

PHILANTHROPIC ACTIVITY OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN ROMANIA DURING 1940-1944

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Abstract: *During Antonescu's rule, the Federation of Jewish Communities (F.U.C.E.) and later the Jewish Center (C.E.R.) organized the struggle for the survival of the Jews through numerous community institutions, many with a social role. This social activity was organized under the auspices of the Autonomous Aid Commission (C.A.A.), established in January 1941, an important role being played by Wilhelm Filderman. The commission organized and supervised all social action throughout this period, fulfilling one of the moral commandments of Shevot: „Every Jew is responsible for another Jew” (Şevout 39, 71). All the spaces where philanthropic aid activities took place were also centers of resistance, including spiritual, a place for socializing and exchanging ideas, information and encouragement in troubled times. For the leadership of the Jewish community in Romania, the fate of the deportees in Transnistria was a constant concern. Actions to help and rescue them have been a component of survival efforts. This material is a short presentation of the social and health effort of the Jewish communities in Romania during the Antonescu regime to help its members, including those deported to Transnistria, to survive the scourge of war.*

Key words: social activity; F.U.C.E.; Antonescu regime; Transnistria; Filderman

1. Introduction

In the organization of the struggle of the Jews from Romania for survival during the reign of Ion Antonescu from 1940-1944, the decisive role belonged to the community institutions. An entire institutional network of worship, culture, education and social assistance functioned to compensate for the material, moral, social and spiritual frustrations imposed on Jews by the Antonescu regime (Benjamin, 2005: 351-352). In the years 1940-1941 the main body that coordinated the activity of these institutions was the Federation of Jewish Communities (F.U.C.E.). The President of the Federation, Dr. Wilhelm Filderman, was the initiator and political leader of Jewish life and in this historical moment, when the Jewish community in Romania faced existential problems among the most complicated in its entire history. Although the activity had to focus on solving problems related to daily life, because all anti-Jewish measures affected aspects of daily life, it did not have a narrow pragmatic dimension.

Solving problems required tact, horizon, political elasticity and the ability to adapt to the concrete historical condition. In this context, Wilhelm Filderman adopted the tactics of legal struggle, the way of petitions, audiences and establishing contacts with Romanian political and clerical personalities with influence in government circles who agreed to intervene in favor of the Jews, an activity he continued even after abolition of the Federation. The activity of F.U.C.E. led by Filderman was not to the liking of the Antonescu authorities nor of the German Counselor for Jewish Affairs in Romania Gustav Richter. On December 16, 1941, by Decree-Law no. 3415, it was decided to dissolve this organisation (Official Gazette, 1941; 7844).

The assistance activity took place, first, under the auspices and within the Federation of Jewish Communities, then of the Jewish Center. The Aid Commission (C.A.A.), established in January 1941 and functioning until August 1944, played a special role. , the families of the Iași pogrom of June 1941, where about 10,000 Jews were killed, Jews suspected of belonging to the Communist Party imprisoned in the concentration camps of Târgu-Jiu and Caracal, but also Jews from the forced labor detachments set up in the summer of 1941.

The C.A.A. benefited, from the beginning, from the subsidy of the Joint, which was able to continue its activity in Romania and during the war. The committee was chaired by M. Zimer, chairman, and Fred Șaraga, A. Schwefelberg, A. Costiner, Cornel Iancu and Benvenisti, members.

In the summer of 1941, her efforts were focused on helping the evacuees from the rural area and from small towns (aid in money, effects, dishes).

2. Aid activity

2.1 Transnistria activity

The action to help Jews deported to Transnistria began in late 1941 - early 1942. After countless interventions, the Federation received permission to send aid to Transnistria on December 17, 1941, with the publication of the Decree-Law on its dissolution. The International Red Cross transferred significant sums from abroad through the C.A.A. to help Jews in Transnistria. After the death of tens of thousands of Jews in Transnistria, from cold, hunger, typhus epidemics, in the winter of 1941-1942, only in November 1942, Radu Lecca, approved the shipment of medicines, clothing, and other basic necessities (Gazeta Jewish, 1942). On January 8, 1943, Gingold empowered pharmacist Izu Fondier to procure medicines and health effects on behalf of the Jewish Central for shipment to Transnistria (Ancel VII, 1986: 166).

As the situation of the Jews in the Transnistrian camps worsened, Radu Lecca asked the Jewish community to increase the number of parcels sent to Transnistria (Ancel, V, 1986: 319-320). According to the report of the Aid Commission of 1943, between February 18, 1942 and August 4, 1943, packages worth 331,000,000 lei were sent to the Jews of Transylvania. The packages also contained injections, typhoid vaccines, working tools, windows, boards, nails, caustic soda for soap and salt, goods of 500,000,000 lei (Carp, III, 1947: 283, 302).

In January 1943, the first delegation of the CAA and the Central Assistance Department traveled to Transnistria to control the distribution of aid sent.

Although they were going to visit the 140 camps and ghettos in Transnistria, the members of the delegation met in the Balta ghetto with 60 representatives from 25 camps and ghettos and visited one of the three orphanages in Moghilev. The delegation consisted of lawyers Fred Șaraga and Iosif Eber Cohen, engineer Iaacov Schechter and Iehiel Marcovici, and took place despite opposition of Governor Alexianu, a visit approved by Antonescu (Ancel, V, 1986: 469). During this visit, in Moghilev, Șaraga distributed 6,600,000 lei (Ancel, V, 1986: 353-358).

Fred Șaraga's report presented the real, disastrous situation of the deported Jews, of the 72,214 Jews in the territory of seven counties and that everything that was sent as aid through the Central Bank is not a tiny part of what is necessary; the situation of the 5,000 orphaned children is disastrous; the entire population is malnourished,

weak and without clothes. The deportees could be saved only by using them in productive work and helped with clothing, medicine and food (ACSIER, fund III, file 300: 200-205).

Following Lecca's approval, the Commission also sent food and clothing to the 1179 Jewish detainees in the Vapniarka camp (Ancel, III, 1986: 299). Through pharmacist Izu Fondier, Centrala purchased medicines and health effects to be shipped to Transnistria (Ancel, VII, 1986: 40). Only between February 18, 1942 and August 4, 1943, they sent 331 million lei to the Jews of Transnistria. These aids contained medicines, work tools, windows, boards, nails, clothes, clothes, the total amount of these aids being half a billion lei (Carp, III, 1947: 283, 302).

19 collective aids were sent to Transnistria, amounting to 81,201,254 lei, about 30 million lei in food, 81,669,800 lei, in money sent by the relatives in the country of those deported. 13 transports of medicines and 10 parcels were made in the amount of 14,501,462 lei (MFA, fund Problem 33, dos 10 bis / 1943: 234-235). The effects sent by the Aid Commission and by the relatives of the deportees were worth 261 million lei. 13 shipments of household items worth 11,267,473 lei were also sent. Also for those in Transnistria were shipped 10 wagons with salt, ie 150 tons, 15 wagons with coal, ie 300 tons, four wagons with windows (Gingold, 1944: 107-110).

Table 1. Receipts and payments to Transnistria

ENTRIES	
Bucharest offertory	25.831.799 lei
Province offertory	26.865.811 lei
Miscellaneous offertory	32.616.626 lei
Orphans offertory	35.697.541 lei
Special share of 15% of the exceptional contribution	16.626.535 lei
	Total 207.638.312 lei
PAYMENT	
Collective remittances	111.210.254 lei
Drugs	14.501.462 lei
Shoes, effects	8.471.782 lei
Materials, tools, timber, windows, salt, etc	39.840.400 lei
Packaging, customs, insurance, transport costs	12.299.768 lei
Aid to those who left Bucharest	798.152 lei
	Total payment 187.067.818 lei

Source: Gingold, 1944: 110-111

Despite all efforts, the aid was still insufficient. A memorandum dated August 8, 1943 from Dr. W. Filderman to the Prime Minister after his return from Transnistria reflects the plight of the deportees. A new delegation, led by Fred Charaga, traveled to Transnistria in early October 1943 to assess the situation.

For the leadership of the Jewish community in Romania, the fate of the deportees in Transnistria was a constant concern. Actions to help and rescue them have been a component of survival efforts.

Simultaneously with the help of those from Transnistria, the C.A.A. and the assistance section of the C.E.R. had to intensify the actions to help those mobilized to

compulsory labor. They did not receive any subsidy or equipment from the state authorities.

2.2 Helping deportees from Dorohoi

The Relief Commission also provided support to the Jewish returnees in Dorohoi, a total of 6,107 Jews out of the 10,000 deported Jews. For their repatriation, two delegations left for Transnistria in December 1943. The first, led by Fred Șaraga, arrived in Moghilev, and the second, led by lawyer Dadu Rosenkrantz, in Tiraspol. The Jews in these camps were provided with clothing and food and money to return to Dorohoi. The commission contributed to the redevelopment of the houses of the deportees from Dorohoi, offered them food and clothes worth 15 million lei. The returnees received social benefits amounting to 10,000 lei for each family and 5,000 lei for each orphan (Ancel VIII, 1986: 552-554). The aid offered was 18 million lei, being offered through the envoys of the Central, H. Covaci and H. Scharf (Ancel VII, 1986: 634-635).

2.3. Return of the orphans from Transnistria

Another action of the Aid Commission was the return of the orphans from Transnistria, of the almost 2000 Jews that fell to the Commission. The idea was accepted in May 1943 by the Deputy Prime Minister of Romania, Mihai Antonescu, and by the Vice President of the International Red Cross. In the autumn of 1943, orphaned children were in 14 orphanages, the conditions in which they lived being among the most miserable. For their repatriation, two delegations left, one led by Fed Saraga, which gathered 1,400 Jewish orphans in Moghilev, and the second, led by lawyer Dadu Rosenkrantz, went to Tiraspol and Tighina, where there were 484 orphans. This delegations, fed, dressed and brought them to the country on March 6, 1944, and were cared for by nine Moldovan communities: Roman, Botoșani, Huși, Vaslui, Bârlad, Fălticeni, Piatra-Neamț and Bacău. In April-May 1944, 200 orphans were transferred to Focșani and another 1000 to Buzău, to be transferred to Bucharest in June (Ancel V, 1986: 576-584).

From here, with the help of the Relief Commission, hundreds of orphans emigrated to Israel with the ships Kazbeck, Belacitta, Bulbul and Moreno. Unfortunately, about 100 orphans perished as a result of the sinking in the Black Sea in August 1944 by a Russian submarine, the ship Mefkure, which had 394 emigrants on board (Artzi, 1973: 28-32).

2.4. Helping Jews in labor detachments

Jewish organizations were obliged to replace state bodies, which, in the case of the Army, were themselves responsible for equipping the troops, while in the case of Jewish detachments this obligation fell to Jews and Jewish organizations.

Communities distributed aid to 58,000 needy people, refugees and those in forced labor detachments; supported 50,000 evacuees from the country's localities in the county capitals and larger cities; distributed clothing, footwear, food, firewood to the camps and to the 40,000 poor who served a hot meal daily in the community canteens (Geller, 2004: 155-156).

According to a report of the C.E.R. of August 17, 1943, aid was distributed to 30,154 workers out of the 45,712 (66%) in the work detachments, aid amounting to

306 million lei (Jewish Almanac, 1943-1944: 196-198). For the operation of these canteens, the County Offices received from the CER a contribution of 53,524,374 lei. In the autumn of 1943 alone, 6,000 poor people ate at the canteens in Bucharest. The U.E.R. through the communities clothed and fed the 50,000 Jews mobilized to forced labor, although the military regulations of July 14, 1941, provided that their maintenance was the responsibility of the government.

3. Social canteens for the poor

To feed tens of thousands of poor Jews, about 100 canteens were set up in 62 communities. The canteens offered a hot meal to the poor, the unemployed, the disabled, the elderly, the sick, those in the work detachments, the poor students who attended the classes. In Bucharest alone, there were 25 canteens, where 6,000 Jews served daily meals. A situation of the canteens existing in the autumn of 1942 is given in the table below (Carp, III, 1948: 339-346). Between September and October 1942, canteens operated in the following communities; Arad, Bacău, Bârlad, Blaj, Botoșani, Brașov, Brăila, Buhuși, Buzău, Cernăuți, Deva, Dorohoi, Fălticeni, Focșani, Galați, Ginta, Hârlău, Huși, Iași, Lugoj, Oravița, Piatra-Neamț, Pitești, Pitești R. Sărat, Roman, Sibiu, Tg. Frumos, Tg. Neamț, Tecuci, Timișoara, Tulcea and Vaslui, where 11,408 people ate. Also during this period, 3729 people received food in kind and 20,573 people received money for food purchase (Gingold, 1944: 114-115).

Obtaining the raw materials needed to prepare food was a permanent problem, the Jewish Central being forced to procure them even on the black market, at quite high prices. The canteens were also centers of resistance, including spiritual, a place for socializing and exchanging ideas, information and encouragement in troubled times.

Table 2. The situation of canteens and beneficiaries in 1942

No. of communities where there were canteens	No. of people served in canteens	No. of people served at home	No. of people who received help in money	Total
62	17.408	3.729	20.573	42.710

Source: Gingold, 1944: 114-115

4. The legal service

The legal service and the placement office were other actions to help the Jewish Central in order to represent before military courts Jews who had deserted from forced labor or accused of speculation, possession and illegal sale of goods, evading the transfer of effects to the authorities. During 1943 alone, the Jewish Central paid 100 million lei for the redemption of punishments. Thus, thousands of Jews were acquitted, the sentences of thousands of Jews were reduced, and most of those sentenced to prison escaped by paying fines (Geller, 2004: 311).

5. Aid from the Joint

Help for the Jews in the country but especially for those in Chernivtsi and Transnistria came from the Joint Distribution Committee, which sent money for social assistance worth 35,000 lei per month. Through the Red Cross, the Joint sent a transport of medicines to stop the epidemics in Transnistria. In 1943 the Joint made a

donation of 100,000 Swiss francs also through the Red Cross for Jews in Transnistria but also another 100,000 dollars, money used by the Jewish Central to dress and feed the needy Jews, refugees returning from Transnistria and those who left for Israel during the summer of 1944. In May 1944, four food wagons arrived in Bucharest from the Joint (Barles, 1975: 79). Regarding the help offered to Romanian Jews by the Joint, its representative in Romania, Elias Costiner states that: „during the Holocaust funds were limited. It was only later that Mr. B. Jacobson, a JDC representative, came and provided \$35,000. That was all we had at our disposal until the beginning of 1944, when our first delegate, sent by Saly Mayer, came and brought us the means to operate. Our activity during the war was done under the aegis of the International Red Cross. We worked as if we were an IRC agency, as an illegal agency. The work we were able to do was possible not only due to the money we received from the Joint, but also because we were able to raise money from the Jews in Romania”(Lazăr și Benjamin, 2016:66)

6. Social and medical assistance

In the activity of the assistance sections, special attention was paid to the maintenance of institutions such as nursing homes, orphanages, dormitories and canteens. For the Jewish life of the Antonescu regime, the activity of social and medical assistance carried out by the Central, the assistance institutions and the various philanthropic societies was of vital importance. The laws in force have Romanianized Jewish hospitals and health homes, personal and community property; Jews were forbidden to care in Romanian hospitals, therefore, practically, the Jewish population did not have guaranteed medical care.

The medical service of the Jewish communities was part of the social work carried out at the national level by the CER. In Bucharest, there were three medical centers with 125 beds, the "Caritas-Fraternitate" hospital, the "People love" hospital and the "Maternity" hospital. In addition, there were seven clinics in Bucharest: "Halfon", "Poradim", "Voința", "Rahova", "Dr. Iuliu Baraș", "Onescu" and the Orthodox Community Clinic. Only during 1942 they performed 59,432 medical tests and 1562 hospitalizations and the following year, 52,266 medical tests and 1669 hospitalizations (Jewish Almanac, 1943-1944: 220, 224, 227, 249).

There were 12 employed nurses and 30 volunteer nurses and two doctors in the preventive medical system. In 1943 alone, eight volunteer doctors and 42 nurses made 6,000 home visits to poor patients, avoiding a typhus epidemic.

In Iași, there were three hospitals: the Israelite Hospital, the Pediatric Hospital, the Maternity Hospital and four clinics, the hospitals having 200 beds. During 1942, 21,536 medical tests, 1093 operations and 1690 hospitalizations were performed at the Israeli Hospital alone. Jewish hospitals also operated in Galați, Bacău or Dorohoi. Clinics were established in Arad, Buhuși, Botoșani, Bârlad, Brăila, Brașov, Fălticeni, Focșani, Piatra Neamț, Roman, Timișoara, Tecuci and Vaslui (Jewish Almanac, 1943-1944: 198, 200-203). All this medical system maintained by the local communities, treated thousands of Jews, saved many poor people and stopped epidemics through vaccination campaigns.

Table 3. Situation of community social and health institutions in the period 1940-1944

Type of institution	1940	1941	1942	1943
Outpatient	2	2	2	2
Social associations	8	4	3	3
Nursing homes	27	24	20	19
Public baths	11	10	7	7
Ritual baths (Mikvaot)	67	62	33	28
	23	28	45	45
Charity houses	1	1	1	1
Clinics	9	10	15	15
Nursery	-	-	1	1
	7	7	6	3
Maternity	3	4	4	3
Orphanages	6	6	6	6
Hospitals	15	13	9	8
Total institutions	179	171	152	142

Source: Cajal and Kuller, 2004: 715

CER also helped the 5,000 Jewish refugees who came from Poland and Hungary in April 1944 with clothes and documents. The CER dealt through the county offices with the representation before the military courts of Jews who had dropped out of forced labor or accused of various economic crimes, most of them under the law of speculation. Thus, in May 1943, CER paid for their redemption 100 million lei (Gazeta Evreiască, 1943: 2).

Regarding the contribution of the County Offices to the assistance work, during the years 1942-1943 over 400 million lei were collected. The President of the Central, elaborated a decision on the guidance and coordination of assistance at the national level by setting up the Superior Commission for Guidance and Coordination of Assistance (Gingold; 1944: 119).

The plant also distributed exceptional aid, such as the 1943 holiday aid worth 30 million lei for a number of 3,000 needy families in all Gingold communities; 1944: 121).

Table 4. The social-sanitary activity in the period 1940-1943

The year	Nursing homes	Fosters	Canteens	Charity houses	Orphanages	Charitable societies	Others
1940	27	7	23	1	6	2	6
1941	24	7	28	1	6	1	3
1942	20	6	45	1	6	1	3
1943	19	3	46	1	6	1	2

The year	Outpatient	Nursery	Baths	Dispensary	Maternity	policlinici	Hospitals
1940	2	0	11	7	3	2	15
1941	2	0	10	8	4	2	13
1942	2	1	7	14	4	1	9
1943	2	1	7	14	3	1	8

Source: Cajal and Kuller, 2004: 719

Conclusions

Despite all these relief efforts, the Central was unable to cope with the growing needs, but it should be noted that everything that could be done during the war was done, as evidenced by the survival of a large part of the Jewish population.

The entire assistance work carried out by the community institutions, as insufficient as it was, played an important role in ensuring the survival of many Jews.

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