

REPORT

**New Loyalties, Old Dramas:
Jewish Community Life in the Aftermath of the
Great War in Central and Eastern Europe**

Date: May 10th-12th, 2018

Location: Bucharest, Romania

Host: New Europe College for Advanced Studies (NEC)

Original event rationale

The conference focused on the impact of the aftermath of the Great War on the dynamic structures generated in Eastern and Central Europe, especially on the dramas involved by the civil loyalty changes in connection with the new national states created in the region, as well as on the consequences of the rise of the anti-Semite extreme right movements. The conference aimed at tackling for the first time the problem of multiple cultural and political identities within the larger group of Eastern and Central European Jewry, each with its own cultural and political affiliation according to the regional ethnic patterns, especially after 1918 when new national states were established. The conference brought together scholars working on these different Jewish historical traditions in order to identify elements of mutual influences and cultural cross-fertilization; the conference opened up a field of research on multiple identities of the Jewish communities from Eastern and Central Europe, initiated collaborative projects and put together the structure of a volume of conference proceedings as a scholarly tool and starting point for further work.

The topic has been rarely touched upon by historians or social sciences academics interested in the political, social and cultural changes occurred in the first years after WW1. Borders changed design, new nation states appeared in Central and Eastern Europe due to the Versailles Treaties or local territorial wars. Minorities, such as the Jewish, were looked upon as potential foes to the majority state, and consequently treated as such. The conference sparked therefore an academic debate upon what historically happened to the larger Romanian Jewish community in the first decade after 1918, and how changes deeply affected the communities' status. 2018 is also the centenary year to 1918 - the year Greater Romania was formed, which added a public weight to the topic of the conference.

Participants

1. **Univ. Prof. Daniel COHEN**
Rice University, Houston, USA
EURIAS Visiting Fellow to the Institut fuer Wissenschaften vom Menschen, Vienna, Austria

2. **Univ. Prof. Andrei CORBEA-HOIȘIE**
Faculty of Letters, University of Iasi, Romania
3. **Univ. Lect. Camelia CRĂCIUN**
Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Bucharest, Romania
4. **Dr. Attila GIDO**
Romanian Institute for Research of the National Minorities (ISPMN), Romanian Government, Romania
5. **Univ. Prof. Armin HEINEN**
University of Aachen, Germany
6. **Univ. Prof. Lucian LEUȘTEAN**
Faculty of History, University of Iasi, Romania
7. **Univ. Prof. Michael MILLER**
Central European University, Budapest, Hungary
8. **Univ. Prof. David RECHTER**
University of Oxford, OCHJS, UK
9. **Univ. Prof. Liviu ROTMAN**
National School for Political Science and Administration (SNSPA), Bucharest, Romania
10. **Univ. Prof. Mihai-Răzvan UNGUREANU**
Faculty of History, University of Bucharest, Romania
11. **Mag. Elisabeth WEBER**
Junior Fellow to the Simon Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies, Vienna, Austria

The program

New Loyalties, Old Dramas: Jewish Community Life in the Aftermath of the Great War in Central and Eastern Europe

May 10th-12th, 2018 New Europe College, Bucharest

Conveners:

Univ. Prof. Mihai-Răzvan UNGUREANU (Faculty of History, University of Bucharest, Fellow of the Institut fuer Wissenschaften vom Menschen, Vienna)

Univ. Lect. Camelia CRĂCIUN (Jewish Studies Department, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Bucharest)

Thursday, May 10, 2018

19:30: Welcome Dinner

Friday, May 11, 2018

10:00: Welcome and Opening remarks

Introductory Considerations:

Mihai-Răzvan UNGUREANU (Faculty of History, University of Bucharest, Fellow of the Institut fuer Wissenschaften vom Menschen, Vienna): *Why This Topic? Why Today?*

10:30-13:00 Panel I

Moderator: Univ. Lect. Camelia CRĂCIUN (Jewish Studies Department, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Bucharest)

David RECHTER (University of Oxford, OCHJS, UK): *The Strange Disappearance of Habsburg Jewry*

Michael MILLER (Central European University, Budapest, Hungary): *Hungarian-Speaking Jews in the Successor States*

Andrei CORBEA-HOIȘIE (Faculty of Letters, University of Iasi, Romania): *Les Juifs de Bucovine et leurs choix identitaires après 1918: option nationale, religieuse, culturelle*

13:00-15:00 Lunch (NEC)

15:00-18:00 Panel II

Moderator: Daniel COHEN (Rice University, Houston, USA; EURIAS Visiting Fellow to the Institut fuer Wissenschaften vom Menschen, Vienna, Austria)

Mag. Elisabeth WEBER (Junior Fellow to the Simon Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies, Vienna, Austria): *"Who Do Our Jews Sympathize With?" – Jewish Identity and Loyalty during WWI in Romania*

Attila GIDO (Romanian Institute for Research of the National Minorities (ISPMN), Romanian Government, Romania): *Transylvanian Jewish Self-Identifications After 1918*

Lucian LEUȘTEAN (Faculty of History, University of Iași, Romania): *Old Loyalties, New Dramas: The Educational Question for Jewish Communities in Inter-War Romania*

19:30 Dinner

Saturday, May 12, 2018

10:30-13:00 Panel I

Moderator: Mihai-Răzvan UNGUREANU

Armin HEINEN (University of Aachen, Germany): *Explaining the Romanian Holocaust. A View on Cultural Geography, Narratives and Social Networks*

Liviu ROTMAN (National School for Political Science and Administration (SNSPA), Bucharest, Romania): *Două imagini cu valoare de simbol: începutul și sfârșitul unei perioade istorice [Two Images of Symbolic Value: the Rise and the Dawn of a Historical Period]*

Camelia CRĂCIUN (Jewish Studies Department, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Bucharest): *Jewish Intellectuals and the Great War - Revisiting Traumas and Memories*

13:00-13:30 Closing remarks (Daniel Cohen)

14:00 Lunch

Contributions / papers

In his opening remarks, **Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu** argued that the history of interwar Jews in former Habsburg and Russian territories is in need of revision. Half a dozen successor states added themselves to the map of Europe, an upheaval with crucial consequences for the fate of Jews in these areas.

David Rechter examined the fate of Habsburg Jewry after the dissolution of the Empire in 1918. How did Jews transition to new loyalties? The very notion of Habsburg Jewry as an unified concept is problematic. The cultural and religious divide between East and West precludes such a definition. Instead, it is more appropriate to distinguish between different Jewish trajectories after 1918. Liberal and assimilated Jews embraced new identities in the successor states. Orthodox Jews continued to cling to traditionalism. Migration, ultimately, put to an end the illusion of a homogeneous Habsburg Jewry. What remained was nostalgia (Stefan Zweig) or idealized memories of Galicia or Bukovina. The disappearance of the Empire was ultimately a blow for its former Jewish subjects. Only 21 years separate 1918 from the start of the Second World War: not enough time for Jews to secure uncontested membership/citizenship in the post-imperial states.

Michael Miller explored the fate of Hungarian-speaking Jews in post-1918 successor states. The age of revolution (1919) was a crucial crossroad for Jewish loyalties. Bela Kun's revolutionary agitation was interpreted as Judeo-Bolshevism. Hungarian counter-revolutionaries framed Jews as enemies of the nation. A wave of "white" counter-revolutionary violence left between 1500 and 5000 Jews dead. Admiral Horthy describes Jews as "alien occupiers" of Budapest, and calls for *numerus clausus* to limit influence emanated in large sectors of Hungarian society. The "age of revolution" placed Hungarian Jews on the defensive. Numerous Jewish figures dissociated themselves from revolution, embraced Hungarian patriotism and even joined counter-revolutionary movements. Out of fear of intensified antisemitism, Hungarian Jews did not internationalize their cause. Instead, Hungarian Jewry feverishly tried to fit into post-Trianon Hungary by pledging patriotism and for many, converting to Christianity.

Andrei Corbea-Hoișie focused on the particular case of post-Habsburg Bukovina. There, Jews were not recognized as a collective nationality and were expected to “Romanize” into the new state, i.e. Romania. Bukovina Jewry, however, remained ambivalent regarding the annexation of the territory into Romania. While Bundists and Jewish nationalists claimed a separate ethnic identity, Jewish elites in Bukovina identified to German culture as *Hochkultur*. The legacy of the Habsburg Empire was overall cultural and linguistic: against programs of assimilation and Romanization, Bukovina Jews asserted a “cultural Germanness” at odds with the goals of Romanian nationalism.

Elizabeth Weber examined the question of loyalty among Jews in Romania at the start of the First World War. While Romania was still neutral (until 1916), accusations of “Germanophilia” appeared in the press in the summer of 1914. In fact, two factions divided Romanian Jewry. A pro-French component viewed Germany as the cradle of antisemitism, and the French Republic as the symbol of liberty. But like in Bukovina, pro-German attitudes were also noticeable. Overall, representatives of Romanian Jews -- the so-called Union of Native Jews -- took great care of showing cautious neutrality. Their goal was to deflect accusations of conflicting loyalties that would further jeopardize their status.

Attila Gido considered the case of Transylvania Jews during the interwar period. Contrary to the uncertain status of Jews in other parts of Romania, Transylvania Jewry underwent successful assimilation into the nation-state. Yet the emergence of Zionism challenged this model. At the start of the twentieth century, a distinctive ethnic Jewish identity transformed the traditional parameters of Jewish life in Transylvania.

Lucian Leuștean presented his findings on the so-called “educational question” in post-1918 Romania – and its consequences for Jewish loyalties. How to unify Greater Romania in territories such as Transylvania, Banat, Bukovina and Bessarabia? For post-1918 Romanian authorities, the uniformization of educational policies was a crucial step towards homogenization. But winning loyalties in these areas was a tall order, as German, Russian or Hungarian identities remained strong. These difficulties were similarly encountered in the case of Jews. Romanization stood in the way of Jewish educational goals, particularly so when the Romanian state attempted to do away with denominational (confessional) schools. Leuștean demonstrated that Jews were able to challenge, oppose, or nuance Romanian demands for educational assimilation. His innovative findings point to “agency” and autonomy, not unquestioned compliance to the will of the nation-state.

Armin Heinen offered a new interpretation of the Holocaust in Romania. He identified different “logics of violence” explaining various patterns of persecution. Heinen challenges traditional explanations centered on the endemic antisemitism of the Antonescu regime. Instead, he proposes a typology of genocide based on “different layers”: geography, historical context, and a distinction between cultural and “redemptive” forms of antisemitism.

Starting with a visual pretext, two pictures of Jewish cemeteries in Iași (one with the World War I heroes, the second with the mass graves of the pogroms occurring two decades later), **Liviu Rotman**'s presentation aimed at providing a "brief" review of the relation between the nation state and the Jews with two states of the Treaty of Versailles: Poland and Hungary. Also, it identified the characteristics of the "Jewish politics" in the interwar Romania, as well as the atmosphere of pogroms, by analyzing its development in space and time. In this context, the presentation proposed the concept of "permanent pogrom" as defining for the relation between the State and the Jews during the interwar period Romania.

Camelia Crăciun provided the audience with three documents presenting the life stories of three Romanian-language Jewish writers who volunteered to fight in the Great War, analyzing the context, outcomes and posterity of their stories. A World War I hero, literary critic Iosif Netzler (I. Trivale) died during one of the final battles and one of his soldiers left a testimony of his deeds. Doctor A. Steuerman-Rodion survived the War, but not his own depression which determined him to commit suicide a few months after being discharged, leaving a young wife and an infant behind with only a goodbye letter. Doctor Emil Dorian survived the War, but was subjected to persecutions two decades later, expressing his protest in a journal article. All three cases were largely debated, appearing as a starting point for a final conference discussion.

Daniel Cohen offered concluding remarks. The workshop unveiled two key patterns of Jewish "loyalties" during the interwar period. In some places (Hungary, parts of the Romanian Old Kingdom), Jews strongly identified with the state. In others (Bukovina as the key example), cultural and ethnic distinctiveness was the norm. Yet extraordinary demands were placed on Jews during this period, leading to increasing vulnerability. New histories of the Holocaust in South-Eastern Europe will have to start with the fundamental fragility of the Jewish condition in the wake of the First World War.

Conclusions and outcomes/outputs

Discussions revolved mostly around the contents of the relation between the newly created (or enlarged) successor nation-state and its new citizens – former imperial subjects and members of urban/rural Jewish communities. Forms of active, widespread and violent anti-semitism that had never been experienced before, fostering socially large mechanisms of exclusion, are suspected to be at the roots of Holocaust's tragedies, thus defining anti-semitism from a processual historical perspective. The pressure put by the nation-state into the direction of civil uniformization added itself to the already existent reluctance/resistance to integration. Societal fractures became wider and deeper, against a superficial democratic background, which would allow the political presence of ethnic Jewish parties.

The conference proved the historiographical territory of the subject has been largely left untouched or barely taken into attention, mostly by local historians (Romanian, Hungarian, Moldovan, Ukrainian *et al.*). On one hand, causes of historical academic neglect relate with the scarcity of accessible archival specific sources in the aforementioned countries. Working in these archives would naturally ask for a dedicated

effort of investigating abroad, e.g. in central imperial archives of Vienna or Moscow/St. Petersburg. On the other hand, local national historians have largely concentrated their efforts on the consequences of World War I, as seen from the perspective of the new national majorities, thus seeking to argue and underline the post – 1918 processes of nation-state formation, while leaving aside topics addressing the new post – imperial minorities. Panelist speakers proved that the post – 1918 fate of the Jewish communities in provinces of the deceased Austro-Hungarian Empire (Transylvania, Bukowina, Banat) can be better traced and described than the course of history of former imperial Russian Jewish communities and subjects. The case of Bessarabian, then Romanian Jewry has not been but partially covered by recent (post) doctoral research, and met with almost no critical echoes or analysis.

Participants agreed upon organizing a string of international conferences dedicated to the same subject, provided the conveners would soon invite a broader spectrum of researchers, meant also to cover the former Russian imperial Jewish communities' post – 1918 history in Eastern and Central Europe, as well as the history of the communities living in the Balkans and Greece, former subjects of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires. Definitive versions of papers presented at the conference will be collected by late October, as to organize the contents of a volume which could be published either in Romania, or abroad. The conference also gave way to establishing an open network of researchers who paid interest into its topic, seeking to enlarge the group of scholars with specific academic experience. The New Europe College fully supports the continuation of the project.

<http://www.nec.ro/public-events/2018/may>