-approved syllabi, being often open on Sundays and national holidays, thus “*defying national dignity and the laws of the state*”. These measures were taken without any legal basis, which resulted in the fact that the Ministry of Arts and Religious Denominations, the Minorities Office, asked the Sălaj County Prefecture to intervene and reopen the *Heder* school until further notice. The demand of the Ministry was justified by the fact that, according to Decision no. 13203/1938 and the Interpretive Order no. 25076/1937, the teaching of Romanian was compulsory in all *yeshivas* whose students had not reached secondary school age, as well as in the *yeshivas* that were training rabbis. Nevertheless, the county prefect still argued in favour of closing down that school, on account of the fact that “*Romanian was never taught in that school, because the school management did not know Romanian*”. The Minorities Office sent a memo concerning the Tășnad *yeshiva* too, showing that religious schools fell outside the scope of both the legislation regulating private

education and the jurisdiction of school inspectors, as they responded directly to the Ministry of Arts and Religious Denominations. Moreover, considering the fact that the students of these *yeshivas* had not yet reached the compulsory age for attending secondary school and that Romanian was obligatory in primary school, a decision was made to introduce two classes of Romanian every week, at least in primary school. After examining the situation of the Tășnad *yeshiva* students, the Ministry observed that the teaching of Romanian was compulsory in this school and adopted suitable measures. It was considered that the decision to close the *Yeshiva* on January 12, 1938, carried out by the priest of Tășnad region, “*following the verbal order of the Sălaj Prefect*”, was not legal, because such a decision could only be made by the Ministry of Religious Denominations. The Ministry demanded the opening of the school, which was made by Decision no. 586 of March 11, 1938 issued by the Tășnad region Praetor’s Office.<sup>7</sup>

The issue of the *Heder* school still remained unresolved; that is why the president of the Tășnad Jewish School Committee, Eugen Rosenberg, addressed a document to the Tășnad Praetor’s Office, asking that the school be reopened, because the reasons outlined by school inspector Crespai were not real, the closing of the school having been done “*without any competence; the inspector drew up those papers on account of the Goga-Cuza government decisions, therefore without any solid basis*”. Eugen Rosenberg’s request was forwarded to the Prefect’s Office that asked to see the functioning authorisation of the school, issued by the Ministry of Arts and Religious Denominations (we have no further information about the way in which the issue of this school was eventually solved).<sup>8</sup>

Another Jewish religious school was closed at the beginning of 1938 in Valcău de Jos, Crasna region. The school functioned in Ulman Solomon’s stable, which had been partially converted into a school (two rooms were used for this, one for classes, one as living quarters for the teacher). The reason provided for closing it had to do with the unsanitary conditions in which the education process was taking place.<sup>9</sup>

Another sector affected by the arbitrariness of the authorities in this period was that of local public administration. The aim was that of eliminating the Jewish civil servants who were working in the county’s administration, regardless of the means used to achieve this. An example in this respect is the “*suspension*” of the Sărmășag Notary Office secretary, Herman Herscovits.<sup>10</sup> After the fall of the Goga-Cuza government, the Sălaj Prefect’s Office asked the Zalău Praetor’s Office to investigate the situation and propose a solution.

The conclusion of the investigation conducted by the Zalău Praetor, Liviu Fărcaș, was that “*the secretary was not guilty of anything, his only fault was that he was a Jew; there was a significant wave of antisemitism at the time and some locals asked that secretary Herschovits be removed during a meeting held by the County*

*Prefect in the village of Sărmășag. The County Prefect, without investigating whether those 2 or 3 people were right, and in order to secure an alleged electoral success, suspended Hershovits; later, those who spoke up during the meeting admitted that their demand was simply a manifestation of antisemitism. Secretary Herschovits is a 42 year old man, he is responsible and kind, and we are aware of this, so he indeed fell victim to a sensational denunciation.”*

Following these observations, a recommendation was made to reinstate the secretary. (This was made by means of a Prefect resolution).

During the investigation, the Praetor conducted hearings with several locals in order to discover how secretary Herschovits' suspension occurred. Some of them (Bogași Mihai, Kupas Alesandru a lui Gheorghe, Basa Mihai, Sas Mihai, Catona Valentin, Kerestszer P. Sigismund and others), declared that they had no objection to make against secretary Herschovits and did not sign any document against him. another local, Dar Mihai, declared that he had no objections against the secretary but that, one night, between 4 and 5 in the morning while he was sleeping, he was forced by another villager, who visited him, Bologh Sighismund, to sign a paper that he claimed asked for a fountain and a bridge to be built on the street where he lived. Believing this story, he signed the paper, but he found out about its true content three days later, namely that it was an indictment against the secretary. He claimed that, had he known this, he would have never signed. Katona Francisc made a similar declaration.

The declaration of the man who started this indictment, Bologh Sighismund (39), a local ploughman, proved to be particularly interesting and clarifying. He stated that

*During Mr. O. Goga's government, we were promised many things that we considered necessary for our interests. There was an antisemitic wave at the time. A gentleman who claimed to be the county prefect promised us he **would eliminate all Jews from their positions**. Our secretary was Mr. Herman Herschovits, a Jew. I felt wronged by him based on the fact that he charged me 162 lei (receipt no. 19 of 1936) and then 150 lei (receipt no. 51 of 1937), both for pasture tax. I considered these sums to be exaggerated. I did not know that the money went to the cashier of the Pastures Administration. But now I am convinced that this is the correct tax that I have to pay and that it is sent to the Administration cashier, proved by entry no. 44 in the 1936/1937 records. It is true that I denounced Mr. Herman Herschovits in a document that was also signed by locals Katona Francisc and Dori Mihai, as well as other people, but this denunciation was motivated only by the dominant antisemitic trend. I declare that the true reason behind this act was antisemitism, not what was written in the document, because the Prefect told us that it was the denunciation that mattered, regardless of its content, but that it should be signed*

*by several people, so that he should have some basis to remove secretary Herman Herschovits from his current position. I maintain and sign these, mentioning that I want to nullify my denunciation if it served the purpose indicated by the County Prefect.*

After such a declaration, all comments seem superfluous. Unfortunately, this was just the beginning of long period of suffering and insults culminating in the extermination of most Sălaj Jews in the Auschwitz death camp in the spring and summer of 1944.



### Notes

1. Comisia Internațională pentru studierea Holocaustului în România, *Raport Final*, Polirom, București, 2005, p.31.
2. Carol Iancu, *Evreii din România. De la emancipare la marginalizare 1919-1938*, Hasefer, București, 2000, p. 263.
3. National Archives, Sălaj County Office, Sălaj County Prefect's Office Fund, file no. 856-1938, f. 1-2.
4. *Ibid.*, f. 15-30.
5. *Ibid.*, f. 33-35.
6. Idem, file no. 749/1938, f. 5.
7. *Ibid.*, f. 15.
8. *Ibid.*, f.21-22.
9. *Ibid.*, f.6-7.
10. Idem, file no. 4.840/1938, f. 1-6.

### Abstract

The study aims to analyze the impact of anti-Semitic measures initiated by Goga-Cuza government, between December 1937 and February 1938. Based on unpublished archive documents, there are presented a number of concrete examples about the way that local authorities from Sălaj county understood to implement the practical governmental policy, sometimes with excessive zeal, in domains such as education and administration. There are also analyzed aspects about "contribution" of locals to the implementation of such anti-Jewish measures.

### Keywords

Goga-Cuza government, Salaj county, anti-Semitic measures, Jewish employers, Jewish religious schools, Yeshiva, Heder, Jewish clerks, Christian women.