

Abstract

A decade ago, when the *Final Report* (of the Commission for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania, presided by the writer Elie Wiesel, victim of the Holocaust himself and originating from Sighetul Marmăției) was published by Polirom Publishing House in 2005, I had the possibility of knowing the opinions and the conclusions of the people involved in writing this text. I especially remember the finding that “the actions to rescue the Jews during the Holocaust are much more numerous than those highlighted so far” (*Final Report*, f. 295), thus this historical issue “should be looked into more thoroughly”, to render “a balanced image that is as similar to the years 1940-1944 as possible” (*Ibidem*), an image of the human solidarity phenomenon in the area mentioned, more precisely on the entire border between Hungary and Romania.

Elie Wiesel’s statement is equally stimulating from a historiographical standpoint: “There were also good and brave Romanians who risked their own lives and saved the honour of their nation, resisting the oppression and killing of their fellow citizens – and they deserve our deepest gratitude, *but why were they so few?*” (*Ibidem*, p. 15). This is a fully justified question that makes you wonder and waits for a conclusive answer. This can only result from a careful and rigorous research on the actions to save the Jews in Northern Transylvania and Hungary (in 1944), by fraudulently crossing them over the border into Romania, a country that was considered an “open gate” to life and freedom.

Therefore, in 2005, it became clear that it was necessary to continue the documentary investigations, especially in the internal archives (state and private ones) in which one could find testimonies on the spirit of human solidarity with the Jews in those tragic moments of the prosecution and terror they were subjected to by the Nazis and their collaborators.

At the same time, there was the urgent need to examine - with critical discernment - the entire bibliography of the issue. Therefore, for objective reasons, we proceeded to conduct a scientific investigation of this historical reality. The result is the present habilitation thesis in whose pages we drew the defining directions of the means of historiographical expression on the actions to rescue the Jews (in 1944) on the western border of Romania. It is obvious that the perceptions were different during the six decades (1944-2004) and they evolved in direct relationship with the new findings and works, as well as with the interpretations given by their authors.

The first memoirist source regarding the historical aspect we are dealing with dates from 1944, i.e. from during the event. It is about Eva Heyman’s *Journal*, the only 13-year-old pupil who wrote this, mostly in the large ghetto of Oradea (where nearly 30,000 Jews, which

represented 30% of the city's population, were crowded), being practically *the only* ghetto diary written in Northern Transylvania (where the Horthy Hungarian government held 12 ghettos and camps). The concerns of her family members can be felt in its pages as they were alarmed by the situation in the ghetto and their future perspective, that is to try to find solutions to get away and, later on, to escape alive. As it was natural, they thought of running to Romania, the border being at about 10 km from Oradea. The refuge in the neighbouring country meant life for them, while the lack of initiative (in this respect) meant death.

After the war, in 1946, the journalist Béla Katona published a book of memoirs, in Hungarian, about the tragic year 1944, entitled *Oradea during Storm*. In its pages, he referred to the Jews' saviour, the Romanian diplomat Dr. Mihai Marina, former general consul at the General Consulate of the Kingdom of Romania to Oradea. Together with members of the consulate, he organised fraudulent crossings over the border (in Băile Felix and Șauaieu) of some groups of Jews, being identified at least 10 of them so far. The narrative of such facts represents not only a gesture of gratitude, but also one to introduce, in the information circuit, actual actions to save the Jews taken by the aforementioned diplomat. Not even a single Jewish refugee was caught while crossing the border between Hungary and Romania at midnight. Also in 1946, the doctor Miksa Kupfer testified (in the presence of two inhabitants of Oradea) about the way in which his family and several other Jews were rescued, being crossed over the border (into Romania) by Mihai Marina, stating that the consul did it in a "disinterested" manner, so it was a sincere act of human solidarity. Other documentary evidences were subsequently discovered, thus confirming those mentioned in the books written by Eva Heyman and Béla Katona, which – from a historiographical perspective - are the first reference historiographical sources. We have removed any uncertainty in this regard through our research.

Three decades later, in 1976, Dr. Mihai Marina highlighted his contribution to the efforts to rescue the Jews in an article published in *Magazin istoric*. The article was written when facing the anti-Semitic terror to which he - and his collaborators - could not "remain complacent". Thus, they risked organizing some actions to save the Jews, whom they took by cars from the city to the border, then crossed over the border by the Romanian peasants from neighbouring villages (the names of two of them are also mentioned), who knew these places very well.

I reconsidered this memoirist text (in several articles), rescuing from obscurity a historical issue of certain importance that it needed to be fathomed. Emerging from the imposed "silence" area and from under the effects of political deadlock, it was impelled by the political authorities who showed interest in highlighting the fact that the Hungarian administrative institutions (mayors, gendarmes and police) practiced unprecedented abuses against Jewish inhabitants of Northern Transylvania. Thus, in May and June 1944, the authorities sent to

ghettoes an overwhelming number of over 150,000 Jews, and then deported them to death camps in Poland.

We need to point out that a collaboration between Yad Vashem and Romanian institutions was initiated in 1980 in order to familiarize the Romanian researchers with “the Holocaust issue” (which had been unknown before), as well as with the phenomenon of solidarity with the Jews. Joint symposia were organized in Bucharest (also attended by the Israeli historians Efraim Ofir, Jean Ancel and Israel Gutman). Between 1986 and 1989 researchers increased their re-constitutive efforts and they achieved a phase of quantitative accumulations and interpretative clarifications after the events of 1989 (between 1990 and 1994). All of them showed the growing interest in the issue of rescuing the Jews, thus reaching a moment of maturity in this respect.

However, a fierce controversy erupted in 1995-1996, covering the actions to save the Jews, and whose echoes have persisted until today. Its aim was the rescuing activity carried out by the professors Raoul Șorban and Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger, which was challenged by the American historian Randolph Braham, the most reputable specialist of the Holocaust in Hungary, including Northern Transylvania. In 2004, when our historiographical re-constitution was completed, this historical aspect was examined in the *Final Report* (of the International Commission for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania), being drawn relevant and encouraging conclusions for those who study the phenomenon of solidarity with the Jews in 1944.

By examining (with specific scientific methods) the works that relate to the issue of rescuing the Jews from Northern Transylvania and Hungary in 1944, we created a synthetic and coherent picture of this phenomenon. Our main contribution is in the assessment of historiographical perceptions, to which we added, in the final part of this habilitation thesis, our contributions (from the period 2005-2014) to the development of researches that have identified other areas of human solidarity with the Jews (in 1944) on the western border of Romania. We also mention that we have drafted the prospects (respectively the development plans) of these concerns, focusing on definite elements, showing that there are great chances to further the research.