

OBJECTIONS TO DEPORTATIONS: NON-VIOLENT AND CLANDESTINE PROTESTS TO ROMA DEPORTATIONS TO TRANSNISTRIA

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Abstract. This article addresses the various forms of objections and protests on a local and national level to the deportations of the Roma to Transnistria. Roma deportees exercised a degree of agency in protesting their upcoming deportation orders or the deportation orders of their loved ones. As well, some Romanian actors, government public figures, and members of the Romanian population at large expressed their objection and protested the mass waves of deportations. Invalidating the government's deportation orders and arguments for repatriation are rooted in four key tropes: the degree of 'Romanianness' the Romani individual in question exuded, reaffirmation of Romanian citizenship, past military service or allegiance to the state, and claims that the injustice occurred as a result of confusion and ill-will on the gendarmes' part.

Keywords: *Romania; Transnistria; Roma; Protest; Deportations*

Prologue

"Transnistria was a prolonged disaster."¹ The claim, made by historian Raul Hilberg, is in reference to the genocide of the Roma and Jews committed during the Second World War under the Ion Antonescu regime in the Romanian-administered territory of Transnistria. Over the course of 1939 to 1945, approximately 26,000 Roma were deported to Transnistria where more than 11,000 Roma were victims of genocide. The forced deportation and marches of Roma deportees with the intention to 'settle' them in 'Gypsy colonies' in the region played a central role in the annihilation of all 'unwanted' and 'foreign elements' from Romanian society. The lack of a concrete long-term policy for Roma 'settlement', along with the inhumane treatment of the ethnic group, an attitude of indifference to their fate,

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¹ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews. Volume II*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003, p. 776.

and callous disregard for human life, not only on the part of the Romanian authorities in the region but in some cases of the local Ukrainian population, resulted in the mass murder of more than 11,000 Romanian Roma.²

Romani Non-violent Protests

Despite the fact that Roma were forced into a situation of structural disadvantage, and there was a grave prospect of violent reprisals if one chose to speak or rise up, some Roma partook in a number of non-violent forms of resistance.³ The most common of these was individual letter writing and petitioning the Romanian authorities or public figures of political status or political influence. These acts of resistance reflect the vulnerable position Roma found themselves in, either because they feared that they themselves would be subjected to the next round of deportations or because their families had been subjected to deportations. On mass, the letters showcase the Roma's desperate attempts to draw light to their own situation of injustice, the looming threat of deportation family members faced or the hardships endured in Transnistria.⁴ Their content featured a similar set of arguments seeking to invalidate the government's decision to deport them by justifying their right as Romanian citizens to reside in Romania.⁵ Others challenged the decision of local enforcement agents in rallying them arguing that the injustice occurred as a result of confusion, ill-will, or an abuse of power on the gendarmes' part.⁶

Military service also constituted one of the most cited tropes in petitions dejecting deportation orders on the ground of its symbol of patriotism and devotion to the state. The underline message of protest is clear: just as citizens had civic obligations to the state, so did the state in ensuring that its citizens rights were not infringed. Given the fact that the deportation orders were carried out in secret high-level executive decisions rather than legal decrees that could be petitioned and appealed in a court of law, these letters of petitions were addressed to the newly established Romanian administration in Transnistria, the Romanian government, and even public political figures such as Marshall Ion Antonescu, King Mihai and Queen Mother Elena.⁷

² Terms used in public discourse to refer to the ethnic group – *Roma*, *Gypsy*, *Romani* and *Țigan* – are pejorative in nature. Self-identifying Roma notably use the term *țigan* when referring to themselves or other individuals of their clan while ethnic Romanians utilize the term *țigan* to identify an individual of the ethnic group. However, as of the early 2000s, the term *Roma* has come to be used in academia as the appropriate terminology when addressing the ethnic group. I avoid using the term *Gypsy* as it is laden with stereotypes both romantic and mythical in nature. The term is used only when a pre-existing English translation exists. The term *Roma*, at least in the English-speaking world, is content neutral. In this article, and in tune with academic scholarship on the subject matter, I will employ the term *Roma* to refer to the ethnic group.

³ Bogdan Chiriac, "Between survival and noncompliance: Roma 'Acts of Resistance' in Transnistria during World War." In *Roma Resistance during the Holocaust and in its Aftermath*, edited by Evelin Verhás, Angéla Kóczé and Anna Lujza Szász (Budapest: Tom Lantos Institute), 2018, p. 54.

⁴ Vladimir Solonari, *Purificarea Națiunii: Dislocări Forțate de Populație și Epurări Etnice în România lui Ion Antonescu, 1940-1944*. Polirom, 2015, pp. 258-259.

⁵ B. Chiriac, "Between survival and noncompliance: Roma 'acts of resistance' in Transnistria during World War", p. 39.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

The most emotive pleas came from Roma who had been deported to Transnistria in the first round of deportations asking to have the orders rescinded. On mass, the letters showcase the Roma's desperate attempts to draw light to their own situation of injustice and the hardships endured in Transnistria.⁸ The petitioners sought to have the expulsion measure rescinded by contesting the vague criteria of the orders and by challenging the inconsistent, chaotic nature of the round-ups.⁹ Maria Dumitrache requested to be repatriated back to Romania after being deported to Transnistria arguing:

"[...] I, the undersigned Maria Dumitrache, with the greatest of respect and tears in my eyes come before you with this petition, I was evicted to Transnistria with my husband and my two children from the city of Galați and I have a son enlisted in the Army, named Dumitrache Const[antin], serving in the 3rd Platoon Border Guards [Grăniceri] in Negru-Vodă, the Constanța County.

I beseech you to investigate in all seriousness what type of people we are, how we behaved in the past and the reasons why we were evicted from our old household and separated from our children, being traditional musicians.

I beseech you with a heavy heart [to approve] our return to our beloved country, for which we have fought for generations and for our son to be returned to us. [...] ¹⁰".

The second category of petitions are those penned by Roma whose family members were deported in their absence. The simplistic, emotive language used in these letters encapsulates the helplessness experienced by Roma women after their husbands were deported or the desperation and emptiness felt by the men after returning from working abroad and discovering their homes deserted or pillaged.¹¹ The discursive strategies employed in these letters tended to follow different 'pattern of protests' and often depended on the recipient. For example, letters written by Roma women, addressed primarily to Queen Mother Elena, King Mihai's mother, made maternal pleas to the Queen by stressing the material difficulties experienced as a result of the painful separation from their husbands and male children, the main breadwinners in the family.¹²

Queen Mother Elena was a political figure. However, she had little power and influence over government decisions. Nonetheless, Roma women made emotional appeals to her hoping that her role as mother would propel her to show compassion to their plight and advocate for their cause on their behalf. On the other hand, letters addressed by Roma women to Marshall Antonescu tended to include an array of maternal and strategic arguments underlining both the hardships endured in the absence of their husbands and children and the distinguished military records of their male relatives, a symbol of their devotion and patriotism to the state. Anastasia Burcea, a war widow from Pitești, pleaded for the repatriation of her son:

⁸ V. Solonari, *quoted work*.

⁹ B. Chiriac, *quoted work*, p. 40.

¹⁰ USHMM, RG-25.050M 'Selected Records from Various Archives of Romania Concerning Roma', Reel no. 4, Folder no. 89/1942, File 1121.

¹¹ B. Chiriac, *quoted work*, p. 40.

¹² *Ibidem*.

“[...] During the implementation of the order issued by the esteemed Government concerning the colonization of Transnistria, Gheorghe Burcea, one of my sons and a carpenter by trade, and his wife were rounded up. Taking into account that our family was born and lives in Pitești, that my husband fell bravely fighting in the previous war, that one of my sons also shed blood for the Country, King, and Conducător and my other son is currently fighting in the first ranks side by side with our soldiers fighting in the Caucasus, I appeal to Your sense of righteousness and beseech you to order the return from the Oceakov commune, Transnistria of my son Gheorghe Burcea [...].”¹³

Letters of petition written by Roma veterans or active-duty army soldiers addressed to Romanian officers or top government officials in Bucharest or Odessa took a different tone – the language used underlined military service as the reason for the exemption of their families from deportation. Their pleas spoke to a previous promise made by the regime stipulating that those with former or active military service and their families would not be included in the ‘colonization’ plan of the east. Many soldiers made mention of wartime wounds as proof of loyalty to the state, a sacrifice that in their eyes places the government in their debt. Frustrated by the deportation of their families, many soldiers wrote directly to Marshall Antonescu and the war cabinet seeking permission to travel to Transnistria and bring back their family members. This is exemplified in a letter of petition written by Gendarme Nicolae Moldovan:

“[...] With tears in my eyes, I beseech you, Marshall Antonescu, to issue orders that grant me permission to travel and look for my relatives, knowing that they currently reside in the Golta County [in Transnistria] and, at the same time, authorize me to request the support of the local military and civilian authorities [in my efforts] to have my relatives returned to my beloved fatherland, for which I have fought since the beginning of the war until the present day. I await your superior orders granting me permission to fulfil my request, because my conduct both as a civilian and as a soldier has been beyond reproach, and my relatives deported in Transnistria do not have a criminal record and do not belong to the nomadic Gypsy groups [...].”¹⁴

The third category of petitions were those drafted by sedentary Roma who were exempted from the first and second round of deportations but lived with fear of being deported. Alarmed by the circulation of rumours that additional deportations were looming, sedentary Roma drafted petitions to local and central authorities pleading their case. Most Roma attempted to define their ethnic identity in relation to their own social status in the village they inhabited, the legal ownership of property, ‘good’ behaviour exhibited, and distinguished military service if they previously or currently served in the Romanian army.¹⁵

¹³ *Documente Privind Deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vols. I-II. Viorel Achim ed., Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2004. Doc. no. 209 (1942 ante October 27), 1: 315.

¹⁴ USHMM, RG-25.050 M ‘Selected Records from Various Archives of Romania Concerning Roma’, Reel no. 4, Folder no. 89/1942, File 1226.

¹⁵ ‘Good’ behavior is articulated within the parameters of how the state, more specifically the Antonescu regime defined the term. For the Roma, ‘good’ behavior could be exhibited by their social conduct in society. For example, their refusal to engage in theft or petty begging or set up makeshift tents in cities or villages.

These four criteria were important as they refuted the Roma's criminalization as 'work-shy', nomads or 'impoverished, delinquent, unpatriotic țigani'.¹⁶ Ultimately, the points outlined set to prove one's alleged 'usefulness' to Romanian society, or at the very least, the local community in which they resided. The arguments provided reflect a nuanced self-perception – ethnicity and citizenship were combined into a hybrid civic identity, reflective in part by their linguistic and cultural assimilation into Romanian society.¹⁷ Labels such as "Romanian of Roma origin" or 'Romanianized Roma' were commonly used as a means of stressing their allegiance to the Romanian nation, the Crown, or the Antonescu regime. A letter of protest written by Gheorghe Sârbu addressed to the prefect of the Botoșani gendarmerie stipulates the aforementioned:

"I am a musician by trade...paying the required dues to state, county, and community as any Romanian citizen [should]... as one who made the obligation to Motherland and Throne then when I was called, ready whenever to be called make [my] obligation as a Romanian, with the most profound respect I ask you to order that I not be classified, to be sent to Transnistria, because until now I never suffered a condemnation, I am not a vagabond [unable to earn my existence] ... I am born and raised in Botoșani, I like my family and parents."¹⁸

Sârbu's petition employs several themes that would come to be used as tropes for contestation of deportations. It underlines the 'good' behaviour exhibited through his honesty, his sedentarization, his military service and his dedication to the state as a patriotic soldier, and lastly, but of equal importance, the fact that he is a tax-paying citizen of the state.¹⁹ By listing these traits, Sârbu constructs his identity as an average Romanian citizen. In doing so, he entrenches his *romanipe* ('gypsyhood' as commonly known in the English language) with *Romanianness*, or rather characteristics that have become associated with *Romanianness*. Though he is not denying his Romani ethnicity, his plea seeks to cement his status as a Romanian citizen irrespective of his race.²⁰ While some Roma sought to assert their ethnicity by affirming that their *romanipe* was interlinked with *Romanianness*, others sought to displace and distance themselves from their ethnic heritage by portraying it as something of the past that they no longer identify with or felt accurately represented them. Both means attempt to equate the ethnic identity with the national identity thereby cementing one's belonging to the nation state.

Sedentarization, that is settling and having a physical home and not a makeshift one, and having a constant, continuous form of employment were considered valuable, looked upon traits. These traits are reflective of the traits a 'good citizen' holds; one whom not only plays a role in the modernizing, civilized state but also respects, follows, and sees the value in the law and regulations established by the said state. Civic contribution is a key element in asserting one's participation and 'usefulness' in society.

¹⁶ Shannon Woodcock, "Romanian Romani Resistance to Genocide in the Matrix of the 'Țigan' Other", *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 25 (2):28-43, 2007, p. 38.

¹⁷ M. Benjamin Thorne, *The Anxiety of Proximity: The "Gypsy Question" in Romanian Society, 1934-1944 and Beyond*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2012, p. 297.

¹⁸ ANDJ-Botoșani, fond Prefecture județului Botoșani, dos. 40/1942, f.15. Translated text from Thorne, *The Anxiety of Proximity: The "Gypsy Question" in Romanian Society, 1934-1944 and Beyond*, p. 299.

¹⁹ M. Benjamin Thorne, *quoted work*, p. 299.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

When making their case as ‘good’ citizens, Roma petitioners also commonly noted their status as landowners and/or professions. Some petitioners attested that their work was useful for the country and thereby for the national economy while others went as far to note their education and cultural contributions to society.²¹ This was the case with a group of eleven self-described “ethnic Romanian musicians” from Brăila pleading, “We have a foundation too in musical education, being graduates of Romanian conservatories, we worked for this art ‘Music’. We are skilled artists in this art of music, we are those who preserved the Romanian songs and doinas, that were handed down by our ancestors and that we make known in our country [...]”²² The petition cited makes the case that the group of settled Roma were playing a key role in society and fulfilling some of the basic requirements of citizenship - gainful employment, patriotic love for one’s country, and the adoption of Romanian culture, in this case through music.²³ The self-perceived ‘usefulness’ of the group is linked to their role in respecting, propagating, and participating in the cultural and artistic exchange of Romanian mythoi and nationalist sentiment, in this case exemplified through music. Within the context of civic discourse, the petitioners underline their status as culturally integrated Romanian citizens. If not for this reason alone, the group pleaded to be exempted from deportations. Despite the vast numbers of letters of protests written, only a few petitions achieved the desired result.

Objections to Deportations by the Public

Objections to deportations by the general populace were far and few in between but that does not mean that they did not exist. While the majority of the population and the entire Romanian political class, fascist and non-fascist alike did not object to deportations (albeit for reasons that they had no objections or that they did not know of deportations as previously claimed), a few actors at both the local and national level expressed their discontent.

Petitions drafted by public figures holding political or social positions in their locality pleading for the ceasing of deportations are well noted. One of the most cited pleas of this degree is that of Gheorghe Niculescu, the president of the General Union of the Roma, asking King Mihai to protect the group under the clause of the ‘Royal Shield’.²⁴ Similar in tone and points of criteria outlined in letters of protests written by Roma individuals, Niculescu’s letters stressed Roma’s allegiance to the Romanian nation, their social and economic standing and by extension their contribution to their locality, their sedentarization, and

²¹ DANIC, fond PCM, dos. 202/1942, f. 190, dated 7 October 1942.

²² DANIC, fond PCM, dos. 202/1942, f. 220-221.

²³ M. Benjamin Thorne, *quoted work*, p. 301.

²⁴ Gheorghe Niculescu was the president of *Uniunea Generală a Romilor din Romania* (General Union of Roma in Romania) from 1934 to 1949 when the Association was disbanded (the Union ceased activity in 1941 but was later reactivated in 1945). The Association promoted various initiatives for the social and cultural development of the Roma population in Romania. According to its own estimates, membership during this time reached an apex of 800,000 members. For additional information, please see: Viorel Achim, *The Roma*, pp. 155-159.

ownership of property.²⁵ Niculescu further noted the Roma's religious practice of Christian rituals, a key element that in addition to the previously stipulated points, highlights the Roma's acceptance and assimilation to 'Romanian' social, cultural and religious practices.

It is important to note that while the letter is itself a symbolic plea for aid and protection, Niculescu's lack of concern for the nomadic tribes speaks volumes. His general apathy towards itinerant Roma reflects the organization's interwar perception and doctrine that nomadism was an archaic practice that itinerant Roma needed to abandon in order to become active citizens of a modern, civilized state. A police report summarizing his letter reflects his perspective: "The association does not mean to sympathize with or include in its appeal to the high protection of His Royal Majesty the nomadic Roma, [those] without well-defined professions, with criminal records, or those who do not obey the measures dictated by the laws and regulations of the country."²⁶

As for the public outcry from the Romanian political elite, only one letter of protest is documented. Constantin I. C. Brătianu, one of the leading political actors of his time and former leader of the Liberal Party, wrote to Antonescu questioning the relocation of Roma to Transnistria. The letter is reproduced below:

"Following the persecutions and expulsion of Jews, as reprisals against their coreligionists in Bukovina and Bessarabia, and influenced by the treatment [Jews] suffered in Germany, today very strict measures are taken against the Gypsies, who are being forcibly arrested and sent, in sealed train cars, to Transnistria, as is happening in Pitești.

No one understands the purpose or benefit of these expulsions. As you know very well, these Romanian citizens were not subject to any special treatment in our state until today. They are Orthodox, just like Romanians, and play an important economic role in our country, being skilled craftsmen such as: farriers, blacksmiths, coppersmiths, masons, construction workers or field hands and day labourers. Many are small shopkeepers, small business owners, milkmen, etc. Nearly all the violinists in our country are Gypsies, and there is not a folk celebration that can dispense with their assistance.

Suddenly, the authorities are telling them to leave the country in which they were born and where their forefathers and ancestors lived; from the country where, as good Romanians, they shed their blood being enlisted in the army.

On the eve of winter, they must liquidate their homes in a matter of hours, from which they are not allowed carry anything save for 20 kilograms of belongings and clothing.

The elderly, women, and children are cast out into regions unknown to them, where they have no means of survival.

Why such cruelty?

What crimes are these unfortunates guilty of?

What will result from their expulsion?

²⁵ DANIC, fond DGP, dos. 191/1942, f. 9, from September 1942 [the full date does not appear on the document].

²⁶ DANIC, fond DGP, dos. 191/1942, f. 14, dated 13 November 1942.

Is Romania, especially after the current war, so overpopulated and has such an abundance of craftsmen and workers that it can sacrifice so great a number of its citizens?

I cannot fathom that such measures have been initiated by or with the knowledge of the head of state, and for this reason I address myself to you to put an end to this persecution that will set us back several centuries in human history.”²⁷

Brătianu’s letter conveys themes similar to those expressed by Roma in their letters of protest – the group’s economic, cultural, and military contributions to the state, their residency on Romanian soil stemming back generations, their fusion into Romanian society and religious practise are all symbols of their assimilation, if not at the very least acceptance and embrace of Romanian cultural and social practices. Brătianu’s underlining premise is that these stipulations, when combined together, affirm the group’s *Romanianness*. From Brătianu’s perspective, the group’s very essence that formed and reasserted their *Gypsyhood* or *Gypsyess* (excluding nomadism) is of value because not only has it brought value to the new redefined model of what constitutes *Romanianness*, but because it is historically interlinked with *Romanianness*. As such, the Roma had earned the right to be treated equally under the law, or at the very least, not to be deported.²⁸

Interestingly, deportations are portrayed as measures that are inherently unRomanian; the measures are arguably not a Romanian initiative but are executed as a result of external influence and pressure applied by Nazi Germany on the Antonescu regime to carry out similar policies.²⁹ Brătianu also makes the claim that not only do the measures not act in the state’s national interest, they are also detrimental to Romania’s international standing due to their barbaric, arguably pre-modern nature.³⁰ While Brătianu initially supported the government’s wartime policy against the Soviet Union, he did not agree with the regime’s deportation of ‘ethnic others’.³¹

²⁷ The only known copy of Brătianu’s letter, dated 16 September 1942, is located at Yad Vashem. The letter has been reproduced in Jean Ancel, ed. *Documents Concerning the Fate of Romanian Jewry during the Holocaust*, vol. IV. Beate Klarsfeld Foundation (Jerusalem: 1985), p. 225. The literally English translation was taken from Thorne, *The Anxiety of Proximity: The “Gypsy Question” in Romanian Society, 1934-1944 and Beyond*, 312.

²⁸ M. Benjamin Thorne, *quoted work*, p. 313.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ The Ministry of Internal Affairs investigated the complaints of settled Roma, Roma veterans, and the families of current officers who had been swept up in the operation and deported to Transnistria in December 1942. Their findings confirmed the claims and as a result, 311 *bulibaşa* (term used to denote the head of each family) and their respective family members, 1,261 persons total, were granted permission to be return to Romania. Not all individuals were however repatriated. In addition, Antonescu’s office and the Army General Staff called for the repatriation of all Romani veterans and families of Roma soldiers. Most were repatriated. In December 1942, the Ministry of Internal Affairs investigated the complaints of settled Roma who had been swept up and dumped in Transnistria. As a result, 311 heads of family (1,261 persons) were given permission to return home, although not all were repatriated. For additional information on the findings of the investigation, please see: Dennis Deletant, *Hitler’s Forgotten Ally: Ion Antonescu and his Regime, Romania 1940-1944*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pp. 191-192.

Deportations were met with little opposition on behalf of the Romanian public. Antiziganism was deeply rooted in Romanian society by the 1940s with many individuals supporting, and even praising deportations. There were however a few individuals, primarily the political and cultural elites who exercised their personal agency and vocalized their opposition. As previously mentioned, Roma protesting for a reprieve or exemption from deportation did so with the intention of proving the functionality of their work and value it brought to the local community. To support their cases some Roma requested willing neighbours, employers or municipal officers to write letters of support for their clause on their behalf. Symbolic as ‘certificates of good conduct’, these letters set to confirm the positive attributes of the individuals in question and importance of their work to the local economy.³² The mayors of Stancea and Mânăstirea communes in Ilfov County each issued such certificates on behalf of their entire Roma populations with the mayor of Stancea, Ion Christache claiming that the Roma in his county were “citizens of good standing, Orthodox Christians who work the land.”³³ The mayor of Dăești praised the talents of the local Roma blacksmith stressing the village’s dire need for his services.³⁴

Lazăr Petrescu, the mayor of Târgoviște, arguably wrote one of the most articulated critiques of the deportations of settled Roma in his town. In his letter directed to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Petrescu, argued that the economic vacuum resultant of their deportation crippled the local economy.³⁵ He further questioned the methods employed by the local police in identifying and registering the local Roma in the 1942 census claiming that unreliable, stereotypical benchmarks and skin color were used as markers of ethnicity. Petrescu argues:

The criteria after which the statistics were made are defective, because first, there does not exist a precise norm to distinguish [between Roma and non-Roma] other than colour and here there is a whole series of abuses. Many say to us that they gave money and were [still] registered, others are suspected of being Gypsies, then husbands of Romanian blood were also registered, in many cases departed for the front, and likewise the children and parents that fight on the front were placed [on the list], and the children of Romanians married to Gypsy girls were registered as Gypsies.³⁶

Calling deportations “defective and inhumane”, Petrescu implored the Ministry to cease operations. Unlike petitions issued by other mayors requesting the repatriation of ‘their’ Roma on economic grounds, Petrescu criticized the regime’s actions condemning deportations as racist and destructive on a local, regional and national level.³⁷ Petrescu was the only political figure besides Brătianu

³² B. Chiriac, “Between survival and noncompliance: Roma ‘acts of resistance’ in Transnistria during World War”, p. 43; M. Benjamin Thorne, *The Anxiety of Proximity: The “Gypsy Question” in Romanian Society, 1934-1944 and Beyond*, p. 314.

³³ DANIC, fond IRJ, dos. 260, f. 19; 21; and 23.

³⁴ *Documente Privind Deportarea Țigănilor în Transnistria*, vols. I-II. Viorel, Achim, ed. Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2004. Doc. no. 91 (1942 September), 1: 142-143.

³⁵ DANIC, fond DGP, dos. 189/1942, f. 209-209v, dated 29 September 1942.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ M. Benjamin Thorne, *quoted work*, p. 315.

to critique the regime's deportation policies.³⁸ As for the cultural elite, the most known personal intervention came on behalf of renowned composer George Enescu who requested that if the Roma were to be sent beyond the Bug River, he would be sent amongst them as an act of solidarity.³⁹

While political and cultural elites remained mostly silent, the business sector was far more active and vocal in their protest. Certain industries relied on cheap Roma labour and goods to meet government-mandated wartime quotas of production.⁴⁰ The forced relocation of these individuals arguably affected and offset the company's production. Such a case was made by the General Director of *Căilor Ferate Române* (Romanian Railways, CFR), Romania's railway authority, who vocalized his protest to the impending deportation of 'his' Roma workers. In his appeal, the CFR Director asserted the Roma's 'usefulness' going as far to argue that the workers were irreplaceable to the war effort and that their deportation would not only negatively impact production, but that it would leave an economic void in the workforce.⁴¹

In a similar nature, the owner of Marmi marble and ceramic factory requested the repatriation of 'his' Roma employee, Radu Alexandru, whom he called "one of the most industrious and useful men" in his company.⁴² The two appeals mentioned above attest the 'value' of the Roma employees as workers by underlining the role they each played in Romania's industry and wartime efforts. While such appeals may have arguably been made for selfish reasons rather than moral ones (the Roma's 'value' to society was determined solely by how well they worked and their work output), the appeals hint to challenge preconceived notions that Roma were 'work-shy', 'lazy' and 'unwilling to work' – qualities that in the eyes of Antonescu and his cabinet validated the group's inability to embrace the modernizing, industrious efforts Romania was undergoing.

In conclusion, petitions drafted by Romanians holding political or social positions in their locality plead for the ceasing of deportations. As well, Roma exercised a certain degree of agency in protesting their upcoming deportation orders or the deportation orders of their loved ones. Invalidating the government's deportation orders and arguments for repatriation are rooted in four key tropes: one, the degree of 'Romanianness' the individual exuded; two, reaffirmation of Romanian citizenship; three, past military service or allegiance to the state; and four, claims that the injustice occurred as a result of confusion and ill-will on the gendarmes' part.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

In response to Petrescu's letter, the municipal police denied that skin color played a role in identifying and registering the local Roma in the 1942 census. The police claimed that the contents of the letter had no basis of truth alleging that mayor's accusation only sought to stir sympathy amongst the Romanian population for the Roma's plight. The police further alleged that Petrescu was motivated by personal, political reasons rather than humanitarian grounds to object to deportations. The gendarme inspector Ioan Epăraru insinuated that an affair which resulted in an offspring of mixed Roma and Gypsy blood, influenced the mayor's decision; his fear being that his mistress and daughter would be subjected to deportation. For additional information on the municipal police report, please see: DANIC, fond DGP, dos. 190/1942, f. 44-45. For a detailed description of the case, please see: M. Benjamin Thorne, *quoted work*, p. 315.

³⁹ DANIC, fond DGP, dos. 195/1942, f. 4. The contents of the file make it unclear if Enescu directed his plea to Antonescu personally or via correspondence.

⁴⁰ M. Benjamin Thorne, *quoted work*, p. 316.

⁴¹ DANIC, fond DGP, dos. 190/1942, f. 72.

⁴² DANIC, fond IGJ, dos. 59/1942, f. 178, dated 25 January 1943.

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