

# THE HOLOCAUST NARRATIVE IN ROMANIA. A CASE STUDY ON ONLINE PRESS

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## ABSTRACT

The research studies dedicated to the memory of the Second World War have become a research priority in Europe, particularly after the fall of the communist regime and the re-establishment of the balance of power between the East and the West, in close connection with the social, cultural, and identity-based policies promoted by the European Union. The main objective of such studies is to understand the manner in which the Second World War is remembered, starting from the assumption that “*the past is always practiced in the present, not because the past imposes itself, but because subjects in the present fashion the past in the practice of their social identity*” (Friedman, 1994 quoted by Kapralski, 2017, 2). Research efforts have been mostly aimed at the study of war “narratives” in general and the Holocaust narrative in particular, the latter becoming the dominant narrative in Europe after the 1990s. Following this line of research, the current study seeks to outline the agenda of commemorative events dedicated to the memory of the Holocaust in Romania, as well as the actors and the narratives they promote, relying on a corpus of 116 online press contents commemorating the Holocaust, as published in the online edition of *Adevărul*, in the period between March 2015 and March 2020.

**Keywords:** politics of memory, Holocaust, commemoration, online press, Romania.

## INTRODUCTION

The same as heroes and *lieux de mémoire*, war narratives are linked to the concept of national identity, as they are specific and distinctive in nature (Assmann 2010, 99). Given the diversity of national war narratives, the key question behind current political and academic debates is whether a collective Second World War narrative is possible, which would allow for the formation of wider commemorative spaces (Hackmann 2008, 386). The question usually relates to the

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efforts made by the European Union to bridge the gap between the East and the West and to establish a common European identity for all Member States. The argument is that a collective war narrative would perfect the unity and the sense of belonging within the European area, thus contributing to the reinforcement of fundamental values such as peace, liberty, democracy, and respect for human rights. A number of resolutions, declarations, programmes and funding instruments promoted by European Union institutions make an attempt at establishing a general framework for a common European war narrative (see Littoz-Monnet 2012, 1183).

#### A COLLECTIVE EUROPEAN MEMORY OF THE HOLOCAUST?

The Holocaust is the central topic put forward by the European experts and political actors as the founding myth of the European Union and the main point of reference for the cultural values and the identity policy of the Union (Sierp 2017, 442). The Holocaust became the dominant narrative in Western Europe immediately after 1990. With the enlargement of the European Union to the East, it has also been promoted within the former communist states; according to a number of historians and researchers, it even became Eastern European countries' "ticket" to EU structures: "*In the political world, remembrance of the Holocaust played a significant role in the negotiations that led to the EU's enlargement to 10 new members on May 1, 2004. Among the admission criteria connected to respect for democratic values, acknowledgement of the Holocaust was an implicit criterion for entry into the club, a kind of "Copenhagen remembrance criterion."*" (Droit 2007)

Researchers support the idea that the Holocaust presents all the characteristics required for the establishment of a "cosmopolitan memory" that goes beyond national borders and has the potential of becoming the foundation for global policies in the field of human rights (Levy and Sznajder 2002, 88). According to Craps and Rothberg (2011, 518), the key characteristic is that of being able to promote empathy along space and time, creating social solidarity and a comprehensive understanding of the horrors of the past. Following the same line of argument, Alexander (quoted by Assmann 2010, 108) states that the Holocaust is the only trauma that is able to become global and reach even those non-Western countries that are unable to remember the event, precisely due to its social significance and symbolic power. Assmann (2010) introduces five items that are able to transform the memory of the Holocaust into a transnational/global one:

1/ deterritorialization: "What had been treated as a footnote to the Second World War after 1945 now became a globally historical event, a rupture of civilization, the marker of a new epoch in the history of humanity, a 'sacred-evil' 'of such enormity and horror that it had to be radically set apart from the world and all of its other traumatizing events'" (p. 110);

2/ symbolic universe: “In its symbolic reconstruction, the Holocaust came to represent inhumanity in general and became a moral norm for human action” (*idem*);

3/ emotional impact: “Identification, the basic form of contact developed in the dramatization of stories in films, television shows and video testimonies, is today also applied in the choreography of museum exhibits. These no longer appeal solely to the cognitive function of the visitors but place more and more emphasis on the possibility to re-experience historical events from within” (*idem*);

4/ analogy: “The Holocaust is used as a rhetorical trope in political debates to legitimize action and to argue for the intervention/non-intervention into other genocides and other cases of immoral action” (*ibidem*, 110-111);

5/ universality: “In the global media age where attention has become the currency of a new economy, the prestigious symbol of the Holocaust is used as a universal lever to draw attention to other marginalized collective memories. Today, it is increasingly invoked as a model to articulate, analyse and legitimate other traumatic memories around the globe” (*ibidem*, 111).

Congruent with this line of argumentation, Baer and Sznajder (2015) state that the Holocaust “has transcended the framework of Jewish memory” (p. 331) and become “the paradigmatic manifestation of the evil that collides with what we would define today as democratic values and human rights” (*idem*) or “the paradigmatic “Never Again” from which all other “never agains” derive” (p. 332). “The slogan”, they further argue, “can serve as a memorial, a ceremony, a museum, a text, a pledge; in all cases, it transcends time and place and constitutes a moral imperative, an ethics of avoidance, and a rallying call for justice” (*idem*). The authors (2015, 2017) yet recognise that the way in which the tragic event is remembered remains situational and rich in multiple meanings and interpretations. Maybe this is one of the reasons why, in spite of its global potential, the Holocaust narrative was not successfully integrated into the collective memory of all European countries. The exception lies with the former communist states. Slawomir Kapralski (2017, 2) claims that the reasons behind this state of affairs are, on the one hand, the weaknesses of the narrative itself and, on the other hand, the specific manner in which social memories have been formed in this region of Europe. Starting from the example of Poland, Kapralski (2017) demonstrates that, after years of communism, when history was rewritten and forced upon its citizens, the European Holocaust narrative is perceived in an almost similar manner, as a supra-national discourse that is constructed and used by an external entity, with no connection to the historical reality of the country, or even in contrast therewith. Thus, as a result of prioritising the memory of the Holocaust in Europe, Poland finds itself forced to push to the background its repressed memories of suffering in communist times, regained after the fall of the totalitarian regime, causing a profound feeling of inequity and injustice, doubled by perceptions of passing from one form of ideological control to another (*ibidem*, 13). Kapralski (2017) concludes that, in this context, the Holocaust, although remembered in the discourse of official institutions and the elites, has no match in the country’s

social memory. The idea that the communist period is a stronger reference when it comes to the past in Eastern Europe is also validated in Romania by a research on the memory of communism (Petre, 2012).

In his turn, Kucia (2016, 114) explains Eastern Europe's reluctance to include the Holocaust narrative into its European memory by comparing approaches in the East and the West. First and foremost, Kucia claims that the whole process started much later in Eastern Europe, and that the memory of the Holocaust was almost completely irrelevant for the East by comparison with the memory of communism, while being a key feature of European identity in the West, as previously emphasised. And last but not least, the memory of the Holocaust in the East is very diverse and profoundly national in nature, while being consistent and transnational in the West.

In this context, the researchers and historians signal the start of a paradigm shift of this dominant European war narrative that focuses on the topic of the Holocaust (Littoz-Monnet 2012; Mälksoo 2009). This shift is in direct connection with the accession to the European Union of the former Soviet states and the efforts made by them in order to redirect the focus of European discourse towards their more recent past, particularly the atrocities inflicted by their communist regimes (Littoz-Monnet 2012; Mälksoo 2009). The Baltic States and Poland have played the most important roles in the process (Mälksoo 2009, 654) of condemning the Holocaust significance to the detriment of the crimes committed by the Soviet regime. Galai (2019, 4) explains this attitude by highlighting that, although most camps and other sites where the Nazis have inflicted their atrocities are located in Eastern Europe and most of the victims of the Holocaust were part of the populations from the region, the Nazi occupation and the Holocaust are just distant memories that fade away when compared to the horrors of communism. In fact, research gives different interpretations of the manner in which the aforementioned states are making an attempt at shifting the European focus towards remembering the atrocities of the communist regime:

1/ as resurfacing of repressed memories, delayed assertion of their right to memory and effort to free themselves from the burden of the Soviet representations of the Second World War (Mälksoo 2009, 659-660);

2/ as source of ontological insecurity with regard to their European identity (Subotic, 2018);

3/ as liberation from Russia (Zhurzhenko 2007, 1);

4/ as method of seeking EU support in persuading Russia to accept accountability for the crimes committed by the communist regime (Mälksoo 2009, 655).

In terms of politics of memory, the European Union is trying – via the resolutions and statements recently issued by the European Parliament – to shape an institutional memory framework which integrates a common perspective of both the horrors of communism and those of Nazism. Among these documents, probably the

most relevant is the declaration for the proclamation of 23 August as *European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism*, a clear expression of the Union's commitment to promote a common European narrative regarding the past, by acknowledging and integrating the various historical trajectories of its Member States (Sierp 2017, 451):

"As the dates mark two sides of the same coin, signifying the beginning and the end of oppression and dictatorship in Central and Eastern Europe, the question of why one was chosen over the other can only be explained by taking into account their function, not only as places in time where memory crystallises but also as expressions of symbolic politics that signify more than pure remembrance [...] By choosing 23 August, the EU has sent a very strong signal towards its new member states, a symbolic gesture that signifies nothing less than the recognition of their painful historical trajectory and with it the unconditional assurance of full membership within the Union (*ibidem*, 452)."

Nevertheless, despite the efforts made by the European Union, the atrocities inflicted by communism failed to receive the same recognition as those inflicted by the Holocaust (Zhurzhenko 2007). The role played by Russia in Europe is considered one of the main reasons for this state of affairs. The great patriotic war narrative promoted and reinstated by Russia as the founding myth of the Putin regime interprets USSR's victory during the Second World War as the reason for the liberation of East European countries from the Nazis (*idem*). This narrative legitimates Russia's status as European super-power (*ibidem*, 3), the hero who liberated Europe from the Nazis (Mälksoo 2009, 665). As a consequence, most researchers in the field of memory studies are of the opinion that, even though the new Member States have included the narrative concerning the crimes committed by the Soviet regime in the general European discourse, the Holocaust narrative remains central (Littoz-Monnet 2012). However, the competition between the pan-European, cosmopolitan memory of the Holocaust and the memory of the horrors of communism is deemed to result in the creation of a common European memory for all EU Member States (Mälksoo 2009, 656).

## METHODOLOGY

Congruent with the theoretical foundations of research in "memory studies", the current paper makes use of a set of core concepts mainly associated with the idea of *commemoration*. Usually, this concept is operationally defined by making direct reference to the heroes and events which have marked the past of an entire nation. Of particular interest are *war narratives*, namely the official representations promoted by state institutions at national level, as well as the representations disseminated at regional and community level, as well as the "narratives" of the

individuals who have (directly or indirectly) experienced war, which are generally circulated within narrower circles (Ashplant et al. 2000, 16)

Consequently, the current paper, which is part of a larger research project dedicated to the Second World War commemoration in Romania, seeks to identify the key elements of the Holocaust narrative, relying on a corpus of 116 online press contents focused on the topic of the Holocaust commemoration, as published in the online edition of *Adevărul* newspaper<sup>1</sup>, in the period between March 2015 and March 2020. The main objective of the research is to highlight the events dedicated to remembering and commemorating the Holocaust, as well as the thematic axes of the narrative, employing qualitative content analysis, primarily focused on the central discourse topics, as well as on discourse analysis.

All the identified media contents include the following variables: (a) headline; (b) publication date; (c) authorship; (d) general content category, as defined by the publication: “international”, “local”, “Moldova”; (e) genre, also defined by the publication: “news”, “news-politics”, “news-society”, “news-events”, “breaking news”; (f) format: “article”, “video”, “photo”, “photojournalism”; “infographic” (as well defined by the publication). Most contents are local and informative in nature<sup>2</sup>; only 20 contents are dedicated to international topics<sup>3</sup>, mainly having “Europe”<sup>4</sup> as a geographical reference. The topic begins to attract the interest of news reporters particularly towards the end of the period under review, i.e. between 2019 and 2020, when the number of events commemorating the Holocaust is also larger worldwide.

<sup>1</sup> The choice for online press content was dictated by the current coronavirus pandemic, more specifically by the impossibility of accessing printed press content in libraries. Our option for the online newspaper *Adevărul.ro* is justified by its position among the most widely accessed general news websites around the country. According to the Internet Audience and Traffic Measurement (SATI) survey conducted by BRAT, *Adevărul.ro* ranked first in October 2020 in terms of number of views, as well as number of visitors and unique visits.

<sup>2</sup> Only 14 are opinion pieces, of which 8 are published in the period 2019 to 2020; Six (6) are classified as “society-news”, 4 – as “international-Europe”/“worldwide”, 2 – as “news-events”, 1 – as “culture-history” and 1 - as “news-politics”.

<sup>3</sup> These refer to the commemoration of the Holocaust in the context of the current geopolitical tensions between Russia and Poland (supported by Ukraine), as a result of the disputes concerning the outbreak of the Second World War. See the articles: „Disputa pe teme istorice dintre Varșovia și Moscova: Duda avertizează că Putin va folosi Ierusalimul pentru a-și răspândi propaganda” (*Historical facts controversy between Warsaw and Moscow: Duda warns against Putin using Jerusalem as a tool for propaganda*) (21 January 2020); „Peste 40 de lideri ai lumii, printre care și Klaus Iohannis, se vor reuni în Israel pentru Forumul Mondial al Holocaustului” (*More than 40 world leaders, including Klaus Iohannis, set to meet in Israel for the World Holocaust Forum*) (08 January 2020); „Furie la Kremlin: Zelenski ia apărarea Poloniei și califică Pactul Ribbentrop-Molotov drept « un complot criminal între două regimuri totalitare »” (*Anger in Kremlin: Zelenski takes Poland's side and labels Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact as “the criminal plot of two totalitarian regimes”*) (28 January 2020).

<sup>4</sup> “Asia”, “Russia”, “United States” and the generic “worldwide” category are the other international referecens defined by the newspaper.

## FINDINGS

### The Holocaust commemorative agenda

The multiple national, European, and international commemorative days dedicated to the memory of the Holocaust set the general scene for constructing the narrative of the tragic event:

The International Holocaust Remembrance Day, celebrated each year on 27 January, following the United Nations General Assembly Resolution in 2005, dominates the commemorative calendar: most of the online press contents included in the selected corpus make reference to this Day (n=49). The event remembers the day of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp in 1945, which currently serves as a museum and site of transnational memory (Björkdahl and Kappler, 2019). In the period under review, the very large majority of the press contents have local sources of information (n=30); the exception is the year 2020, when the number of such items is slightly lower by comparison to those having international origins<sup>3</sup>. Local “news” accounts for the majority of the contents (n=13), except for the period between 2019 and 2020, when “news-politics” items become predominant; these items usually consist of partial or complete renderings of the messages delivered by President Iohannis and, sometimes, other individual and/or institutional political actors. The European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day, adopted by the European Parliament Resolution in 2015 to remember the date when, in 1944, approximately 3,000 Roma were exterminated in the gas chambers of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp ranks second in terms of quantitative references (n=14). Most of the contents dedicated to this event were published in 2015 (n=4) and 2019 (n=5); mention should be made that, in 2019, four articles revolved around the topic of a controversial statement made by the Minister of Culture of that time, concerning the significance of the Roma genocide. The press contents belong almost equally to categories such as “news-politics”, “culture-history”, local “news”, and “news-events”. Most of them were informative articles, with only two media commentaries published in the period under review: one signed by sociologist Gelu Dumitriță, in 2017, and one having actress Mihaela Drăgan as author (in 2016). A similar frequency (n=12) was displayed by press content referring to the National Holocaust Remembrance Day, which is commemorated on 9 October each year, to keep alive the memory of the times when the deportations of Romanian Jews to Transnistria began, in 1941. Mostly classified in the local “news” category (n=7), these contents talk about various commemorative events organised in cities and towns such as Târgoviște, Zalău, Cluj-Napoca, and Bistrița. The Commemoration of the Iași Pogrom (n=8) is mostly the topic of local “news” and, sometimes, the topic of “news-politics”, reporting on the statements made by President Iohannis in 2017 and 2019 and “news -society” pieces. Of the eight articles, two are opinion articles, both signed by Gelu Dumitriță (in 2016 and 2018). The International Day Against Fascism and

Antisemitism, celebrated on 9 November to remember “Kristallnacht”, namely the pogroms in Germany and Austria which took place before the Holocaust, is only mentioned in two articles (n=2). One of them, published in 2019 in the “news-society” category, announces a European campaign dedicated to remembering the past and protesting against all contemporary forms of fascism and antisemitism, insisting on the significance of the event and the local and international Holocaust memory loci. The second one, published in 2018 in the “international” category, is reporting via the *News.ro* platform the statements of a number of German political leaders, commemorating 80 years from the horrors committed in 1938, when the far-right was taking over political power in Germany and antisemitism was on the rise. Another brief mention is made of the Holocaust Remembrance Day (Yom HaShoah) which has been commemorating ever since 1979, in Israel and abroad, the Warsaw Ghetto uprising of 19 April 1943. Only two articles refer precisely to this commemorative event, both being published in 2017 and making reference to the same topic: the vandalization of several graves in the Jewish Cemetery in Bucharest. Other commemorative events<sup>5</sup> (n=16) which were brought to the attention of the public by *Adevarul.ro* included the Hanukkah ceremony organised by the Jewish Community Federation; the unveiling of several commemorative plaques (remembering, for instance, the Jews who had been brought to Călărași by death trains, in 1941); the opening of the first virtual Holocaust museum; and the commemoration of the Jews in Sighet and Huedin (2015). The aforementioned were all local events, while the international events reported included the International March of the Living, dedicated to the memory of the Jews in the Balkans and Eastern Europe who had been the victims of the Holocaust, an event where the Romanian Prime Minister was also present in 2019; the commemoration of the victims of the Holocaust in Israel (in 2019); President Trump’s attending a ceremony organised in 2017 at the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial; the building of a monument dedicated to the victims of the holocaust in Cahul; and the announcement of OSCE’s decision to support Moldova’s actions aimed at remembering the Holocaust (2017).

### **Actors promoting the Holocaust narrative and the narrative’s thematic axes**

#### **(a) Political actors**

The key individual and institutional actors, who took part in constructing and promoting the Holocaust narrative, were the political actors mainly represented by the voice of President Iohannis. Thus, 11 online press pieces included in the research corpus report in part or in full the messages delivered by the Romanian President. Most articles were published in the years 2019 and 2020 (n=9) on the

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<sup>5</sup> A total of 103 articles make reference to the Holocaust commemorative agenda. Other 13 pieces are dedicated to the debates concerning plans to establish the National Museum of Jewish History and of the Holocaust in Romania.

occasion of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day (n=5). Interesting, the messages delivered on the occasion of the National Holocaust Remembrance Day were not reported in any of the years included in the period under review. Instead, the messages reported were those delivered by the President on the occasion of the Commemoration of the Iași Pogrom (in 2017 and 2019); the EU memorial days of the Roma genocide (in 2015); the Hanukkah ceremony organised by the Jewish Community Federation (in 2019); the passing of the law for the establishment of the National Museum of Jewish History and of the Holocaust in Romania (2019); and the general meeting of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (2016 and 2020).

The messages delivered by President Iohannis focus mostly on the perspective of the victims and include a number of definitions for the Holocaust, which insist on its uniqueness and incomprehensible nature. Thus, the Holocaust is “an unparalleled tragedy”, something “that’s beyond understanding”, an event of historical magnitude, “the worst episode in the history of humanity”, “the worst episode in recent history”, “a painful and overwhelming chapter of our past”, one of “history’s tragedies”, a political crime against humanity and civilization, “an immense genocide which has to do not only with the Jews and the Roma, but with all of us, as Yehuda Bauer so accurately described, a crime against Western civilization and the concept of being human”<sup>6</sup>, “a diabolical campaign aimed at persecuting, capturing, and exterminating the Jewish population (...), a carnage of unimaginable brutality for any modern society (...), a human inferno” that should be universally condemned “by the whole world”<sup>7</sup>.

The transversal theme cutting across the Romanian President’s rhetoric is the preservation of the memory of the Holocaust, presented as national “duty” dictated by two imperatives: “never forget” and “never again” (see Baer and Sznajder, 2017). This theme is reiterated through the use of several expressions comprising verbs that show concrete actions to this very end: “to honour the memory”, “to preserve the memory”, “to recover the memory”, “to protect and respect the memory”, and “to defend the memory”. The President is committed to all these actions: he militates/supports/encourages/“stands deeply engaged” in keeping the memory of the tragic event alive. But there is also a project for the entire country to follow: “Romania remains committed to continuing the constant support granted to preserving the memory of the Holocaust”. Consequently, the message of the Romanian President becomes an action that has to do with memory politics (Thiemann & Pricopie, *forthcoming*). On the one hand, President Iohannis pays

<sup>6</sup> „Iohannis: Pericolul revenirii atitudinilor xenofobe și antisemite este mereu prezent” (*Iohannis: The danger of recurring xenophobe and antisemitic attitudes is ever present*), 27 January 2020.

<sup>7</sup> „Iohannis, la comemorarea Pogromului din Iași: Ura, antisemitismul, rasismul, naționalismul și extremismul își croiesc încet un drum în societatea noastră” (*Iohannis, attending the Commemoration of the Iași Pogrom: Hate, antisemitism, racism, nationalism, and extremism are slowly making their way into our society?*), 30 June 2019.

homage to the victims and awards medals to the survivors, who are living “testaments”, playing “vital roles in preserving the memory of the Holocaust”, while, on the other hand, he insists on the importance of the preservation and realisation of memory loci as “symbolic places for the tragic consequences of the Holocaust”, “given the number of survivors that shrinks by the year”, at the same time fostering and supporting actual projects, such as the establishment of the National Museum of Jewish History and of the Holocaust in Romania and the transformation into a museum of the former Police Headquarter in Iași.

Another transversal theme of the President’s discourse refers to the deliberate acknowledgement of the past, as a sign of maturity and political accountability: “Romania has chosen to take accountability for its past, to talk about it and try to understand it. It is an expression of strength, not weakness”<sup>8</sup>. This rhetoric of accountability, exemplified through actions such as “recovering the memory of the Holocaust, reinforcing education and research on the Holocaust, fighting against extremism, antisemitism, and intolerance, strengthening legislation in the field” is doubled by a rhetoric of knowledge (Tileagă 2012, 56). President Iohannis urges people to further their knowledge on the topic, particularly with regard to the genocide of the Roma: “The horrible suffering endured by the Roma community of our country in the Transnistrian camps is not yet sufficiently known and recalled. It is the time to pay attention to the genocide of the Roma”<sup>9</sup>. This kind of accountability stands witness to Romania’s democratic and European road and involves the acknowledgment of authentic history, as opposed to the past attempts at forging reality. The dichotomy is that between the “honest and truthful history” of the present versus the truncated and altered history of the communist past, while acknowledging that the past becomes “the foundation for consent, progress, and respect for all those who have worked so hard for the values that Romania embraces today”, an intrinsic component of the process of constructing and strengthening the country’s national identity.

Another theme that is central to the President’s discourse is the risk of exacerbated antisemitic and Holocaust denial attitudes at national level. President Iohannis insists on the danger of such recurring attitudes, by offering actual examples: “Jewish cemeteries are vandalized, public actors proclaim the supremacy of certain races, the monstrosities of the Holocaust are relativized in public, several horrendous murderers in the history of our country are sung endless praises, and Roma citizens are often humiliated or discriminated against”<sup>10</sup>. The

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<sup>8</sup> “România marchează Ziua Holocaustului. Iohannis: “România a ales să-și asume trecutul, să-l discute și să-l înțeleagă” (*Romania commemorates the Holocaust Remembrance Day. Iohannis: “Romania has chosen to take accountability for its past, to talk about it and try to understand it”*), 08 October 2015.

<sup>9</sup> “Iohannis: Pericolul revenirii atitudinilor xenofobe și antisemite este mereu prezent” (*Iohannis: The danger of recurring xenophobe and antisemitic attitudes is ever present*), 27 January 2020.

<sup>10</sup> *Idem*.

efforts to fight against antisemitism and racism are constantly reiterated by the Romanian President, while also linked to education in the spirit of the European values of tolerance and respect for human rights. In this context, particularly as highlighted in the message delivered in 2019, on commemorating the Iași Pogrom, the axiological dimension of the President's discourse becomes even more evident: democracy and the rule of law are brought forward as core elements of Romania's European roadmap/strategy/future. In close connection with the aforementioned theme, the President's rhetoric also includes the theme of the past as lesson learned for the present and the future. The lesson of the Holocaust is a lesson on barbarity and tyranny which should be passed on from generation to generation to be always remembered as a means of defending and strengthening democracy and respect for human rights. Thus, the memory of the Holocaust becomes the memory of absolute evil and the signal sent via the messages of the Romanian President with respect to the urge of "never again", the danger of other potential atrocities that may happen, and the foundation that is needed for a society that is based on respect for human rights (Gordon 2006).

### **(b) The academia**

The few opinions of professors, historians, and sociologists that have been presented in the form of opinion pieces focus on the following ideas: (a) the moral and political responsibility of the Romanian state for the Romanian Holocaust of 1941, insisting on the idea that the genocide was "well thought of, planned, and sought after in Bucharest"<sup>11</sup>, as a result of enforcing the government's "own ethnic cleansing policy"<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, the articles focus on the "silence" lingering around the topic of the Holocaust and come up with the idea of advocacy campaigns aimed at accepting, acknowledging, and including the subject in national school books: "One thing that the Romanian government is discreetly overlooking is the involvement of the Romanian authorities in governing the extermination camp in Bogdanovka, where around 50,000 people were killed. It is a national shame and this is why the information is nowhere to be found in our school books"<sup>13</sup>; (b) the magnitude of the phenomenon, expressed in numbers, citing the findings of the research conducted by the Elie Wiesel Institute<sup>14</sup>; (c) the profiles of several anti-

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<sup>11</sup> G. Duminică, "În numele statului" (*In the name of the state*), 02 August 2017.

<sup>12</sup> G. Duminică, "Dubito ergo cogito sau despre 75 de ani de ignoranță" (*Dubito ergo cogito or on 75 years of ignorance*), 28 June 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Ioana Nicolescu, "Amintirile țiganilor din lagărele morții: « O verișoară a fost violată și aruncată într-o fântână. Mama a plâns tot drumul că a reușit să ne aducă înapoi vii »" (*The memories of the gypsies in death camps: "A cousin of mine was raped and thrown into a well. Mother cried all the way because she managed to bring us back alive."*), 08 August 2015.

<sup>14</sup> "Around 35,000 Jews from present northern Moldavia (Dorohoi, Suceava, Gura Humorului, Rădăuți etc.), all inhabitants of those places for tens and hundreds of years, were deported. They were accompanied by over 24,000 Roma. More than half of all those displaced died of starvation,

heroes, namely: 1/ Gheorghe Alexianu, the Governor of Transdniestria in the period 1941 to 1944, under whose command “the greatest atrocities known to modern Romania” were committed. Gelu Dumincă wrote an ample commentary on the topic in the newspaper edition of 28 January 2019; 2/ Ion Antonescu, the main person responsible for the establishment of “an ethnic regime” in Romania, as referred to by history professor Corneliu Riegler<sup>15</sup>; (d) the social, demographic, cultural, and economic consequences of the Holocaust, as discussed by the historian Adrian Cioflâncă<sup>16</sup>, as well as the “denial” phenomenon, as detailed by Doru Pop<sup>17</sup>; (e) the shift in the focus of research towards individual testimonies and memories: “Taking interest in individual stories is now standard approach in the study of the Holocaust. This is a moral duty, after all. The genocide was seeking not only to physically eliminate the Jews, but also to wipe out the memory of all those who had been assassinated. Harm has already been done, but we still have the moral duty of some form of symbolic reparation. We will publicly the names of the dead.”<sup>18</sup>; (f) the social and political ignorance of the Roma genocide, as depicted by professor Riegler: “What happened then was a genocide that has been forgotten, as the Romanian people continue to discriminate against the Roma and the state is not doing too much for a minority that is now the third most important ethnic group in Romania”<sup>19</sup>.

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exhaustion or as a result of the abuse inflicted upon them. According to the research conducted by the Elie Wiesel Institute, between 115,000 and 118,000 local Jews, 105,000 and 120,000 Romanian Jews and 15,000 Romanian Roma were killed. They were all killed or died as a result of the living conditions in the camps and ghettos built and administered by Governor Alexianu. Professor Alexianu was the one to lead the reprisals against the Jews in Odessa, although no evidence exists of the attack against the Romanian barracks. 24,000 civilian Jews were shot, hung, and burnt alive on the streets of the city governed by Romanian authorities. In 2 days, some more 45,000 people were deported to the camps built by Romanian authorities in the Bug River area.” (G. Dumincă, „Un criminal nu poate rămâne decât un criminal” (*A killer is nothing but a killer*), 28 January 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Ioana Nicolescu, *Art. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> Ionela Stănilă, “Reparație morală, în amintirea evreilor aduși la Călărași cu trenurile morții în 1941, după pogromul de la Iași” (*Moral reparation in remembrance of the Jews brought to Călărași by death trains*), 24 September 2019 + Ionela Stănilă, „O placă comemorativă, dezvelită în gara din Călărași, locul unde au ajuns două trenuri ale morții cu evrei în 1941” (*A commemorative plaque unveiled in the Călărași train station, the place where two death trains brought the Jews in 1941*), 26 September 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Doru Pop, “Să nu uităm niciodată Holocaustul” (*We should never forget the Holocaust*), 03 January 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Mariana Iancu, “Poveștile crunte a trei evrei împușcați în Pogromul de la Iași. « Nu se urmărea doar eliminarea fizică a evreilor, ci și ștergerea din memorie a celor asasinați »” (*The horror stories of three Jews shot during the Iași Pogrom. “The genocide was seeking not only to physically eliminate the Jews, but also to wipe out the memory of all those who had been assassinated”*), 03 June 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Ioana Nicolescu, *Art. cit.*

**(c) Survivors**

The survivor narrative<sup>20</sup>, which is inserted in the news or commentaries, is one of individual and collective trauma, a narrative of humiliation, degradation and unimaginable suffering and cruelty. The testimonies of the survivors usually highlight key moments such as “seizure” by the members of the Iron guard authorities, the journey to the camp by “death trains”, forced separation from other family members, forced labour, escapes and other acts of resistance.

**(d) Journalists**

Journalists focus on both the victims and the perpetrators of the Holocaust in Romania. Thus, on the one hand, the journalists write their own detailed news of a specific episode of the Holocaust, namely the Iași Pogrom, including descriptions enhanced by survivor testimonies and statements by historians, alongside statistical data and excerpts from the Final Report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania. All the media pieces are built around highly emotional words and expressions. Thus, the Holocaust is defined, from the victims’ perspective, as “unprecedented massacre”, “unleashed anger”, “hell”, and “inferno”, while the victims are seen from a double perspective of Jews versus “victims of Nazi-inspired extremism in Romania”<sup>21</sup>. On the other hand, the press contents also portray the anti-heroes/morally and politically responsible perpetrators of the Holocaust in Romania: (a) Ion Antonescu, the one who devised, lead, and enforced the criminal actions<sup>22</sup>; (b) Mihai Antonescu, the Minister of

<sup>20</sup> Romanian and foreign survivors of the Holocaust – mostly Jewish – are featured in the media pieces reviewed, with testimonies presented as part of local news or society news (news – society): Rachel Davidovits (94 years old from Matei, Bistrița-Năsăud county) (27 January 2019); Ewa Mozes Kor (84 years old, Port, Zalău county, deported when she was 10), who, in 1984, established in Terre Haute (Indiana), the C.A.N.D.L.E.S. Museum - Holocaust Museum and Education Center<sup>41</sup>, in memory of the children who died or survived the Auschwitz experiments; Iancu Tucarman (93 years old), survivor of the Iași Pogrom (27 January 2016); Elena Pop (nee Muller), who was taken to the camp near Bistrița (09 October 2015); Liviu Beris, 87 years old, from Bucharest, who was deported at the age of 13 to the Hertsa region (09 October 2015); Aneta Vasile (78 years old), Constantin Braila, who was deported at the age of 12, and Traian Craciun (Plosca village) were the only testimonies of Roma survivors that were featured in the selected corpus, in an article published on 08 August 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Cezar Pădurariu, “Cronica masacrului evreilor coordonat de Ion Antonescu. Mareșalul și-a consolidat dictatura „împlinind opera de purificare” în Basarabia și nordul Bucovinei” (*The chronicle of the Jewish massacre led by Ion Antonescu. The Marshall consolidated his dictatorship by “completing the cleansing work” in Bessarabia and northern Bucovina*”), 08 October 2015.

<sup>22</sup> Cosmin Pătrașcu Zamfirache, “Mărturiile cumplite de la cel mai mare masacru antisemit din România. Cum au fost omorâți mii de evrei la Iași?” (*Horrendous testimonies from the largest antisemitic massacre in Romania. How thousands of Jews were killed in Iași*), 22 June 2019 + Cezar Pădurariu, „Cronica masacrului evreilor coordonat de Ion Antonescu. Mareșalul și-a consolidat dictatura „împlinind opera de purificare” în Basarabia și nordul Bucovinei” (*The chronicle of the Jewish massacre led by Ion Antonescu. The Marshall consolidated his dictatorship by “completing the cleansing work” in Bessarabia and northern Bucovina*”), 08 October 2015.

National Propaganda and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Ion Antonescu Government, the person responsible for the order to evict the Jews from Iași<sup>23</sup>. Two opinion pieces were published in 2020 in the international-Europe category, one signed by Cristian Unteanu<sup>24</sup>, insisting on the danger of “reviving past tragedies” through the proliferation of neo-Nazi attitudes and movements throughout the country and in Europe, based on “the myth of one superior race”. The author emphasises the idea that politicians and the society bear the responsibility and should strongly react in order to stop similar global tragedies from repeating<sup>25</sup>. The second article, signed by Petre Iancu<sup>26</sup> (Deutsche Welle) discusses, from a geopolitical perspective, Poland’s absence from the ceremonies organised in Jerusalem on the occasion of the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust.

#### **(e) Other actors**

The representatives of cultural institutions are refocusing their discourse to highlight topics such as: (a) the ignorance of the Roma genocide by the authorities. The topic is tackled by a commentary written in 2016 by an actress of Roma origins, Mihaela Drăgan<sup>27</sup>, on the occasion of the 72 years commemoration of the Roma genocide, in Auschwitz-Birkenau. The article insists on the lack of interest shown by Romanian political leaders in keeping the memory of the Roma genocide alive: “None of the Romanian officials was present today, here, in Auschwitz, to show solidarity with Roma victims”, in spite of having historical responsibility for the genocide: “Romania, with 26,000 Roma deported to the Nazi camps in Transnistria, is the second country after Germany to have the largest number of genocide victims on its conscience”; in this case, the lack of interest is associated with the authority’s lack of interest in the current social situation of the Roma ethnics; (b) projects focusing on educating the youth with regard to “the matter of the Holocaust, the history of the Jews, and the fight against antisemitism”<sup>28</sup>, as developed and launched by the Northern Transylvania Holocaust Memorial Museum.

<sup>23</sup> Ionela Stănilă, “Infernul trăit de evrei aduși în Bărăgan cu trenul morții, în timpul masacrului din 1941: « Din cauza căldurii, au înnebunit și au pierit »” (*The inferno of the Jews brought to Bărăgan by death trains during the 1941 massacre. “They went mad or perished because of the heat”*), 27 January 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Cristian Unteanu, “«Arbeit macht frei», sintagma sinonimă cu orașarea Holocaustului” (“*Arbeit macht frei*”, an expression assimilated with the horrors of the Holocaust) 20 January 2020.

<sup>25</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>26</sup> Deutsche Welle, “Quo vadis Europa? Liderii lumii și rușinile continentului” (*Quo vadis Europe? World leaders and the indignities of the continent*), 22 January 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Mihaela Drăgan, “72 de ani de la Genocidul împotriva romilor, în timp ce în București, femei rome fac greva foamei” (*72 years from the genocide of the Roma; meanwhile, in Bucharest, Roma women are on hunger strike*), 03 August 2016.

<sup>28</sup> “We have a number of educational landmarks in Romania; they are trying to offer educational projects that provide the best education possible, in the spirit of tolerance and respect for our peers, particularly in defence of human rights” (Andreea Vilcovschi, “Muzeul Holocaustului,

## CONCLUSIONS

The Holocaust narrative is built around multiple national, European, and international commemorative events dedicated to the tragic phenomenon of the Holocaust. In basic terms, this situates the construction of the memory of Holocaust at the interplay between “universal” and “particular memory”, confirming that both “coexist at the same time and in the same space, and each affects the other, in a process of mutual feedback” (Baer and Sznider, 2015, 332). As such, the Holocaust is commemorated both as cosmopolitan event, triggered by various International/ European remembrance days (The International Holocaust Remembrance Day being the most representative), as well as a national event promoted by national (political) initiatives.

Maybe not surprising, considering that our research focused on a general news website, the central narrative disseminated by the press is that expressed by the country’s political actors, with emphasis on the messages and declarations of President Iohannis. The narrative’s thematic cores gravitate around the tragic and unique nature, as well as on the historical dimension of the Holocaust, as “supernational aspects” which are present in the political debates and beyond concerning this horrific phenomenon (Gordon 2006, 174). To commemorate the Holocaust is a national “duty” dictated by two imperatives: “never forget” and “never again” (Baer and Sznider, 2017). The first one is linked to the need of ensuring the preservation of the memory of the victims of the Holocaust; the second one refers to the efforts of counteracting current social and political manifestations such as antisemitism, xenophobia, and ethnic discrimination, while promoting the European values of tolerance and respect for human rights. Both are the transversal axes of the President’s messages, accompanied by the idea of taking responsibility for the past by knowing and accepting the country’s genuine history. A sign of Romania’s moral and political accountability, in the context of its European path, acknowledging the past is also a sign of the revival of the forgotten history as well as of the recovery of the memories repressed during communist times, by various means including the resumed realisation of memory loci and the preservation of the individual testimonies of victims and survivors.

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decorat de președintele României. « Distincția ne onorează și ne responsabilizează » (The Holocaust Museum awarded distinction by the President of Romania. *“This distinction makes us proud and responsible”*), 29 January 2020) + “This event is an excellent opportunity for the young generation to find out more information and details about our mission to provide education on the tragic story of the Second World War and the Holocaust, through our most recent project, Eternal Echoes – An interactive tool for teachers on the topic of the Holocaust” (Andreea Vilcovschi, “Medicul premierului israelian Benjamin Netanyahu vine în România. La ce eveniment va participa” (*The physician of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visits Romania. The list of events to be attended*), 13 January 2020).

Besides political actors, survivors are included, according to the classification made by Zandberg (2010), into the category of “authority figures” regarding the discourse on Holocaust. Nevertheless, survivor testimonies are rarely the focus of media content and are usually integrated in other local news pieces. The same as political actors, survivors adopt a victim-centered perspective, while their thematic axis gravitates around topics such as trauma and the significance of remembrance. The second category in the typology developed by Zandberg (2010) includes “professionals”, namely the academia and the journalists. As opposed to the first category, they focus on both the victims and the perpetrators, insisting on Romania’s accountability for the Holocaust, developing anti-hero profiles, and detailing their criminal actions in opposition to the suffering and trauma of the victims. Having a strong educational dimension, their discourse is focused on educating the new generations and furthering knowledge on the topic of the Holocaust, with particular emphasis on the genocide of the Roma, a topic largely ignored by Romanian authorities at the moment.

The narratives of all categories of actors presented in online press also signal the development of the Holocaust memory at the intersection between universalized memory of “never again” and the particular memory of Holocaust in a post-communist country in which the event was only recently restored to public memory after years of oblivion and distortions, and in which the country’s own contribution and responsibility for Holocaust remain rather a sensitive topic.

Nevertheless, future studies should broaden the research on Holocaust narrative by looking, comparatively, how the online press also frames the narrative of communist atrocities and whether the two narratives are presented in opposition or rather emerged in conjunction as “traumatic narratives of victimizations that ignore politics and history” (Baer and Sznider 2015, 339).

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