**Both Form and Substance: Romanians and Political Antisemitism in a European Context**

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**Abstract:**

Nineteenth and twentieth century Romanian public discourse was obsessed with the question of Romania’s place in Europe. Whereas some elements of Romanian culture might have reflected European forms without their substance (*forme fără fond*), between roughly 1880 and 1944 political antisemitism had both form and substance. Romanian antisemites were at the forefront of developments within European antisemitism and saw it as a way of demonstrating their Europeanness. Anti-Jewish rhetoric, laws, and violence during this period should thus be discussed as part of a broad transnational story of political antisemitism and not in terms of Romanian exceptionalism. This article situates the origins of antisemitic political organising in Romania alongside similar developments in Austria, Germany, and France, showing that Romanian antisemites were well connected with prominent antisemites abroad. Just as antisemitism entered urban politics during this period, it also shaped rural violence, which was provoked by the sort of propaganda and rumour-mongering seen in the Russian pogroms of 1881 and the Kishinev pogrom of 1903. In 1922 Romanian students protested to limit the number of Jews enrolled at universities, as did nationalist students in Austria, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, and elsewhere. Romanians corresponded with antisemitic students abroad and employed the same language, repertoires, and frames that were popular elsewhere in Europe.

Antisemitism shaped the way that Romanian fascists, from the Romanian National Fascists to A. C. Cuza, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, Ion Moţa, and Nichifor Crainic, related to fascist movements abroad during the interwar period. Publicists such as Georg de Pottere and Ulrich Fleischhauser drew Romanians into pan-European antisemitic networks, and antisemitism sabotaged Eugenio Coselschi’s attempts to convince the Legion of the Archangel Michael to ally itself with Fascist Italy. Legionaries did find common ground with young antisemites in Poland, and their struggle against ‘Masonic-Marxism’ helped unite them with other fascists fighting in the Spanish Civil War. Ultimately, the aspirations of Romanians to become equals with European antisemites were dashed during the Second World War as Nazi advisors dictated the shape, if not the scale, of the Holocaust in Romania.

**Keywords:** Antisemitism; Romania; Transnationalism; A. C. Cuza; Corneliu Zelea Codreanu

When Titu Maiorescu coined the phrase *formă fără fond* (form without substance) in 1868, he complained that ‘our young people set out on an extraordinary emigration towards the founts of knowledge in France and Germany’. But ‘as unprepared as they were and are, dazzled by the great spectacles of modern culture, they understood only the effects, not the causes, seeing only the superficial forms but not perceiving the deep historical substances that were the necessary conditions of those forms and without which the forms could never exist’.[[1]](#footnote-1) With its clear distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’, Maiorescu’s lament gave new direction to an oft-repeated sentiment that Romanians were backward and were defined by their lack of (Western) European culture.[[2]](#footnote-2) Building on the Paşoptist notion of *Românism* (Romanianism), Maiorescu and the Junimists used the idea of *formă fără fond* as an impetus for creating an authentic Romanian culture based on Romanian realities. One of the presuppositions of the idea, which Mihai Eminescu in particular made explicit, was that Romania’s cultural and intellectual poverty was a result of centuries of domination by foreigners.[[3]](#footnote-3) Habsburg, Ottoman, and Russian rulers had forced Romanians to remain uneducated peasants, and they were apparently the ones who had brought Jews into the country as *arendaşi* (overseers) and tavern-keepers.[[4]](#footnote-4) Refracted through the antisemitism of the Sămănatorist movement of the 1890s, by the 1920s Ionel Brătianu’s ‘*prin noi înşine*’ (through ourselves alone) easily co-existed with A. C. Cuza’s ‘*nici un ac de la jidani*’ (not even a needle from the Yids). Brătianu funded industrialisation with Jewish money while Cuza organised boycotts of Jewish businesses, but both distinguished between Romanians and their Others, and both insisted that development by and for ethnic Romanians was the only way for their nation to overcome its subaltern status within Europe.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Between c.1880 and 1944 Romanian antisemitism had both form and substance, being deeply rooted in the self-image of Romanian nationalism. Political antisemitism was a logical product of the Romanian national movement and state-building in Moldavia, Wallachia, and Transylvania, but it was also a common phenomenon in many European countries.[[6]](#footnote-6) While a number of scholars have examined the local roots of political antisemitism in modern Romania, few have situated it within a transnational, pan-European story.[[7]](#footnote-7) For the past three decades the history of Romanian antisemitism has been written primarily within the bounds of the nation-state, isolated from the transnational story taking place across the continent.[[8]](#footnote-8) Without denying the importance of the national context, this article examines the variety of ways that political antisemitism in Romania was entangled with similar movements elsewhere. From a European perspective, Romanians were consistently at the forefront of political antisemitism, which was grounded simultaneously in local realities and in discourses and forms of political organizing found across Europe. To say that Romanians were at the forefront of European antisemitism does not mean that politicians elsewhere imitated the Romanian movement or that Romanians were somehow uniquely evil in their attitudes towards Jews. But neither were they imitating foreign movements whose concerns were fundamentally alien to the Romanian context. Considering political antisemitism within a European framework also highlights the extent to which perceptions of Romanians as backward shaped antisemitic activism during this period. When Romanian antisemites insisted on excluding Jews from the cultural, political, and economic life of the nation they did they so confident that their antisemitism made them truly European and that achieving this goal would at last allow them to become one of the civilized nations of Europe.

**Antisemitism in a New Key**

During the 1870s antisemitism took on ‘a new key’ throughout Europe, adopting a more political character and mobilising movements and political parties around the goal of excluding Jews from Europe.[[9]](#footnote-9) In Germany such movements emerged briefly during the financial crisis of 1873 before consolidating and radicalising from 1879 onwards.[[10]](#footnote-10) Wilhelm Marr is usually credited with coining the term ‘*Antisemitismus*’ in his 1879 pamphlet *Der Sieg des Judenthums über das Germanenthum* (*The Victory of Judaism over Germanism*), in which he argued that ‘world domination belongs to Semitism’, with the result that ‘the “twilight of the gods” has arrived for us. You [Jews] are the masters, we are the slaves.’[[11]](#footnote-11) Marr’s vision of a Europe fundamentally incompatible with and in danger from Jews found an enthusiastic audience, and politicians such as Adolf Stöcker and Heinrich von Treitschke began using it to rally support for their own political agendas.[[12]](#footnote-12) In France the leading voice of antisemitism was Édouard Drumont, whose book *La France juive* (*Jewish France*) became an instant bestseller, combining a host of antisemitic conspiracy theories about Jewish finance and ritual murder with biological racism to present Jews as the enemy of Christian Europe.[[13]](#footnote-13) In Vienna, first Georg von Schönerer’s Pan-German Party then Karl Lueger’s Christian Socialists undermined the hegemony of the city’s liberal bourgeoisie and convinced Austrian politicians that it was possible to win votes by appealing to antisemitic prejudices. Their repertoires helped associate organised political antisemitism with violence, flag waving, and opportunism.[[14]](#footnote-14) Elsewhere in Europe, what Grzegorz Krzywiec calls ‘the Lueger effect’ served as a catalyst for antisemites who modelled their movements on rhetoric on Lueger’s success.[[15]](#footnote-15)

As Paul Hanebrink has argued about the twentieth century myth of Judeo-Bolshevism, in the late nineteenth century antisemitism functioned as a ‘cultural code ... to generate associations and linkages among a variety of complex and disparate social phenomena’. Quoting Shulamit Volkov, he maintains that it ‘functioned as a sign of “cultural identity, of one’s belonging to a specific cultural camp”’.[[16]](#footnote-16) Antisemitism did not necessarily define the specific content of these cultural camps, however. In France, Italy, and Hungary antisemitism was intimately connected to right-wing Catholic politics, for example, and with Eastern Orthodoxy in Russia.[[17]](#footnote-17) Yet in Austria, Germany, and Romania it was decidedly atheist, a stance which Raul Cârstocea and Éva Kovács describe as ‘part of an attempt to “prove” one’s modernity’.[[18]](#footnote-18) With similar debates about the role of religion, representation, eugenics, technology, and industrialisation taking place in most European countries, regardless of their religious persuasions most antisemites embraced a worldview that Jeffrey Herf later called ‘reactionary modernism’, which involved identifying perceived threats to ‘traditional’ national values and marshalling the coercive technologies of the modern state to exclude anyone associated with those threats.[[19]](#footnote-19) As Sămănatorists did in Romania, European antisemites waxed lyrical about how urbanisation and industrialisation were destroying ancient pastoral values, while simultaneously insisting that their position offered the most rational, scientific solutions to pressing social problems.[[20]](#footnote-20) Sămănatorism provided the ideological substance that grounded the organisational forms of antisemitism in local soil.

Romanian antisemites organised congresses and pressure groups in the same ways as their colleagues elsewhere in Europe. Romanians attended the Second International Anti-Jewish Congress in Chemnitz in 1883, and established a Universal Anti-Israelite Alliance in 1886, with congresses in Bucharest and Craiova. The organisers thought about their Alliance in international terms, welcoming delegates from Austria-Hungary and France and electing Drumont as their president.[[21]](#footnote-21) The congresses were characterised by violence and unrest and were condemned even by other antisemites as being unnecessarily vulgar.[[22]](#footnote-22) In the 1890s the Dreyfus Affair catalyzed antisemitic sentiment across Europe. The mainstream Romanian dailies rarely mentioned the antisemitic nature of the Dreyfus Affair, although they did provide blow-by-blow coverage of the trials. Even the Conservative newspaper founded by Mihail Eminescu, *Timpul* (*The Times*), which often spoke about ‘Yids’ exploiting Romanians , was remarkably objective in its reporting on the trials.[[23]](#footnote-23) Antisemitic newspapers such as *Ecoul Moldovei* (*The Echo of Moldavia*), *Jos jidanii* (*Down with the Yids*), and Craiova’s *Antisemitul* (*The Antisemite*) hailed the affair as proof of the treachery of assimilated Jews and took from it the lesson that ‘it is nice to be merciful, to welcome the porcupine into your house to warm itself, but you also have to think of the consequences. The French did not think when they gave, or more accurately, when they permitted, Jews to become citizens. Now they are suffering, and who knows how much more they have to suffer’.[[24]](#footnote-24) Antisemites were well aware of international trends and they drew heavily on foreign literature in their polemics against Jews, sometimes even going so far as to plagiarize it and claim it as their own.[[25]](#footnote-25) They frequently reported on the successes of antisemites elsewhere in Europe, and Romanian activists attended international conferences.[[26]](#footnote-26) Constantin K. Zamfirol cited both the Dreyfus Affair and Karl Lueger’s success in Vienna as his motivations for founding Liga Antisemită (The Antisemitic League) in Craiova in 1898.[[27]](#footnote-27) French connections were particularly strong. All of the businesses which advertised in the July 1906 issue of *Antisemitul* from Brăila were French, and the newspaper claimed that Romanian Jews were sending money to France which was being used to create an international front against antisemitism.[[28]](#footnote-28)

The Romanian press in the Old Kingdom focused on Western European antisemitism, but it was Russian antisemitism that shaped relationships with Jews in Bessarabia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Pogroms terrorised the southern provinces of Russia’s Pale of Settlement for two years after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881, engulfing major cities including Kiev and Odessa. As Benajmin Nathans argues, ‘these were by no means the first pogroms against Jews in the Russian Empire, but 1881 inaugurated a new pattern of anti-Jewish violence in which national political events acted as decisive catalysts, and rioting occurred not just in isolated settings but across large regions, for months or years on end’.[[29]](#footnote-29) Historians have identified a range of factors that shaped antisemitism in late imperial Russia, the most important of which were social polarisation, the economic tensions thrown up by modernisation, and the failure of the authorities to prevent violence.[[30]](#footnote-30) Although it might not have been as visible in Russia’s profoundly undemocratic system as it was further West, political opportunism catalysed antisemitic activism in Russia too. The 1903 pogrom in Kishinev, in which 49 people were murdered, dozens of girls and women raped, and over 500 injured in 48 hours of violence, was sparked by Pavel Krushevan and other journalists associated with the newspaper *Bessarabets* who spread the rumours and fears that the pogrom fed on. Krushevan was later responsible for publishing – and possibly writing – the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and his fearmongering helped sustain his own political platform while also financing the newspaper.[[31]](#footnote-31) The Kishinev pogrom shows that similar processes to those which Marr and Drumont drew on were at work in provicial borderlands and the rapid spread of the *Protocols* demonstrates how closely connected places like Kishinev were to transnational antisemitic networks.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Antisemities in both Russia and Romania formed grassroots movements made up of peasants, factory workers, shopkeepers, and other people usually excluded from political life. A plethora of right-wing grassroots movements commonly known as the Blackshirts emerged in Russia during the 1905 revolution. Passionately defending the state, ‘tradition’, and Russian nationalism, they were nonetheless not conservative. With a radical, anti-elite posture, their violence posed a problem for the authorities who recognized that they had more in common with the integral nationalism of people like Charles Maurras than with the official ideology of the Russian state.[[33]](#footnote-33) Linkages between city, town, and village also characterised the violence against Jews in Romania in 1907. What began as an attack on Jews in one village in Botoşani County became a national uprising as rumours and long-standing frustrations with deprivation and social inequality boiled over. As Irina Marin demonstrates, however, it was local economic, legal, and repressive structures that made the uprising possible, and cross-border networks had little impact on the violence.[[34]](#footnote-34) At the same time that it reproduced the same tropes circulated by antisemites elsewhere in Europe, the antisemitism seen in the 1907 uprisings was grounded in Romanian realities and was not simply mimicking the forms of political antisemitism abroad.

**Student Politics**

The antisemitic Romanian student movement of 1922 should also be understood as part of a pan-European phenomenon with a history going back over forty years. University students in Austria, Germany, and Russia began a regular practice of violently attacking Jews during the 1880s. They combined hooliganism and assault with a clearly articulated political platform that demanded university curricula be shaped according to national chauvinist criteria and student associations be given more influence in university affairs.[[35]](#footnote-35) Romanian students also organised around antisemitic platforms at this time. A student congress held at Piatra Neamț in 1888 condemned Jewish contributions to Romanian culture, and Moldavian students in particular agitated against the presence of Jews in Romanian universities.[[36]](#footnote-36) While their rhetoric drew on the ideas of the Junimists and Sămănatorists, they were also perfectly in tune with nationalist student culture across the continent.

Student antisemitism gained a new lease on life in East-Central Europe after the war, in part because of the nationalisation of the universities following the collapse of the old empires and attempts to democratise institutions of higher education.[[37]](#footnote-37) Austrian students agitated for limiting the number of Jewish students at universities in 1918, but were successful only at the University of Graz.[[38]](#footnote-38) They continued organising around these demands for the next few years.[[39]](#footnote-39) Students at the University of Latvia made similar complaints about the number of Jewish students there in September 1919.[[40]](#footnote-40) Poznań University introduced a quota system for Jewish students in 1919 and the following year antisemitic students insisted that numerus clausus rules be applied throughout Poland, beginning an organised campaign of preventing Jewish medical students from using Christian cadavres in their lessons.[[41]](#footnote-41) In Hungary, students joined the gangs and paramilitary units which carried out the White Terror that accompanied Miklós Horthy’s rise to power in 1919. Continuing the violence of the nineteenth century Austrian and German Burschenschaften, Hungarian students refused to allow Jewish students to attend classes, heckled and interrupted lectures by Jewish or left-wing professors, and assaulted Jews in the canteens. They typically attacked in gangs, demanded identity documents to prove their victims’ ethnicity, and sang patriotic songs – repertoires that characterised student violence across the region during these years.[[42]](#footnote-42) In August 1919 students at the Technical University in Budapest demanded a *numerus clausus* rule that would limit the number of Jewish students to no more than the percentage of Jews in Hungary’s population as a whole.[[43]](#footnote-43) The Technical University agreed to their demands, and in September 1920 a similar law was introduced for all of Hungary. Not only were the majority of Jews to be excluded from the country’s universities, two students from ‘anti-revolutionary organisations’ were allowed to sit on admissions committees, thus satisfying student aspirations to dictate how their universities were run.[[44]](#footnote-44)

Student violence was not limited to Hungary, and in 1919 students joined paramilitary groups that attacked Jews and communists in Berlin, Graz, Lviv, Warsaw, and elsewhere.[[45]](#footnote-45) During 1920 and 1921 students in Berlin and Vienna were accosting and attacking Jews in trams and cafes on a daily basis, and invading Jewish neighbourhoods with clubs and stones.[[46]](#footnote-46) Demands for *numerus clausus* rules continued to be heard in Czechoslovakia and Germany in 1922, and the Młodzież Wszechpolska (All Polish Youth) renewed its campaign for a *numerus clausus* in Poland with rallies at universities across the country.[[47]](#footnote-47) Students in Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Germany organised through the newly-formed Deutsche Studentenschaft (German Student Union), which identified ‘the greater German idea’ as one of the primary motives behind creating a single organisation to represent all German students.[[48]](#footnote-48) The Deutsche Studentenschaft claimed that the German people were ‘fighting for life and death’ against Jews, and saw antisemitism as a core part of its agenda.[[49]](#footnote-49) Although nationalist students were more organised in some places than in others, by 1922 the phenomenon of violent student antisemitism had taken on clear transnational proportions.

Like their counterparts further north, Romanian students in Iaşi had been engaged in antisemitic activism since 1919. The law student Corneliu Zelea Codreanu played an active role in Garda Conştiinţei

Naţionale (the Guard of the National Conscience), whose rhetoric equated Bolsheviks with Jews and identified both as the enemies of the Romanian nation.[[50]](#footnote-50) Together with other students from Iaşi and Cernăuţi, in September 1920 Codreanu convinced a student congress in Cluj to refuse to allow Jews to become members of Romanian student associations and then caused a minor disturbance by attempting to prevent the opening of the University of Iaşi on the grounds that no religious ceremony had been carried out to bless the beginning of the school year. Codreanu and his colleagues burned the hats of communist students and vandalised the printing presses of left-wing newspapers until he was eventually expelled in 1921. The Dean of the Faculty of Law, A. C. Cuza, himself a well-known antisemitic agitator, refused to condone Codreanu’s expulsion, however, creating a loophole that allowed Codreanu to continue his studies and even to be elected as a leader of the Law students’ association.[[51]](#footnote-51) Codreanu established a new student organisation, Asociaţia Studenţilor Creştini (the Christian Students’ Association) in May 1922, on ‘a new and holy ideal, that of defending our country from the Yid invasion’.[[52]](#footnote-52) That summer they vandalised newspaper stands and broke into Jewish theatres during performances to throw things at the actors.[[53]](#footnote-53) In autumn Codreanu travelled to Germany to study the antisemitic student movement first in Berlin, then in Jena, buying swastika lapel pins, subscribing to nationalist publications, and also making contact with antisemitic students in Vienna.[[54]](#footnote-54) He later wrote that ‘from the study we had done we realized that the Yid problem has an international character and that the reaction must also be on an international scale’.[[55]](#footnote-55)

Riots broke out in Romanian universities on 10 December 1922, while Codreanu was abroad. The protests began in Cluj, where antisemitic students refused to allow Jewish students to dissect Christian cadavres. They quickly spread to universities in Bucharest and Iaşi, whose students added complaints about overcrowding, lack of educational resources, and poor food and living conditions, but kept the idea of a *numerus clausus* at the head of their agenda. The students assaulted Jews and repeatedly clashed with soldiers and gendarmes before the authorities closed the university campuses. The students’ repertoires were identical with those used by antisemitic students elsewhere in Europe, but there is little evidence of centralised planning. Students appear to have decided on a course of action on the spot, drawing on a range of options they were familiar with. One police report from 10 December 1922, for example, stated that ‘The student protest ended in front of [the offices of] *Monitorul oficial* (*The Official Monitor*) because the army had it surrounded. A student’s head was wounded by a gendarme during the assault on the lecture theatres. After a long discussion they decided that no student should go to classes tomorrow and not to allow Jewish students to enter their classes.’[[56]](#footnote-56) Violence, strikes, and protests continued in earnest for the next two years, and intermittently until the establishment of the royal dictatorship in 1938.[[57]](#footnote-57) Like their counterparts abroad, the Romanian students reorganised themselves in 1925, creating an umbrella organisation known as Uniunea Naţională a Studenţilor Creştini din România (the National Union of Christian Students in Romania, UNSCR) to represent all nationalist student groups across the country. UNSCR statutes forbade members from participating in political activities ‘in the name of the students’, and so their formal ties with political parties were always vague.[[58]](#footnote-58) Codreanu’s mentor, A. C. Cuza, established Liga Apărării Naţional Creştine (the National Christian Defence League, LANC) in March 1923 to capitalise on the student movement and drew together antisemites and nationalists under his leadership.[[59]](#footnote-59)LANC made extensive use of the swastika from the outset, but never admitted to borrowing the symbol from the Nazis. Instead, Cuza argued that ‘the Swastika is related to the solar cult and is the distinctive sign of the Aryan races in general. It can be found on the oldest monuments in the places where they lived and from them it passed into the Aryan Christian religion, today taking the form of a Cross.’[[60]](#footnote-60) Similarly, Cuza claimed, the concept of a *numerus clausus* was not a Hungarian import but that comparable anti-Jewish laws had a long history in the Romanian principalities dating back to 1579.[[61]](#footnote-61) LANC and UNSCR collaborated so closely that when Ioan Niculescu donated a house to antisemitic students in Bucharest, one police report recorded that it had been donated to ‘the society of Christian students’, while another considered it a donation to the LANC.[[62]](#footnote-62)

Irina Livezeanu and Dragoş Şdrobiş have demonstrated that the Romanian student movement was grounded in structural problems with the Romanian education system and a national chauvinist agenda promoted in schools after the First World War.[[63]](#footnote-63) At the same time, however, Romanian students imitated the language, repertories, organisation, and demands of antisemitic students elsewhere in Europe. The Romanians were well aware of their relationship to transnational antisemitic student organising. In January 1923 the student newspaper *Cuvântul studenţesc* (*The Student Word*) printed a letter from Robert Körber of the German Student Association at the Academy of Commerce in Vienna assuring them that ‘we too are standing guard against the Yid invasion and we too have been forced to begin a fight to eliminate them’. They asked to formalise their relationship with the Romanians and to ‘be able to send news and recipricol messages about the bitter enemy of Christianity’.[[64]](#footnote-64) Such letters demonstrated that Romanian students had entered the world of European politics as equals whose values and campaigns resonated with those abroad. *Cuvântul studenţesc* also printed news about the *numerus clausus* campaign in Poland and used the fact that similar laws existed elsewhere to rebut the claims of Romanian politicians that international opinion prevented them from passing similar legislation in Romania.[[65]](#footnote-65) In December 1931 a Nazi student leader from Germany, Karl Motz, attended a student congress in Sibiu as well as meeting with representatives from LANC and the Legion, suggesting that the Nazis saw the Romanian student movement as an integral part of European antisemitism.[[66]](#footnote-66) Student violence may have been grounded in local realities, but it emerged in conversation with and as an integral part of a transnational, European phenomenon.

**‘Nationalists of the World Unite’[[67]](#footnote-67)**

Just as student antisemitism emerged in Romania concurrently with similar movements elsewhere in Europe, so too did fascism. Nationalists across Europe appear to have been impressed with Mussolini’s movement once it began making a name for itself through violent clashes with socialists in 1919.[[68]](#footnote-68) At the very least, international observers writing for the *New York Times* lumped together the German National Socialist Workers Party, the Camelots de Roi, and the antisemitic student movement in Romania as all being imitators of Mussolini.[[69]](#footnote-69) In Romania in 1921 a journalist by the name of Elena Bacaloglu convinced Mussolini to endorse her attempt to bring together notable personalities in the Movimento nazionale fascista italo-romeno (Italian-Romanian National Fascist Movement). She recruited roughly 100 followers, including several scientists from the University of Cluj and some important Italians living in Bucharest.[[70]](#footnote-70) By October 1923 the movement was bitterly divided between those who wanted closer ties to Italy and believed that fighting Bolshevism was their main priority, and those who hoped to distance the movement from the Italians and reorganise their propaganda around antisemitism.[[71]](#footnote-71) Bacaloglu’s movement was succeeded by Fascia Naţionale Române (the National Romanian Fascists, FNR). Police sources suggest that the FNR had hundreds of thousands of followers by 1923, including 63 men from Bucovina who had served in the Italian army. The movement was explicitly antisemitic, although its core message varied from region to region.[[72]](#footnote-72) FNR did enjoy connections with other Romanian antsemites and its newspaper came out in support of Codreanu and other students associated with LANC when they were arrested for conspiring to assassinate leading Jewish figures in 1923.[[73]](#footnote-73)

Anti-fascists eagerly sought out evidence of ties between movements such as FNR and LANC and antisemitic or fascist movements abroad, assuming that foreign connections were proof that FNR and LANC were not working in Romania’s best interests.[[74]](#footnote-74) Fascists were quick to deny such accusations, explaining that despite appearances, they were authentically Romanian movements.[[75]](#footnote-75) At the same time, FNR published a number of articles extolling the virtues of Italian Fascism.[[76]](#footnote-76) During 1923 every issue of LANC’s newspaper also carried information about antisemitic and fascist movements elsewhere in Europe, always contrasting their success in other countries with the power of Jews in Romania.[[77]](#footnote-77) It also published lists of recommended reading for antisemites, consisting mostly of books and pamphlets written by antisemites in Britain, France, and Germany.[[78]](#footnote-78) Cuza and other LANC members, including the student activist Ion Moţa, attended an International Antisemitic Congress in Budapest in 1925 and were apparently warmly received by the other delegates. Cârstocea argues that this congress was formative for Moţa’s vision of antisemitism as an international movement and that the congress enabled him to establish relationships with key activists abroad that he would exploit for the rest of his life.[[79]](#footnote-79)

By 1925 LANC had entirely replaced FNR as the predominant movement on the far right, but following a very public attempt by Cuza to drive out any potential rivals to his leadership, Codreanu, Moţa, and a handful of other students formerly associated with LANC established the Legion of the Archangel Michael in August 1927. The first legionaries emphasized that their movement was a response to structural problems in LANC – notably Cuza’s desire for power – and identified antisemitism as their primary purpose.[[80]](#footnote-80) As former student leaders, they also claimed to be re-founding the antisemitic student movement of 1922 on the same ideas but on a new organisational basis.[[81]](#footnote-81) They swore that they were fighting for ‘the land of the ancestors’ and associated themselves with ‘the Archers of Stephen [the Great] in front, Michael [the Brave] in Câmpia dela Turda, and Tudor [Vladimirescu] and Horia [Vasile Ursu Nicola] and [Avram] Iancu’.[[82]](#footnote-82) At the same time that they grounded themselves in Romanian history and culture, the legionaries identified ‘the Yid conspiracy’ as a pan-European problem.[[83]](#footnote-83) They claimed that Lord Rothermere – ‘the Yid from England’ – was attempting to return Transylvania to Hungary, and reported on organised political antisemitism in Britain, Switzerland, Hungary, and Russia.[[84]](#footnote-84) The Legion also organised an international section based in Paris which was to issue its own newspaper and fight Jews in France.[[85]](#footnote-85) Codreanu attempted to establish ties with the German Nazi Party in 1929 by asking an acquaintance of his to buy him a Nazi uniform and to meet Hermann Esser, the editor of the Nazi newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter*, but nothing came of this initiative.[[86]](#footnote-86)

Antisemites abroad were not always clear about the bitter rivalries dividing Romanian antisemites, but as Cârstocea has argued, it was antisemitism rather than fascism that dictated how both cuzists and legionaries related to the European far right.[[87]](#footnote-87) When Georg de Pottere wrote to Cuza in August 1932 on behalf of the Alliance Chrétienne Arienne (Aryan Christian Alliance, ACA) he congratulated him on the success of the Iron Guard – another name for the Legion – apparently ignorant of Cuza’s deep animosity towards the legionaries. He also invited Cuza to a confidential congress of ‘Botanists’ in Zurich where they would all participate under pseudonyms, but Cuza replied that he liked to keep his activism out in the open whenever possible.[[88]](#footnote-88) De Pottere had been an active antisemitic organiser in Austria since the early 1920s and had founded the ACA in 1928.[[89]](#footnote-89) In 1934 the legionary Ion Moţa began his correspondence with the magazine *Welt-Dienst* (*World-Service*) run by de Pottere together with the German antisemite Ulrich Fleischhauer. After failing to convince Adolf Hitler to create a Nazi office for foreign propaganda (*Auslandspropagandastelle*), Fleischhauer had established *Welt-Dienst* in 1933 as a platform for uniting antisemites across the world.[[90]](#footnote-90) It was intended as an independent newssheet, Fleischhauer explaining that ‘if we want to enjoy the trust of the whole world we must remain independent of every government agency’.[[91]](#footnote-91) As were most of *Welt-Dienst*’s early articles, the first two issues focused on attempting to prove the international nature of the Jewish threat.[[92]](#footnote-92) The third featured an article by Moţa summarizing the state of antisemitic organising in Romania, presenting the Legion as a force at the forefront of European antisemitism. ‘When will the time finally come for the people of all countries to join in solidarity to put an end to such goings-on in the “Underground International”?!’, Moţa asked, expressing a clear desire for transnational cooperation among antisemites.[[93]](#footnote-93) A genuinely international publication, *Welt-Dienst* appeared in three languages in 1934, six in 1936, eight in 1937, and nineteen in 1944.[[94]](#footnote-94) It was taken over by the Nazi Party in 1939 and closely associated with Alfred Rosenberg’s German Nazi University from that point on.[[95]](#footnote-95) Despite this promising start, Armin Heinen notes, ‘de Pottere sought to use Moţa for his own purposes. Moţa responded irregularly, with long pauses, and somewhat frustrated with the former’s requests’.[[96]](#footnote-96) The legionaries increasingly distanced themselves from *Welt-Dienst* and even refused to de Pottere’s invitation to pay his travel arrangements to a congress in Germany in August 1934.[[97]](#footnote-97)

Another Romanian antisemitic publicist, Nichifor Crainic, also began building international ties during the early 1930s. In 1930 he travelled to France and attended a literary banquet together with members l’Action Française, including Charles Maurras. Crainic was unexpectedly asked to speak, and afterwards he writes that ‘when I finished speaking, Charles Maurras stood up from where he was sitting, came over to me and embraced me. The whole room rose in a standing ovation’.[[98]](#footnote-98) Crainic’s newspaper *Calendarul* reported sympathetically on British, Irish, and Japanese fascisms, holding them up as examples for Romania to follow.[[99]](#footnote-99) Nichifor Crainic travelled to Italy twice in 1933 and 1934, where he met Benito Mussolini, Eugenio Coselschi, and other senior Italian officials to discuss the Legion, antisemitism, and Italy’s geopolitical aspirations in the Balkans.[[100]](#footnote-100) Soon after Crainic’s first trip to Italy, Coselschi visited the worksite of House for Wounded Legionaries in Bucharest.[[101]](#footnote-101) Coselschi is best known for his leadership of the Comitati d’azione per l’universalità di Roma(Action Committee for Roman Universality, CAUR), an Italian was attempt to unite fascist parties abroad into one umbrella organization.[[102]](#footnote-102) Italian chauvinism and the failure to invite the German Nazi Party to participate ultimately sabotaged CAUR, but Codreanu spoke highly of Mussolini when Coselschi visited. The Italians sent a CAUR representative named Guido Ferruccio Cabalzar to follow up on Coselschi’s visit, and he reported that the Italian government needed to take urgent measures to ensure that the Legion did not move into the Nazi sphere of influence.[[103]](#footnote-103) Legionaries were eager to deepen their ties with Italy, and *Calendarul* printed a number of articles in the months that followed, praising Italy and suggesting closer cooperation between Mussolini and the Legion.[[104]](#footnote-104) He also organised several lectures on Italian fascism in Bucharest together with Italian diplomats.[[105]](#footnote-105) Crainic was in conversation with the Germans at the same time as he was talking to the Italians, meeting with Alfred Rosenberg in Berlin and publishing an interview about Nazism in *Calendarul*.[[106]](#footnote-106) While the Germans were hesitant to support the Legion financially, they did contribute money to other Romanian antisemites, including Nichifor Crainic, Octavian Goga, and Ştefan Tătărescu.[[107]](#footnote-107)

Antisemitism was a core element of legionary ideology during the early 1930s, which strained relations between Codreanu and Mussolini. In 1933, both Italians and Germans expressed concerns that the legionaries were exclusively obsessed with antisemitism and could not be counted on to support Italian or German interests in Romania.[[108]](#footnote-108) The legionaries agreed, pointing out that German sympathisers in Romania such as pro-Nazi Saxons in Transylvania would have to support Romania in any conflict between Romania and Germany and that if they did not they would be treated as being no better than Jews.[[109]](#footnote-109) Regardless of their ideological sympathies they promised to defend Romania’s borders against Italy, Hungary, or anyone else who wanted to revise the post-war treaties.[[110]](#footnote-110) As a British intelligence report from 1937 shrewdly noted, ‘a considerable body of opinion consisting of Right Parties in Roumania looks with sympathy on National Socialism in Germany.  But the advent of these parties to power would by no means necessarily imply  a change in Roumania’s foreign policy.  Her chief interest would and always must remain the preservation of her recently acquired territories’.[[111]](#footnote-111)

Italian Fascism was not an antisemitic movement during the 1920s, and although Jews were occasionally persecuted during the 1930s, these were usually explained as purges of ‘bourgeois’ anti-Fascists. Italian Fascists did not become openly antisemitic until 1938, when many Jews lost their jobs and new laws limited their civil rights.[[112]](#footnote-112) Although he declined de Pottere’s invitation to a congress organised by *Welt-Dienst*, Moţa did attend a CAUR congress in Montreaux, Switzerland in December 1934.[[113]](#footnote-113) According to *Cuvântul studenţesc*, delegates heard about fascist movements in Sweden, Norway, Holland, and Switzerland that faced the same problems that the Romanians were fighting against, and the whole congress held a moment’s silence when Moţa toasted those who had died for the fascist cause.[[114]](#footnote-114) But Moţa’s antisemitism alienated him from many of the other delegates. They rejected his suggestion that the congress issue a declaration against ‘the international Jew’ in both his liberal-capitalist and communist forms, and were offended when he demanded that the German National Socialists should be invited to join CAUR.[[115]](#footnote-115) The relationship between the German Nazis and the Italian Fascists was particularly brittle at this time, and Moţa did little to endear himself to the Italians through his support for the Germans or his hostility towards Jews.[[116]](#footnote-116)

Legionaries also took part in ultranationalist camps in Poland during 1935 and 1936. They first formed ties with Polish ultranationalists in 1934, when the president of the antisemitic student movement, Traian Cotigă, took advantage of a new wave of antisemitism in Polish universities to develop a closer relationship with right-wing student circles there, publishing a joint Polish-Romanian Bulletin with their Polish counterparts and encouraging student exchanges.[[117]](#footnote-117) In 1935 Romanian students celebrated seventeen years of Polish independence with a meeting led by the legionary Petre P. Panaitescu, who gave a history describing cordial relationship between the two countries over several centuries.[[118]](#footnote-118) Romanian students participating in summer camps in Poland in 1935 caused trouble and took part in ultranationalist rioting, but the Poles blamed cuzist students and invited the legionaries to return the following year. When Polish Scouts organized an international gathering known as a Jamboree several months later, they specifically invited legionary youth as well as Romanian Scouts.[[119]](#footnote-119) The Poles offered Romanian students 200 places in their physical education summer courses in 1936, and invited them on ski trips, both free of charge.[[120]](#footnote-120) Some legionary students took advantage of the Poles’ hospitality, further cementing social relationships between young ultranationalists from both countries.[[121]](#footnote-121)

The Spanish Civil War offered the legionaries the ideal opportunity to demonstrate their solidarity with international fascism. A team of eight legionaries traveled to Spain to present General Franco with a ceremonial sword in 1936, and – apparently against Codreanu’s explicit orders – seven of them enlisted to fight in the war. The Romanians were not alone, and fascist volunteers came from Belgium, Britain, France, Ireland, and Russia, fighting alongside regular soldiers from Germany, Italy, and Portugal for Franco’s cause.[[122]](#footnote-122) One of the legionaries, Bănică Dobre, wrote that ‘in Lisbon we made contact with the nationalist student associations, exchanging autographs with the Portugese students. Moţa made a speech and we spent the evening with in the Lisbon train station accompanied by hundreds of Portugese and Spanish students, singing patriotic and legionary hymns and promoting the Christian and national ideal’.[[123]](#footnote-123) Another of the legionary volunteers, Vasile Marin, said that when they entered Spain ‘I spoke with the Requetés and the Falangists at the train station and many of them were perfectly informed about “the Iron Guard” and “Everything for the Fatherland”. As soon as we made contact a strong sense of community was established between us and them on the basis of common ancestry but especially because of the affinity we felt as participants in a common struggle against diabolical Masonic-Marxism’.[[124]](#footnote-124) A third legionary volunteer, Ion Dumitrescu-Borşa, claimed that ‘though they were foreigners, Turks, Germans, Italians, Portuguese, Romanians, etc., it seemed like Spain united us all and made us part of the same people [*neam*]’.[[125]](#footnote-125) When Moţa and Marin died in the war they received what looked like an unofficial state funeral back in Romania, attended by diplomats from Germany and Italy as well as prominent Romanian political figures.[[126]](#footnote-126) Unlike earlier congresses, where differing views on antisemitism and geopolitics had limited the possibilities for solidarity between Romanians and European fascists, the war in Spain allowed them to come together and celebrate a brotherhood based on having a common enemy.

**The Shadow of the Swastika**

The ability of Romanian antisemites to claim that they were the equals of antisemites anywhere else in Europe became less convincing as the Second World War loomed closer. The failure of the League of Nations and the growing regional influence of Nazi Germany meant that by 1940 Romania had few options apart from an alliance with Hitler.[[127]](#footnote-127) At the same time, however, the rise of Partidul Naţional Creştin (the National Christian Party, PNC) was primarily a result of domestic factors. Once again, despite resonating with transnational antisemitism, the fortunes of Romanian antisemitism were grounded in local forms and substances. Gheorghe Tătărescu’s coalition government won only 35.92 percent of the vote in the 1937 elections, leaving it without a clear mandate to govern. Both of the next two largest parties – Partidul Naţional Ţărănist (the National Peasant Party, 20.40 percent) or the Legion (15.58 percent) – had campaigned on platforms directly opposed to King Carol II’s power base, making the king disinclined to appoint them either. Despite winning only 9.15 percent of the vote, the vehemently antisemitic PNC was thus Carol’s obvious choice for government.[[128]](#footnote-128) As Philippe Blasen has demonstrated, the range of antisemitic laws introduced by Goga and Cuza and then by the royal dictatorship emerged directly from positions they had articulated during the previous decades and from minorities policies created through negotiation with the various stakeholders, of whom Nazi Germany was far from being the most important.[[129]](#footnote-129) International pressure from countries such as Britain and France actually had remarkably little impact on antisemitic legislation in Romania as foreign diplomats were forced to accept the obviously dubious arguments of the Goga administration that they were implementing antisemitism in order to prevent the legionaries coming to power.[[130]](#footnote-130) Ultimately Romania’s alliance with Germany in June 1940 reflected Romanian preferences for joining an antisemitic bloc of countries just as much as it was a result of the unenviable geopolitical position the country found itself in.[[131]](#footnote-131)

Germany refused to support Carol at the crucial juncture in September 1940, making it possible for General Ion Antonescu and Horia Sima to establish the National Legionary State.[[132]](#footnote-132) Antonescu and the legionaries maintained Carol’s alliance with Hitler, but as they were quick to point out, the National Legionary State was not just ‘with the Axis’ but ‘in the Axis’. As far as they were concerned, they were collaborating with the Third Reich as equals, not as puppets.[[133]](#footnote-133) Rather than concede to foreign demands, both the legionaries and Antonescu’s ministers consistently called upon Germany and Italy as mediators between Hungary and Romania on the Transylvanian question.[[134]](#footnote-134) The Germans did not take the same attitude, however, and saw their allies and puppet regimes as colonies that existed only to serve German interests.[[135]](#footnote-135) German police attachés had been active in Bucharest since July 1940, collaborating with the Siguranţa, advising Romanian politicians, and providing detailed information about Romanian politics to Berlin.[[136]](#footnote-136) On 12 December 1940 German and Italian diplomats forced Antonescu to declare war on Britain despite his personal sympathies for that country. As Antonescu pointed out at the time, his primary enemy was the Soviet Union and he had no real interest in fighting Britain or France.[[137]](#footnote-137)

Hitler’s arrogance towards his allies shaped the nature of the Holocaust in Romania, but not Antonescu’s decision-making regarding whether or not the Jews should be murdered.[[138]](#footnote-138) Romanian soldiers too were motivated by anti-Bolshevism and antisemitism, killing because they wanted to, not because they were forced.[[139]](#footnote-139) German advisors served a variety of Romanian government ministries, including an ‘advisor on the Jewish and Aryanization questions’, Gustav Richter. Constantin Iordachi and Ottmar Traşcă argue that Richter saw his task as ‘the modeling of the Romanian anti-Semitic legislation on the Nazi “standards”; and the creation of appropriate institutions and resources necessary to solve the “Jewish Question” in Romania in an “organized” manner, in line with the Nazi model’.[[140]](#footnote-140) As they demonstrate, however, rivalries between German representatives in Romania and Romanian disagreements made implementing these ‘standards’ impossible and Richter’s posting ended prematurely, only for him to be reappointed after Mihai Antonescu wrote to Heinrich Himmler in August 1941, pointing out that ‘the Jewish question carries with it international solutions and has to be settled in an in-depth and definitive fashion, drawing upon German experience’.[[141]](#footnote-141) Ion Antonescu appreciated German advice but his refusal to send Romanian Jews to Polish death camps and to halt the deportations to Transnistria in the summer of 1942 were a shocking reminder to the Nazis that Romanian antisemites acted according to their own interests and would not have policy dictated to them.[[142]](#footnote-142) Germans were allowed to shape the Holocaust in Romania, but ultimately it was up to Romanians who they killed, when, and how.

**Conclusion**

Neither the Holocaust in Romania nor the history of Romanian political antisemitism from 1880 to 1940 can be understood without reference to events elsewhere in Europe. Romanian antisemitism was grounded in local realities and motivations, but throughout its history it imitated and shaped the frames, structures, and repertoires of political antisemitism elsewhere in Europe. In the 1880s Romanians attended international antisemitic congresses and held their own. A decade later they followed the Dreyfus Affair with great interest and were inspired by Austrian politicians such as Karl Lueger that political antisemitism had a real future. Romanian student activism of the early 1920s took place amidst similar unrest in universities across East-Central Europe, and local antisemites acting on their own initiative did so within a transnational context of student violence. When fascists tried to form solidarities across borders antisemitism proved to be both a motive and a stumbling block that brought some fascists together while alienating others. Only the violence of the Spanish Civil War ultimately provided a crucible in which uncontested solidarities could be forged. Even the Holocaust created tensions between Romanian and German antisemites, demonstrating how cherished independence of thought and action was. Political antisemitism was, after all, political. Antisemitism served a variety of purposes for antisemites, but they followed its logic only insofar as it was politically expedient for them to do so and when Romania no longer had anything to gain from it, Antonescu reversed his policy of genocide and began talking about the repatriation of Transistria’s Jews.

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