

# Max Wolf

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Braila

Romania

Interviewer: Roxana Onica

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Max Wolf is a retired gym teacher and a big sports enthusiast. Even at 85 years of age he moves a lot, taking long walks and thus maintaining his physical and mental health. He's tall and thin, and lives on his own in a modest studio in the town of Braila. The few things he keeps in his home are always in perfect order. He has a maid who cooks for him from time to time. For a while he served as the secretary of the local Jewish Community. He's a good storyteller and a meticulous and thorough person. He has an active lifestyle, going out every day to take care of all sorts of things.

I couldn't tell you much about my grandparents. I know my maternal ones were religious and simple people. But I never had a photo of any of them and I have no idea where they were born and what family roots they had.

My father had a couple of brothers: Samy Vorenstein and Moritz Vorenstein. The reason why their last name differed from my father's is still a mystery to me. After they were gone I wondered what had caused this difference, but I never found out.

My father was born in Buzau in 1892 [the city of Buzau lies near the right bank of the Buzau river, between the Carpathian Mountains and the lowlands of the Baragan Plain]. His name was Heinerich Wolf and he made clothes. To be more specific, he was a cutter, a craft in which he had specialized in a school in Vienna. His job was to take the client's order, cut the fabric for the future garment and pass it to his craftsmen. He didn't do the sewing; there were others who had been hired specifically for that. This is what he did for as long as he lived. And he was good at it.

My father had served in the army and was recorded as a veteran and a war invalid of the 1918 campaign. He was seriously injured while fighting on the Bulgarian front. He was very close to losing his left arm, and it was with great risk and difficulty that the doctors managed to save it from amputation. However, he lost two fingers and the limb was affected by ankylosis, so he couldn't use it anymore. He was still able to do his job because he had got used to working with his right hand very well. I don't know when he moved to Braila.

My parents didn't tell me how they met. I don't know whether their marriage was arranged or not. They got married in Braila. Their marriage was solid and they lived in understanding. I never heard them insult each other or fight over something. They were religious people, but their devoutness didn't go to the extreme.

My maternal grandparents were still alive when I was a small child, but I can't remember what their first names were. I can only recall that their last name was Moscovici.

My mother had two brothers who lived in Paris. They had a good material situation: they were jewelers and watchmakers. One of them came to Braila and I met him on that occasion. Unfortunately, I lost track of them. My parents kept in touch with them for a while, but all correspondence was lost at a certain point, I don't know why. One of her brothers invited my mother to Paris once; she was ill and needed to be examined. So I know for sure that our families used to exchange letters. But, strangely enough, I wasn't able to find one single envelope from either uncle.

My mother, Rebeca Wolf, was born in Braila in 1900. Her maiden name was Rebeca Moscovici. Before she got married she owned a millinery store. I don't know whether she had inherited the business from her parents. After she got married to my father she became a housewife. My mother was a very elegant woman; she always dressed up.

For many years my father owned a clothing business. He was an elite tailor, if I may say so, because he was an expert in apparel. My parents didn't dress in any peculiar way; they wore the same clothes as everyone else in town. I mean, they dressed according to the fashion of the time. They were modern, not traditional Jews. They worked hard and earned good money while I was a child. So we did pretty well from a material point of view. My father would go to the store at 8am, would come home for lunch, and then he would spend the rest of the day back at the store. He didn't have time for anything else.

Most of the Jews in Braila were small craftsmen: tailors, carpenters, tinsmiths etc. The tailors, for instance, were further divided according to their specialization: some made trousers, some made jackets, and some made vests. No single tailor made the entire suit. Our community also had a few grain merchants who ran import-export businesses. They were doing particularly well.

The former 'Jewish street' in Braila is known today as Petru Maior Street. But Jews lived in other neighborhoods too. I, Max Wolf, was born on 14th December 1919 in a house on Sfantu Petru Street. Later my family moved.

My only brother was 5 years older than me, having been born in 1914. His name was Elias Wolf. He graduated in journalism and changed his name to Mihai Lupescu in 1924 [lup means wolf in Romanian]. He moved to Bucharest, where he spent most of his life, working as a journalist and a gym teacher. His wife's name was Coca.

Like I said, my family was rather well-off at first. My parents sold the house where I was born and we moved to a rented place. We had ordinary furniture. I mean, it wasn't antique or custom-made. It was ready-made furniture that my parents had bought. Ours was a clean and well kept place. The town had electricity and plumbing - and so did our house. We used stoves for heating. The fire wood was bought in fall.

We used to have a garden. My mother loved flowers, so she kept a very beautiful garden in our courtyard. We also had a cat and a dog, but they weren't allowed to stay inside or sleep in our beds like pets are today. Still, we loved them and we took good care of them. My parents didn't raise poultry. My mother employed a maid who cooked for us.

Not all our neighbors were Jewish. People lived in individual houses and didn't develop the kind of familiarity that is common among apartment building dwellers nowadays. Neighbors just didn't

have the time to bother one another. I mean, we all lived peacefully, but we weren't that close. Everyone had his own house and courtyard.

We went shopping for groceries to the main marketplace called the Saraca Marketplace. My mother was the one in charge of that. In order to have poultry slaughtered ritually or buy kosher meat, we went to a hakham's [a wise person; he is probably referring to someone trained to be a ritual slaughterer] on Tamplari Street.

I don't know what kind of education my parents had, but the language they used was Romanian. My father could also read Yiddish, which he did on holidays. My mother could read Yiddish too, but to a lesser extent. We had a small home library with ordinary books. Some of them were partly in Yiddish and partly in German, and my parents would read the part they understood better. They also read the press: 'Dimineata' ['The Morning,' a Romanian-language daily newspaper, published intermittently in Bucharest from 1904 to 1938] and 'Adevarul' ['The Truth,' a Romanian-language journal of democratic opinions. It was first published in Iasi as a weekly, from 1871 to 1872, then intermittently in Bucharest as a daily, from 1888 to 1951.]. They encouraged me to read too. I gradually got the hang of it and ended up reading a lot. There was a public library in our town, 'Nordau and Dererea,' but my parents didn't frequent it because they were far too busy with their everyday work.

When I was a child my family kept the common Jewish holidays. On such occasions we would observe the rituals, eat kosher, cook traditional Jewish dishes and the like. My mother used different vessels for milk and meat. She was a thorough homemaker. On Friday evening she would say the Sabbath prayer – Sabbath was a very special day. I didn't study with my father on Sabbath. I mostly remember the High Holidays: Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The New Year was my favorite holiday because of its festive feeling; it was really a day like no other.

Many Jews lived in our town when I was a child. There were as many as eight synagogues, plus the Choral Temple, which was located opposite the headquarters of the Jewish Community, on Petru Maior Street. My parents used to take me to the synagogue quite often. They weren't very religious, but they regularly observed the holidays. They were members of the Jewish Community and they would go to the synagogue, especially on High Holidays.

In the early 1930s my parents moved to Bucharest, where my father started a new business of making clothes and selling fabrics. They left me in Braila, at an aunt's. As years went by, I would spend more time in Braila than with my parents because I wasn't very keen on Bucharest: it was too frantic for my taste and, since I didn't know anyone, it made me feel lonely. This wasn't the case with Braila, the place where I was born and where all my friends were. My father didn't do very well in Bucharest, so he and my mother had to come back to Braila about ten years later, in the early 1940s.

My father was not affiliated with any political party or cultural organization. Most of my parents' friends were Jewish. They ate out regularly, usually on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. They often took us, the children, along. They led a quiet life, with little partying. In the summer, my mother would go to health resorts like Calimanesti or Sovata, as she had liver and stomach problems that she sought to cure using mineral waters. We, the children, would accompany her. [Sovata: A health resort in central Romania, in Mures County, open all year round. Sovata owes its reputation to its lakes with mineral waters rich in chlorine and sodium that have therapeutic effects.]

I didn't go to kindergarten – my mother was there to look after me. I didn't have a nanny either. We only had a cook.

There was a Jewish elementary school in Braila, but I didn't go there. Instead, I attended the School no.1 for the first four years. Studying in a regular public school, alongside the Romanians, we, the Jewish kids, became familiar with their traditions. So we celebrated Easter, Christmas or the New Year as if they were our own. Then I went to the 'Schaffer' Middle School, which was in the same building as the 'Hirsch Baroness' School [for girls], located on Cuza Avenue, next to the public bathhouse. The School for Nurses is located there today.

My favorite subject was physical education. I also liked geography, history, and Romanian. I didn't like math and wasn't good at it. One of my favorite teachers was Mr. Balanescu, who taught chemistry. In fact, he's the only one I can remember. I also had a number of tutors who helped me with my homework from time to time. They were hired by my parents.

I didn't study Hebrew in school. The middle school was a Christian establishment where the Jewish children studied alongside the Romanian ones. For the religion classes, we would separate: the Christian kids studied with a local priest, while we studied with the Chief Rabbi. At that time, the Chief Rabbi was Dr. Thenen. [Rabbi Dr. Mayer Thenem is one of the most important Jewish personalities in Braila. He served until 1940. He authored the first Romanian translation of the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur prayers. One should also mention Rabbi Ihil Michel Dobruschin, who served at the Beth Iacob Synagogue from the age of 20 (1932) until 1956, when he left for Israel. He was the town's last rabbi]

There weren't Talmud Torah classes in my time. Still, at the age of 13, I celebrated my bar mitzvah like I was supposed to, in the synagogue my parents went to. This synagogue was located opposite the Maccabi [1](#), on Coroanei Street. There were actually two synagogues there, which have both been demolished and replaced with other buildings. My parents regularly attended one of those two synagogues on holidays like Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. [There were a total of 14 synagogues in Braila, including the Sacred Synagogue and the synagogues of the various craftsmen's guilds, none of which still stands. The Beth Iacob Synagogue, which was open until 1943, was the last sacred place to be built in Braila, probably in 1924.]

To prepare for my bar-mitzvah I took Hebrew classes with a Jewish man. I was able to read Hebrew very well and I could recite the prayers too. When the day came, there was a special service where numerous people were invited. There was a brief speech, and then we put on tefillin, the small leather boxes with sacred texts from the Torah. One is attached to the left arm, one is placed over the heart, and one is put on the forehead. [Actually, there are only two cases: one is attached to the left arm and the other is placed on the forehead. Mr. Wolf probably means that the front side of the former must face the direction of the heart.] This was a classic Jewish ritual signifying the religious coming of age. It was the last tradition I observed.

When I was little I used to play with other kids. I used to play a lot! I was an ordinary kid. I ran around all day long, climbing trees, jumping fences, and causing my mother to worry a lot. Hardly had I finished my homework, when I was already outside playing. We played with marbles, we played 'turca' [A game in which a small rectangular piece of wood with sharp ends, called turca, is thrown using a two-foot-long stick called batac], we played soccer using a ball made of rags. When I grew up, I played 'real' soccer and I exercised.

Being a rather frail kid, my parents wanted me to exercise a lot in order to strengthen my body. As for me, I can't say I didn't enjoy exercising. When I was 12 or 13, they signed me up for the Maccabi, a Jewish sports association. I trained there as a kid and, later, I worked for them as a coach. Gymnastics was a beautiful sport. It wasn't compulsory, but the environment there was nice and the coaches were very well trained. All in all, I got a good education and I had a happy childhood. My parents were well-off and I didn't lack anything.

On certain holidays there were military parades in our town. They taught us patriotic songs in school too. We, the Jews, used to be and still are highly adapted to the customs of the country and of the place of our birth. There wasn't any discrimination. We all lived in peace and understanding with one another.

Back then [in the interwar period], cars were very scarce in Braila. Only a handful of people owned one. One could safely lie in the middle of the street, as there was little or no risk of him being run over by a car.

While I was a kid, I came to no harm from anti-Semitism. I was completely unfamiliar with the issues of race and faith. Many of my friends were Christian. Many of my classmates, first at the public school and, later, at the 'Schaffer' Middle School, were Christian. We didn't discriminate and had no sense of being discriminated against. We didn't perceive ourselves as being different from the rest. It all lasted until the late 1930s, when discrimination showed its fangs [When the anti-Jewish laws were enforced by the Goga-Cuza cabinet] [2](#). Then the war came and we were forced to realize just how 'different' we were.

Right before the war, in 1938 or so, the Maccabi was forced to close because of the political situation, with the Legionaries [3](#) and all. From 1940 I worked as a gym teacher. I didn't have an actual degree in physical education, but I had enough experience from my days at the Maccabi association. I wasn't able to get a college degree because the times made it impossible for a Jew to go to college.

In 1940 we really became aware of Hitler. We heard stories from Jewish refugees from Austria and began to realize that something was going on. The persecutions against the Jews gradually became less of a story and more of a fact; when the Legionaries came to power, we were affected directly. I, for one, was arrested by the Legionaries on the grounds that I had been a member of the Maccabi association. The legionary doctrine was 'Jews are Communists'; they considered us the worst wrongdoers, so they had us seized. I was beaten, had my teeth broken and my hair torn out. I suffered a lot. This kind of abuse happened over a short period, for one month, at the time of the legionary rebellion [4](#); those were particularly hard times for the Jews. The Legionaries wanted to seize power, but Antonescu [5](#) stepped in.

Like I said, going to college was out of the question for a Jew [because of the anti-Jewish laws that were passed] [6](#). We weren't even allowed to travel anymore. There were times when we were forbidden to leave town altogether - not to mention the daily curfew. In addition, our radios were confiscated, which cut us off from the free world; we used to tune in to the Voice of America [7](#) or to the BBC in London, before that.

Such were the times that on 22nd June 1940 I was drafted into the labor detachments. The anti-Jewish laws enforced under Antonescu's administration prevented the Jews from being drafted into

the regular army. I wouldn't have minded serving in the army because I was in good shape; in fact, I was looking forward to joining the troops. Instead, it was forced labor. I did my time partly in town, partly outside the town, and encountered all the expected hardships: the wartime, the digging. Conditions were very rough. I was lucky enough to be sent to places within Braila county. Some of the Jews were sent to other counties and some even ended up in Transnistria [8](#). I had the hardest time then.

At a certain point, many friends of mine set out for Bessarabia [9](#) and their track was lost. Many died on the way, from starvation, cold or typhus. You couldn't imagine what wretched times those were.

My parents were too old to be drafted in the labor detachments. In addition, my father was a veteran and a war invalid. My brother was in Bucharest. There were periods when it was possible for some people to get exemptions from forced labor, and my brother seized such opportunities. I was able to keep in touch with my parents: every now and then, I would go AWOL. My detachment was located 25-45 kilometers away from Braila, close enough for me to go home for a weekend from time to time. I would have my laundry washed and get food and money from my parents.

They later took us to Cotu Lung and Cotu Mihalea [27 and 29 kilometers north-west of Braila]. Most of our work was concentrated on the banks of the Siret River, around the pillboxes [Editor's note: pillbox is a military term for a type of bunker]. The ground on which they had been erected was being eroded by the stream and we had to reinforce it. Those pillboxes had been designed to protect us from the Soviets, but they were never used. When the front was broken, the Russians simply went round them. They were equipped with heavy machine guns. Our work consisted mainly of digging, and I can assure you that was hard work. In fact, working with iron and dirt was the most difficult kind of labor. I pity those who had to work in a mine. We were lucky to be used only on the surface, doing that reinforcement work.

We lived in huts dug in the dirt. We had found them there, covered with planks. Rats were abound and hygiene was precarious. Food came in a bucket and it often had maggots in it. We would pick them and eat the food anyway, because we simply had to eat something.

I served in the labor detachment until 1944, until the very end. I walked out of there on 23rd August 1944 [10](#). I was in Vadeni, 10-12 kilometers away from Braila [Editor's note: 22 kilometers north-west of Braila] when the Russians [Editor's note: the Germans] started bombing the town of Galati. At midnight I was sitting on top of a pile of hay and saw the town being lit up by the bombing. It was so bright that you could read a newspaper! I kept turning my eyes towards Braila, to check on the town where my parents were. Fortunately, it remained covered in darkness. I felt more relaxed knowing my native town was not a target. However, some 30 kilometers northward, Galati was being bombed like crazy. [As a result of the events of 23rd August 1944 - when Romania broke the alliance with Nazi Germany and joined the Allied Powers - the German forces unleashed a fierce attack on Bucharest, on Hitler's order. In the days that followed, heavy fighting took place in Bucharest, on Prahova's Valley and in some other areas. By 28th August 1944, the Nazi resistance had been annihilated.]

Things changed radically for us when the commander of our detachment and his soldiers fled. We were free to leave for Braila. It took us eight hours to get there, because we had to avoid the ordinary roads. They were definitely not the place to be at that particular time, as they were crawling with the withdrawing German tanks and troops. So we got on a freight train that headed



to Braila. The trip lasted for 4-5 hours, because the train kept stopping. At one point, all trains were halted in order to block the Nazi withdrawal. When we finally got to Braila, our families were happy to see us, happy the war was over, and happy the whole forced labor routine had become a thing of the past.

My father died at the age of 64, in 1956. My mother died in 1953. They are both buried in the Jewish cemetery in Braila. Their funerals observed the traditions of a religious ceremony and were officiated by a religious assistant. We had a tombstone made for each.

After the war, I resumed my teaching career at the 'Schaffer' Middle School, which became the 'Schaffer' High School. I taught there until 1948, when all private schools were closed. Then I worked at some public schools in Braila: the School for Nurses and the Steel Industry High School, for instance. I never was a swimming champion, but only a good swimmer. I used to teach swimming classes by the Danube River for the School for Nurses of the Red Cross. I also taught at the Workers' Faculty for as long as it was open. I was rather sought-after, being one of the best gym teachers in town. At the workplace, I never had any problems because I was a Jew. I loved my job because I was so fond of sport. If you see me move around easily despite my age, it's because I've always exercised. That kept me in shape. However, old age is claiming an ever-rising toll.

I never chose my friends according to their religious affiliation. For me, it was never a big deal whether they were Jewish or Christian. I spent a lot of time among Christians and never found it unnatural. I sort of consider Easter or Christmas my holidays too.

I married a Christian woman in May 1940, so there you have it: an inter-ethnic marriage. Her name was Elena Zalumis, but I used to call her Lilica. She was born in 1914 and was a Christian-Orthodox of Greek descent. Her native tongue was Romanian, but she also spoke Greek, of course. Her native town was Braila too. She went to school here, but I can't remember for how many years. Her father worked in the town harbor for an import-export company. He was the leader of the teams who moored the ships that docked in Braila. His name was Stavru Zalumis and he was Greek. His wife, Maria Zalumis, was Romanian.

Braila had many ethnic groups: Romanians, Greeks, Armenians, Turks, Jews etc. They all lived together peacefully. The Jews were particularly close to the Greeks. I mean, we were on good terms with everyone, but we had a special affinity for the Greeks. We were on best terms with them.

There was no religious ceremony at my wedding, it being a mixed marriage. To me, it didn't matter whether my wife-to-be was Jewish or not, as I never had any problems with Christians. My wife and I got along well as far as our traditions were concerned, and the fact that neither of us was very religious helped. We had agreed to keep both my holidays and hers. So we celebrated the Jewish holidays, but we also celebrated Easter and Christmas. And everything was fine.

After I got married I lived at my wife's for a while, until the two of us rented a place. After my mother died we moved in with my father; his health had deteriorated and he couldn't look after himself any longer. Two years later, his turn to pass away came too. We stayed in his house for a while, and then we moved to another place. One last move got us to this studio, the one I currently live in, located in the Hipodrom [district]. My wife wasn't employed. Back then, it was customary for the wife to stay at home.

My wife and I rarely went to theater performances or to concerts. We spent most of our spare time visiting friends and relatives, like my wife's sisters, for instance. We also kept in touch with my brother, who lived in Bucharest. We led a quiet, ordinary life. We didn't use to go on vacation out of our town either. My wife died in 1982, at the age of 68. We didn't have children.

I was happy when the State of Israel was founded [11](#). It was a great victory for the Jews worldwide. While I followed with great interest and satisfaction every step of the way towards the new Jewish state, I was saddened by the way things turned out. I deeply feel for the suffering of the Jewish people, for all the innocent lives that were lost and are still being lost in those terrorist attacks. I didn't read Jewish books or newspapers.

I have never been to Israel and I never considered emigration. Being in a mixed marriage, I drifted away from the ideal of moving to Israel. But yes, I would have liked to go there and see how things are. Many of my former pupils are now living in Israel. I didn't keep in touch with them, but I hear from them every now and then, from those who visited Romania.

The communist regime didn't give me a hard time because I'm Jewish. I never did patriotic labor [12](#) or farming labor. I was never involved in politics and I wasn't a member of the Communist Party. They never made me join the Party, but they did 'court' me, so to speak. No radical changes occurred in my life; after 1950 the Jews who held key positions were gradually dismissed [13](#). I, for one, didn't have to hide the fact that I was Jewish. But I know others were under a lot of pressure and were forced to change their name.

The Jews were able to observe their traditions under the communist regime. My personal opinion is that, in this respect, the Old Kingdom [What Mr. Wolf means by 'Old Kingdom' here is, in fact, the region of Walachia.] was more liberal than Moldova [14](#), where the Jewish population was more numerous.

The events of 1989 [15](#) had a positive effect on me, definitely. I felt the taste of democracy, of free speech once again. Things changed radically. What happened in that period, and not only in Romania, but in the whole Eastern Bloc, was a positive thing altogether. Switching from totalitarianism to democracy can only be a good thing. As an elderly man, I also experienced democracy before World War II. But the communist regime came and changed it all.

When one retires, one goes through a psychological shock and through a material shock as well, since one's income diminishes. Pensions are quite small and the various illnesses of old age claim extra money. At least we have the Joint [16](#) and the Federation of the Jewish Communities in Romania. They help us, the assisted Jews, with clothing and medicine. The Jewish community in Braila is very active. The members meet regularly, on holidays and other occasions. Some of us meet on a daily basis. Our secretary is an energetic man. I myself served as secretary from 1983 to 1993, for ten years.

The Jewish families in Braila are quite mixed. There are families in which both spouses are Jewish, but there are also mixed families. Numbers are not known exactly, but it's safe to say that our community is on the brink of extinction: it will disappear when the biological life of the last remaining Jew ends. In my opinion, there are only 25-30 genuine Jews left. The rest are half-Jewish descendants.



Glossary:

### **1 Maccabi World Union**

International Jewish sports organization whose origins go back to the end of the 19th century. A growing number of young Eastern European Jews involved in Zionism felt that one essential prerequisite of the establishment of a national home in Palestine was the improvement of the physical condition and training of ghetto youth. In order to achieve this, gymnastics clubs were founded in many Eastern and Central European countries, which later came to be called Maccabi. The movement soon spread to more countries in Europe and to Palestine. The World Maccabi Union was formed in 1921. In less than two decades its membership was estimated at 200,000 with branches located in most countries of Europe and in Palestine, Australia, South America, South Africa, etc.

### **2 Goga-Cuza government**

Anti-Jewish and chauvinist government established in 1937, led by Octavian Goga, poet and Romanian nationalist, and Alexandru C. Cuza, professor of the University of Iasi, and well known for its radical anti-Semitic view. Goga and Cuza were the leaders of the National Christian Party, an extremist right-wing organization founded in 1935. After the elections of 1937 the Romanian king, Carol II, appointed the National Christian Party to form a minority government. The Goga-Cuza government had radically limited the rights of the Jewish population during their short rule; they barred Jews from the civil service and army and forbade them to buy property and practice certain professions. In February 1938 King Carol established a royal dictatorship. He suspended the Constitution of 1923 and introduced a new constitution that concentrated all legislative and executive powers in his hands, gave him total control over the judicial system and the press, and introduced a one-party system.

### **3 Legionary**

Member of the Legion of the Archangel Michael, also known as the Legionary Movement, founded in 1927 by C. Z. Codreanu. This extremist, nationalist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic movement aimed at excluding those whose views on political and racial matters were different from theirs. The Legion was organized in so-called nests, and it practiced mystical rituals, which were regarded as the way to a national spiritual regeneration by the members of the movement. These rituals were based on Romanian folklore and historical traditions. The Legionaries founded the Iron Guard as a terror organization, which carried out terrorist activities and political murders. The political twin of the Legionary Movement was the Totul pentru Tara (Everything for the Fatherland), which represented the movement in parliamentary elections. The followers of the Legionary Movement were recruited from young intellectuals, students, Orthodox clericals and peasants. The movement was banned by King Carol II in 1938.

### **4 Legionary rebellion**

Failed coup d'etat intended by the legionaries in January 20-27 1941, which culminated with the pogrom of the Jews in Bucharest; after its defeat, Ion Antonescu established military dictatorship.

## **5 Antonescian period (September 1940- August 1944)**

The Romanian King Carol II appointed Ion Antonescu (chief of the general staff of the Romanian Army, Minister of War between 1937 and 1938) prime minister with full power under the pressure of the Germans after the Second Vienna Dictate. At first Antonescu formed a coalition with the Legionary leaders, but after their attempted coup (in January 1941) he introduced a military dictatorship. He joined the Triple Alliance, and helped Germany in its fight against the Soviet Union. In order to gain new territories (Transylvania, Bessarabia), he increased to the utmost the Romanian war-efforts and retook Bessarabia through a lot of sacrifices in 1941-1942. At the same time the notorious Romanian anti-Semitic pogroms are linked to his name and so are the deportations - this topic has been a taboo in Romanian historiography up to now. Antonescu was arrested on the orders of the king on 23rd August 1944 (when Romania capitulated) and sent to prison in the USSR where he remained until 1946. He was sentenced to death for his crimes as a war criminal and was shot in the same year.

## **6 Anti-Jewish laws in Romania**

The first anti-Jewish laws were introduced in 1938 by the Goga-Cuza government. Further anti-Jewish laws followed in 1940 and 1941, and the situation was getting gradually worse between 1941-1944 under the Antonescu regime. According to these laws all Jews aged 18-40 living in villages were to be evacuated and concentrated in the capital town of each county. Jews from the region between the Siret and Prut Rivers were transported by wagons to the camps of Targu Jiu, Slobozia, Craiova etc. where they lived and died in misery. More than 40,000 Jews were moved. All rural Jewish property, as well as houses owned by Jews in the city, were confiscated by the state, as part of the 'Romanisation campaign'. Marriages between Jews and Romanians were forbidden from August 1940, Jews were not allowed to have Romanian names, own rural properties, be public employees, lawyers, editors or janitors in public institutions, have a career in the army, own liquor stores, etc. Jewish employees of commercial and industrial enterprises were fired, Jewish doctors could no longer practice and Jews were not allowed to own chemist shops. Jewish students were forbidden to study in Romanian schools.

## **7 Voice of America**

International broadcasting service funded by the U.S. government through the Broadcasting Board of Governors. Voice of America has been broadcasting since 1942, initially to Europe in various European languages from the US on short wave. During the cold war it grew increasingly popular in Soviet-controlled Eastern Europe as an information source.

## **8 Transnistria**

Area situated between the Bug and Dniester rivers and the Black Sea. The term is derived from the Romanian name for the Dniester (Nistru) and was coined after the occupation of the area by German and Romanian troops in World War II. After its occupation Transnistria became a place for deported Romanian Jews. Systematic deportations began in September 1941. In the course of the next two months, all surviving Jews of Bessarabia and Bukovina and a small part of the Jewish population of Old Romania were dispatched across the Dniester. This first wave of deportations

reached almost 120,000 by mid-November 1941 when it was halted by Ion Antonescu, the Romanian dictator, upon intervention of the Council of Romanian Jewish Communities. Deportations resumed at the beginning of the summer of 1942, affecting close to 5,000 Jews. A third series of deportations from Old Romania took place in July 1942, affecting Jews who had evaded forced labor decrees, as well as their families, communist sympathizers and Bessarabian Jews who had been in Old Romania and Transylvania during the Soviet occupation. The most feared Transnistrian camps were Vapniarka, Ribnita, Berezovka, Tulcin and Iampol. Most of the Jews deported to camps in Transnistria died between 1941-1943 because of horrible living conditions, diseases and lack of food.

## **9 Bessarabia**

Region situated between the Prut and Dniester rivers. It probably derives its name from the Walachian princely family of Bassarab, which once ruled Southern Bessarabia. Beginning in the Middle Ages, the region was an Austrian, Russian and Turkish protectorate alternatively. As a result of the Russian-Turkish peace agreement of 1812, it became Russian territory, and from 1919 to 1940 it was incorporated into Romania, after which it was annexed to the Soviet Union. Though it temporarily came under Romanian rule during WWII, according to the peace treaty of 1947 Romania was forced to cede Bessarabia to the USSR. The larger part of the region today belongs to Moldavia and the smaller part to Ukraine.

## **10 23 August 1944**

On that day the Romanian Army switched sides and changed its World War II alliances, which resulted in the state of war against the German Third Reich. The Royal head of the Romanian state, King Michael I, arrested the head of government, Marshal Ion Antonescu, who was unwilling to accept an unconditional surrender to the Allies.

## **11 Creation of the State of Israel**

From 1917 Palestine was a British mandate. Also in 1917 the Balfour Declaration was published, which supported the idea of the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Throughout the interwar period, Jews were migrating to Palestine, which caused the conflict with the local Arabs to escalate. On the other hand, British restrictions on immigration sparked increasing opposition to the mandate powers. Immediately after World War II there were increasing numbers of terrorist attacks designed to force Britain to recognize the right of the Jews to their own state. These aspirations provoked the hostile reaction of the Palestinian Arabs and the Arab states. In February 1947 the British foreign minister Ernest Bevin ceded the Palestinian mandate to the UN, which took the decision to divide Palestine into a Jewish section and an Arab section and to create an independent Jewish state. On 14th May 1948 David Ben Gurion proclaimed the creation of the State of Israel. It was recognized immediately by the US and the USSR. On the following day the armies of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon attacked Israel, starting a war that continued, with intermissions, until the beginning of 1949 and ended in a truce.

## **12 Patriotic labor**

Farming labor. During the communist regime, the urban population was regularly summoned to

forced labor disguised as voluntary work in the service of community – and dubbed “patriotic labor.” The preferred moments for this kind of activity were right before the major State holidays or during the spring fieldworks and the fall harvest. Getting large masses of people (from industrial workers and enlisted men to students and white-collar workers) to clean the city streets or help picking potatoes in the fields was intended to give the impression that the population enthusiastically supported the government. This kind of labor was also a means to compensate for the workforce shortage in the rural areas – hence the name “farming labor.”

### **13 Purges of the Romanian Communist Party**

The building-up of the communist system in Romania involved rivalry between different groups, respectively the "showdown" with each other. Two main trends took shape within the Romanian Communist Party, which seized the power over the country, and the main struggles for power took place along these lines. One of the trends (the so-called Muscovite faction) consisted of those party members, who left for the Soviet Union between the two world wars, then returned to Romania after WWII (Anna Pauker, Laszlo Luka). The so-called local faction consisted of those who stayed in the country. In 1948 Gheorghiu-Dej, the leader of the RCP, making use of the anti-Semitism spread out from the Soviet Union, started to purge his political adversaries, first of all the Muscovites. His first victim was Lucretiu Patrascanu, the charges brought against him being nationalism and rightist deviation; he was executed in 1954. Patrascanu was followed by Laszlo Luka (he was sentenced to life imprisonment), then Anna Pauker was expelled from the Party. The purge of the Party aimed at not only the highest leadership, but it covered the circle of simple members as well.

### **14 Moldova**

Historic region between the Eastern Carpathians, the Dniester River and the Black Sea, also a contemporary state, bordering with Romania and Ukraine. Moldova was first mentioned after the end of the Mongol invasion in 14th century scripts as Eastern marquisate of the Hungarian Kingdom. For a long time, the Principality of Moldova was tributary of either Poland or Hungary until the Ottoman Empire took possession of it in 1512. The Sultans ruled Moldova indirectly by appointing the Prince of Moldova to govern the vassal principality. These were Moldovan boyars until the early 18th century and Greek (Phanariot) ones after. In 1812 Tsar Alexander I occupied the eastern part of Moldova (between the Prut and the Dniester river and the Black Sea) and attached it to its Empire under the name of Bessarabia. In 1859 the remaining part of Moldova merged with Wallachia. In 1862 the new country was called Romania, which was finally internationally recognized at the Treaty of Berlin in 1886. Bessarabia united with Romania after World War I, and was recaptured by the Soviet Union in 1940. The Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic gained independence after the break up of the Soviet Union in 1991 and is now called Moldovan Republic (Republica Moldova).

### **15 Romanian Revolution of 1989**

In December 1989, a revolt in Romania deposed the communist dictator Ceausescu. Anti-government violence started in Timisoara and spread to other cities. When army units joined the uprising, Ceausescu fled, but he was captured and executed on 25th December along with his wife. A provisional government was established, with Ion Iliescu, a former Communist Party official, as president. In the elections of May 1990 Iliescu won the presidency and his party, the Democratic

National Salvation Front, obtained an overwhelming majority in the legislature.

## **16 Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee)**

The Joint was formed in 1914 with the fusion of three American Jewish committees of assistance, which were alarmed by the suffering of Jews during World War I. In late 1944, the Joint entered Europe's liberated areas and organized a massive relief operation. It provided food for Jewish survivors all over Europe, it supplied clothing, books and school supplies for children. It supported cultural amenities and brought religious supplies for the Jewish communities. The Joint also operated DP camps, in which it organized retraining programs to help people learn trades that would enable them to earn a living, while its cultural and religious activities helped re-establish Jewish life. The Joint was also closely involved in helping Jews to emigrate from Europe and from Muslim countries. The Joint was expelled from East Central Europe for decades during the Cold War and it has only come back to many of these countries after the fall of communism. Today the Joint provides social welfare programs for elderly Holocaust survivors and encourages Jewish renewal and communal development.