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# Anti-Semitic Violence in Eastern Romania: The National Christian Party's Congress, 8 November 1936

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Two leading political organisations in interwar Romania were genuinely anti-Semitic: the fascist Legionary movement and the far-right party the National Christian Defence League (LANC), known from 1935 as the National Christian Party (PNC). Whereas the anti-Semitism of the Legionaries is well researched, that of the LANC/PNC has rarely been studied. I argue that, in addition to an anti-Semitic agenda and rhetoric, anti-Jewish violence was an inherent part of the political practices of the LANC/PNC. I analyse the party's national congress on 8 November 1936, when thousands of supporters gathered in Bucharest, and use party correspondence and police and Interior Ministry records to show that the attendees engaged extensively in anti-Jewish violence, before and even more so after the congress. The government, ruled by the National Liberal Party, agreed to the mass anti-Semitic gathering but had only a vague plan to repress violent anti-Semitism: expecting the event to stir up anti-Jewish hatred, the Interior Ministry mobilised the security forces to prevent outbursts during the congress, but not much before or after. The LANC/PNC played a central role in the politicisation of extreme anti-Semitism in interwar Romania, and addressing the party's history provides a better understanding of the right-wing radicalisation of the time.

## Introduction

When modern anti-Semitism took hold in the second half of the nineteenth century, Romania was among the first countries to join the new trend; the Encyclopaedia Britannica from 1910 named Russia and Romania as the only countries where 'legalised anti-Semitism' already existed. However, unlike in the Russian Empire, in Romania – 'a constitutional country' – the anti-Semitism 'was the work of the elected deputies of the nation', and tense political and social moments, upheavals and crises, such as the peasant uprising of 1907, revealed a widespread popular anti-Semitism.<sup>1</sup> Anti-Semites in Romania had complained for a long-time about the lack of an organisation, and one was established after the First World War as the League of National Christian Defence (*Liga Apărării Național Creștine*; LANC). Anti-Semites took advantage of the new political opportunities after 1918, particularly the expansion of voting rights, and organised one of the most aggressive anti-Semitic movements in Europe. Founded in 1923, the LANC is known for endorsing the anti-Semitic student protests of the 1920s, and the notorious fascist leader Corneliu Zelea Codreanu belonged to the organisation until he founded a break-away group in 1927 that would soon gain more prominence – the Iron Guard, also known as the Legionary movement. The LANC received attention in July 1935 when it merged with the Agrarian Party of the Transylvanian national poet Octavian Goga (1881–1938) to form the National Christian Party (*Partidul Național Creștin*; PNC). The new party took over the LANC's radical anti-Semitic, royalist and pro-German agenda, unifying Goga's county organisations in western Romania with the LANC's strongholds in the east of the country and claiming to be the only party

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in: Iulia Onac, 'In der rumänischen Antisemiten-Citadelle': zur Entstehung des politischen Antisemitismus in Rumänien 1878–1914 (Berlin: Metropol), 44–5.

the king needed on his side in order to rule.<sup>2</sup> In December 1937, King Carol II entrusted the PNC to lead the government following political turmoil, although it had received only 9.15 per cent of the vote in the previous general election. In the forty-four days of PNC rule, the government passed extensive anti-Semitic laws for the first time since 1918, which led to a surge in anti-Semitic violence, to economic instability and to increased concerns among Romania's allies, particularly France, about the country's political future.<sup>3</sup>

My article addresses the anti-Semitic violence carried out by LANC leaders and supporters before the party entered government at the end of 1937 and thus analyses the less explored aspect of how the party's anti-Semitic propaganda became implemented and the official reactions to those policies. The few works dealing with the party's history have taken a rather descriptive approach, offering an overview of its ideology and key events in the party's history, but without much analysis of how the LANC – together with the Iron Guard – came to be the most important right-wing organisation.<sup>4</sup> There is only basic data on the party and its leaders, such as its founder Alexandru Constantin Cuza (1857–1947), in studies on the Legionary movement and the Shoah in Romania.<sup>5</sup> The role that the LANC, and later the PNC, played in coordinating anti-Semites has also been little explored, partly because of the research focus on the Legionary movement since the 1990s and partly because some authors, such as the historian Ion Mezarescu, perceive the PNC to be merely a conservative party, rather than a radical anti-Semitic organisation<sup>6</sup> – a tendency that one can see in a recently published study of interwar Bessarabia. The LANC received early support in this former region of the Russian Empire, which was annexed by Romania in 1918 and in which there was a long tradition of anti-Semitism because it had been part of the Pale of Settlement. At the same time, the LANC's headquarters in Iași were relatively close, and the region therefore became a centre of the anti-Semitic movement in the 1930s. However, the study on Bessarabia not only fails to mention the LANC's popularity but also keeps silent about anti-Semitism in the region altogether.<sup>7</sup>

Illuminating the party's history is of paramount importance for understanding the radicalisation of the conservative right and the role that anti-Semitism played in that process. The party had a constant presence in the political scene in interwar Romania and, especially from the 1930s onwards, achieved imposing electoral results in various counties in Bessarabia, Moldova and the Bukovina. Apart from the party's beginnings, the split between Codreanu and Cuza in 1927, and the Cuza–Goga government from December 1937 until January 1938, little is known about the county organisations, their leaders, the party's propaganda apparatus, the paramilitary troops – the 'Blue Shirts' (*cămășile albastre*) – or the PNC's relationship with the NSDAP. This article focuses on one feature that shaped the LANC – and later the PNC – and that distinguished it from a traditionally conservative party: the anti-Semitic acts that were used by the 'Cuzists' (*cuziști*), as the LANC supporters were called, for political mobilisation. How did the anti-Semitic acts manifest? Who instigated the violence and how did the

<sup>2</sup> Hans-Christian Maner, *Parlamentarismus in Rumänien (1930–1940)* (München: Oldenbourg, 1997), 207.

<sup>3</sup> Horia Bozdoghina, *Antisemitismul lui A. C. Cuza în politica românească* (București: Curtea Veche, 2012), 226–30; Stephen Fischer-Galati, 'The Legacy of Anti-Semitism', in Randolph L. Braham, ed., *The Tragedy of Romanian Jewry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 1–28, here 20–21; Keith Hitchins, *Romania 1866–1947* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 419–21.

<sup>4</sup> Bozdoghina, *Antisemitismul*; Viorica Nicolenco, *Extrema dreaptă în Basarabia (1923–1940)* (Chișinău: Civitas, 1999); Corneliu Ciucanu, *Dreapta românească interbelică. Politică și ideologie* (Iași: Tipo Moldova, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Diana Dumitru, *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust: The Borderlands of Romania and the Soviet Union* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Carol Iancu, *Le Juifs en Roumanie (1919–1938). De l'émancipation à la marginalisation* (Paris-Louvain: E. Peeters, 1996), 185–94; Mariana Hausleitner, *Deutsche und Juden in Bessarabien: 1814–1941. Zur Minderheitenpolitik Russlands und Großrumäniens* (München: IKGS, 2005), 149–59; Armin Heinen, *Die Legion 'Erzengel Michael' in Rumänien. Soziale Bewegung und politische Organisation. Ein Beitrag zum Problem des internationalen Faschismus* (München: Oldenbourg, 1986); Armin Heinen and Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Inszenierte Gegenmacht von rechts. Die 'Legion Erzengel Michael' in Rumänien 1918–1938* (München: Oldenbourg, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Ion Mezarescu, *Partidul Național Creștin, 1935–1938* (București: Paideia, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Nicolae Enciu, *În componența României Întregite. Basarabia și basarabienii de la Marea Unire la notele ultimative sovietice* (București/Brăila: Editura Istros a Muzeului Brăilei, 2018).

authorities react? Anti-Semitic violence was clearly a LANC legacy, and the main question was whether, after the merger, anti-Semitic violence would also be the core of the PNC's political practices. It became obvious that anti-Semitic violence was an inherent part of the PNC's programme when the party achieved its biggest political success in December 1937, but the current article shows that violence against Jews had long been present in the party's eastern strongholds and that the anti-Semitic violence during the PNC government period was by no means a singular outburst. In so doing, it takes a first step to approaching the history of the LANC/PNC from a praxeological perspective in order to reconsider the organisational structures of this leading anti-Semitic organisation and to reflect on the degree of radicalisation of the extreme right in interwar Romania.

### Anti-Semitic Violence in Interwar Romania

The beginnings of political anti-Semitism in Romania reach back to the second half of the nineteenth century. During the nation-building process that followed the unification of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia into a Romanian state, anti-Semitism was a popular way for members of the elite to express their 'national pride'.<sup>8</sup> An important characteristic of anti-Semitism in unified Romania was that the exclusion of Jews was propagated from top to bottom and that it took place within legal terms. These measures were more 'coherent and active than in most countries'.<sup>9</sup> The discussions over Romania's first constitution that encouraged hopes of legal emancipation among the Jewish population provoked widespread anti-Semitic reactions. Alexandru Constantin Cuza and others founded the 'Universal Anti-Semitic Alliance' (*Alliance Anti-semitique Universelle*) in 1886 and hosted the first international anti-Semitic congress in Bucharest in the same year.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, Romanian anti-Semites sent a clear signal that the new country at Europe's periphery was actively contributing to the anti-Semitic debates that were gaining in popularity in Western Europe. The increase in anti-Semitism precipitated the exodus of 70,000 Jews until the beginning of the First World War, an enormous number given the Jewish population was only 266,652 according to the 1889 census.<sup>11</sup>

The end of the First World War led to a spike in newly established anti-Semitic organisations, and LANC was one of them. The aim was the exclusion of Jews from civil rights, which was seen as a means to 'nationalise' the provinces acquired unexpectedly from the Habsburg and the Russian Empires. At the same time, the LANC considered the battle against the Jewish population as an attempt to prevent the spread of the Bolshevik Revolution at the country's eastern border: The odious stereotype of 'Judeo-Bolshevism' was ubiquitous in those days. The territorial gains also brought about profound demographic changes that made Romania much more multi-ethnic. In 1920, 30 per cent of the population were not ethnic Romanians, as opposed to 8 per cent before the war. At the end of the 1920s, the country had the third largest Jewish population of Eastern Europe, with 800,000 Jews, 5 per cent of Romania's inhabitants.<sup>12</sup> (There were 2.8 million Jews in Poland and 2.68 million in the Soviet Union.)<sup>13</sup> About 70 per cent of the Romanian Jews lived in the formerly imperial territories and spoke, as a rule, Yiddish, German, Hungarian or Russian but – unlike many Jews in the Old Kingdom – no Romanian.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Roland Clark, 'From Elite Pamphleteers to Social Movement Protagonists: Anti-Semitic Activism in 1920s Romania', *Studies on National Movements*, 4, (2019), 1–35, here 1; Carol Iancu, *Jews in Romania 1866–1919. From Exclusion to Emancipation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 9.

<sup>9</sup> Iancu, *Jews*, 10–11.

<sup>10</sup> Avram Andrei Băleanu, 'Rumänien', in Elke-Vera Kotowski, Julius Schoeps and Hiltrud Wallenborn, eds., *Handbuch zur Geschichte der Juden in Europa*, 3rd edn (Frankfurt am Main: Primus, 2013), 277–86; Trond Berg Eriksen, Håkon Harket and Einhart Lorenz, eds., *Judenhass. Die Geschichte des Antisemitismus von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), 441–43.

<sup>11</sup> Băleanu, 'Rumänien', 280; Iancu, *Jews*, 11–12.

<sup>12</sup> Băleanu, 'Rumänien', 281.

<sup>13</sup> Norbert Franz and Wilfried Jilge, 'Rußland, Ukraine, Baltikum (Lettland, Estland)', in Kotowski, Schoeps and Wallenborn, *Handbuch*, 167–227, here 198; Ryszard Kaczmarek, *Historia Polski 1914–1989* (Warszawa: PWN), 163.

<sup>14</sup> Hitchins, *Romania*, 290–1.

The further revival of anti-Semitism was related to the ‘post-war nation-building agenda’.<sup>15</sup> There were growing concerns among the political elite over how to integrate the provinces into a centralised national state, assimilate the minorities, and change the demographic balance in favour of ethnic Romanians, in particular in the cities where the latter were a minority, and some of them had a sizeable Jewish population. This led to a nation- and state-building process in which an anti-Semitic discourse was common ground among nationalist politicians.<sup>16</sup>

Roland Clark’s research on the first years of the anti-Semitic movements after 1918 illuminates the change in political culture that anti-Semites underwent. Whereas before the war, anti-Semitism had been a political expression of the elites, universal manhood suffrage and the new national project made the anti-Semites adapt ‘to the new conditions’. They turned from pamphleteering to mobilising tens of thousands of Romanians to join ‘ultranationalist organisations’.<sup>17</sup> LANC leaders who looked back at long political careers took advantage of the new opportunities and unfolded their activities in the new provinces – in former Tsarist Bessarabia and the southern part of Habsburg Bukovina. The LANC became the largest anti-Semitic movement by incorporating smaller organisations, such as ‘The Romanian Action’ (*Acțiunea Română*), ‘The Social-Christian Party’ (*Partidul Social-Creștin*) and the ‘National Romanian Fascio’ (*Fascia Națională Română*) in 1925.<sup>18</sup> The party attracted supporters from the rural areas in northeastern Romania by blaming the Jews for the urgent economic, social, political and cultural problems. Compared to the fascist Iron Guard, LANC supporters were more likely to be illiterate and were attracted by the religious strain of anti-Semitism. The closer the counties were to the Soviet Union, the higher was the support for the Cuzists: the anti-Bolshevik rhetoric of the LANC fell on fertile ground.<sup>19</sup>

Another characteristic attributed to anti-Semitism in Romania by scholars is violence – embraced by both the fascist Iron Guard and the LANC.<sup>20</sup> Whereas the violence of the Iron Guard was directed against the political enemies, the central authorities and against the Jewish population, the LANC’s ultranationalist propaganda targeted primarily Jews. In his study on propaganda strategies of the Legionary movement in Bessarabia, Wolfram Nieß specified that in areas politically dominated by the LANC, in particular in northern Bessarabia, anti-Semitic acts were committed by the Cuzists.<sup>21</sup> A ‘detailed analysis of the Cuzist propaganda, political praxis and violence are to be differentiated from those of the Legion’ and should therefore be studied separately, outlined Nieß.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, Oliver Jens Schmitt stated that the LANC and the PNC ‘bore responsibility for the physical violence against the Jews’ – a responsibility that has been yet insufficiently researched.<sup>23</sup> Diana Dumitru covers some of these aspects in her comparative study on the treatment of Jews by the population in Transnistria and Bessarabia during the Second World War. In the subchapter ‘Prewar Violence against Bessarabian Jewry’, she mentions several cases of violence, such as assaults, marches through villages and market towns as well as thefts from shops owned by Jews. When an important Christian holiday such as Easter was approaching, rumours and false accusations that Jews harmed or killed LANC

<sup>15</sup> Irina Livezeanu, ‘Fascists and Conservatives in Romania: Two Generations of Nationalists’, in Martin Blinkhorn, ed., *Fascists and Conservatives: The Radical Right and the Establishment in Twentieth-Century Europe* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 218–39, here 219.

<sup>16</sup> Livezeanu, ‘Fascists’, 223.

<sup>17</sup> Clark, ‘Elite’, 1–2; Roland Clark, ‘The Romanian Right: Images of Crisis, the Press and the Rise of Fascism’, in Marco Bresciani, ed., *Conservatives and Right Radicals in Interwar Europe* (London: Routledge, 2021), 193–214.

<sup>18</sup> Bozdoghină, *Antisemitismul*, 90–98.

<sup>19</sup> William Brustein and Amy Ronnkvist, ‘The Roots of Anti-Semitism: Romania before the Holocaust’, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 4, 2 (2002), 211–35, here 233.

<sup>20</sup> William I. Brustein and Ryan D. King, ‘Anti-Semitism in Europe before the Holocaust’, *International Political Science Review/Revue internationale de science politique*, 25, 1 (2004), 35–53, here 44; Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth: Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 96, 99; Dumitru, *The State*, 88–92.

<sup>21</sup> Nieß Wolfram, ‘“Hai să dăm mână cu mână, cei cu inima română” – Der geplante Propagandazug der Legion durch Bessarabien vom Sommer 1930’, in Heinen and Schmitt, *Inszenierte Gegenmacht*, 217–76, here 221.

<sup>22</sup> Nieß, ‘Propagandazug’, 221.

<sup>23</sup> Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Căpitan Codreanu. Aufstieg und Fall des rumänischen Faschistenführers* (Wien: Zsolnay, 2016), 174.

supporters rapidly spread and created a pogrom-like atmosphere.<sup>24</sup> There are no official statistics on the extent of anti-Semitic violence in the interwar period, so one has to rely on archival material. As the authorities often treated complaints by Jews reluctantly, ‘anti-Semites’ attacks grew ever more audacious and frequent.<sup>25</sup> In an empirical study on anti-Semitic violence in Romania before the Shoah, William I. Brustein and Ryan D. King examined data on anti-Semitic acts reported in the American Jewish Year Book and established that the country was ravaged by ‘vehement anti-Semitism’.<sup>26</sup>

### The PNC’s First National Congress – Anti-Semitism in Words and Deeds

Half a century after the international anti-Semitic congress in Bucharest, Alexandru Constantin Cuza staged a similar congress together with Octavian Goga at the beginning of November 1936, this time on a national level. It was the first PNC national congress, and according to the available sources, it was the largest anti-Semitic event in Bucharest since the First World War. Little is known about the political background of the congress, nor does the scholarly literature make any reference to the wave of anti-Semitism the congress stirred up. I will highlight the context of this mass event and analyse the preparations made both by the party and the authorities. Why did the government give its approval to a large-scale anti-Semitic manifestation on the streets of the capital? When, where and how did the authorities register anti-Semitic acts? Did the congress contribute to a further radicalisation of its attendees? To be more specific: Was there a surge of anti-Semitic violence right after the congress?

Compared to the student protests in the 1920s or single anti-Semitic acts in rural Bessarabia scrutinised by Wolfram Nieß and Diana Dumitru, the congress brought about widespread violence in its immediate aftermath and precipitated a wave of intensive anti-Semitic propaganda in the following months and years. The mass event mirrored the PNC’s programme and was also an opportunity for the party to show what a success the merger had been. It sent at the same time a clear message to King Carol II and the NSDAP that they could count on the PNC for closer collaboration.<sup>27</sup> For the LANC, the transition from a radical anti-Semitic organisation with strong ties to rural areas in eastern Romania, to a party with aspirations to lead the country and to mediate between Romania and Nazi-Germany, brought about a major boost of confidence. In the eastern LANC strongholds, the party members still called themselves Cuzists, and they felt empowered by the opportunity to march through Bucharest. This should be further corroborated by the way the regional organisations performed at the congress, where this new self-perception manifested by being and acting openly anti-Semitic. Another notable difference to the anti-Semitic acts of the 1920s were the anti-Semitic leaders. Now, there were by far fewer students than in the early 1920s because most of them sided with Codreanu after the party split in 1927, and the LANC invested its resources primarily into the eastern countryside.<sup>28</sup> However, those students who had stayed with Cuza took leading positions in the county organisations. After years of propaganda against the Jews and the central authorities, they enthusiastically announced that the PNC congress marked ‘the beginning of a new era’.<sup>29</sup>

The congress was the first large-scale gathering of the PNC, requiring months of preparations in advance which are well-documented. This article is based on party correspondence preserved in the personal papers of the two leaders, Alexandru Constantin Cuza and Octavian Goga. When it

<sup>24</sup> Dumitru, *The State*, 88–92; Andreea Kaltenbrunner, ‘Bauernbewegung gegen den modernen Staat. Der Stilismus in Rumänien, 1924–1936’, PhD Thesis, University of Vienna, 2019, 146–52.

<sup>25</sup> Dumitru, *The State*, 88–92.

<sup>26</sup> William I. Brustein and Ryan D. King, ‘Anti-Semitism as a Response to Perceived Jewish Power: The Case of Bulgaria and Romania before the Holocaust’, *Social Forces*, 83, 2 (2004), 691–708.

<sup>27</sup> For more about the affinities between the PNC and the NSDAP see: Schmitt, *Codreanu*, 169–74.

<sup>28</sup> Bozdoghină, *Antisemitismul*, 118–52; Nicolenco, *Extrema dreaptă*, 43–57.

<sup>29</sup> PNC leaders explained that the congress marked the beginning of a new era, the end of the democratic system. See: Note from Iași Regional Police Inspectorate to Bucharest General Police Office, 14 Nov. 1936, Arhivele Naționale ale României (National Archives of Romania, ANR), Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 117–18.

comes to the anti-Semitic acts, the majority of sources were produced by various security forces in Bucharest and on the county level alike. The police offices in eastern Romania reported to the Interior Ministry in Bucharest when PNC supporters headed to Bucharest or were on their way back home after the congress. There are also reports and informative notes of police and gendarmerie, sent to the regional security offices, the so-called General Inspectorate (*Inspectoratele Regionale*). The PNC had been routinely supervised since the establishment of the LANC in 1923, and every relevant political party except for the two leading ones, the Liberal Party and National Peasantry Party, was under the close supervision of the central government. In Bălți County, a LANC stronghold in northern Bessarabia, gendarmerie, police and the Siguranța all ceaselessly wrote monthly updates on the Cuzists.

### The Congress and Romania's New Foreign Policy

There are no documents that directly confirm that King Carol II and the government, led since 1933 by the Liberal Party, intended to use the PNC congress for sending rapprochement signals towards Germany. But there are clues that indicate that. The preparations for the anti-Semitic event coincided with Romania's shift from a French-centred foreign policy that the country had adopted after the First World War, to a 'policy of balance' towards the great powers.<sup>30</sup> The idea was to preserve the close ties with France and to improve relations with the Germans at the same time. This was a noticeable turn: from 1932 to 1936, the famous foreign minister Nicolae Titulescu had been busy building up relations with the Soviet Union – with French and Polish support. The aim was a nonaggression pact with the Soviets analogous to the one Poland had signed in 1932, and to gain Soviet recognition of Romanian sovereignty over Bessarabia. With Germany's rise and its growing influence in South-eastern Europe, more and more voices were critical of Titulescu and asked for a more balanced approach. Titulescu's most notable accomplishment in Romanian-Soviet relations was the signing of the 'Convention for the Definition of an Aggressor' in July 1933 – a project launched by the Soviet People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs, Maxim Litvinov. Both Titulescu and Litvinov considered the convention as tantamount to a nonaggression pact, and the territorial dispute over Bessarabia was at least temporarily settled.<sup>31</sup> Titulescu's endeavours to incorporate the country into a Franco-Soviet security system came to an end on 29 August 1936 when he was replaced by Victor Antonescu.

In the weeks and months after Titulescu's dismissal, Romania's foreign policy was marked by 'a distinct, if subtle, change in policy towards Germany'.<sup>32</sup> Rebecca Haynes has called it a policy of 'neutrality and good will'.<sup>33</sup> What Romania needed in the first place in autumn 1936 was to consolidate its relations with Germany that had been 'the weakest of Romania's Great Power relationships'.<sup>34</sup> In addition to Germany's reassurance of the country's territorial integrity (in particular against Hungary's revisionism), potential trade agreements for the export of grain also played a role.<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, at the time the PNC-activists marched through Bucharest, King Carol and the liberal government were anxious not to damage the barely existing German-Romanian relations. A refusal to the PNC and Octavian Goga, 'probably the best-known Romanian in Germany'<sup>36</sup> thanks to his connections with the NSDAP, would have certainly not enhanced the rapprochement between the two countries. Alfred Rosenberg, the head of the NSDAP Office of Foreign Affairs, revealed in his diary that Octavian Goga was networking in Germany on Carol's behalf in August 1936.<sup>37</sup> In all probability,

<sup>30</sup> Henry Roberts, *Eastern Europe. Politics, Revolution, and Diplomacy* (New York: Knopf, 1970), 69.

<sup>31</sup> Dov B. Lungu, *Romania and the Great Powers, 1933–1940* (Durham: Duke University Press), 27, 223.

<sup>32</sup> Rebecca Haynes, *Romanian Policy Towards Germany, 1936–1940* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 13.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 32–43.

<sup>37</sup> Jürgen Matthäus and Frank Bajohr, eds., *Alfred Rosenberg. Die Tagebücher von 1934 bis 1944* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2015), 186–7, 195.

Goga discussed the PNC's plans to organise a national congress with the NSDAP, and it was clearly regarded as an occasion to express open support for closer German-Romanian relations. When Rosenberg heard the news about 'over 100,000 Cuza-Goga supporters' marching and waving swastika flags, he wrote with enthusiasm that 'on 8 November the long-prepared parade took place in Bucharest. This was the first open escape from 15 years of Entente-politics. Three years of arduous work has been rewarded'. NSDAP officials were convinced that the congress initiated 'a clarification process' in Romania's foreign relations.<sup>38</sup> The anti-Semitic mass event also brought Octavian Goga and the NSDAP even closer together because the Nazis believed that his party had made an important contribution to Romania's shift to the right.<sup>39</sup> The NSDAP continued to follow Goga's political moves in Romania meticulously but tried to avoid the impression that he was a puppet of Germany.<sup>40</sup>

Given Romania's urge to deepen its links with Germany, the anti-Semitic congress would not have received the government's approval had the country not made important changes regarding its external orientation. Therefore, the congress was a subtle and cautious sign of cordiality that Bucharest sent to Germany. This does not mean that the king and the government agreed with the PNC's fiercely anti-Semitic programme and practices. Carol's approach to the PNC in autumn 1936 was clear: The party was a mere instrument to weaken the fascist Legionaries, and PNC leaders were used as intermediaries between the king and the NSDAP.<sup>41</sup> And while Codreanu's movement received authorisation for a congress in Târgu Mureş in April 1936, and the government provided the students with a train to travel from Bucharest to Transylvania, only the PNC was allowed to hold a demonstration of power in the capital.<sup>42</sup>

With Titulescu's dismissal and the success of the PNC congress, Alfred Rosenberg immediately reacted and wrote on 14 November 1936 in *Der Völkische Beobachter* an article on 'Oppressed Nations and Revisionism' (*Unterdrückte Völker und der Revisionismus*),<sup>43</sup> where he explained that Germany guaranteed the inviolability of Romania's borders.<sup>44</sup> The article, the first declaration in favour of Romania's territorial integrity made by a high-ranking NSDAP member, was exactly what PNC leaders and other pro-German politicians had sought. Rosenberg went into more detail in his diary: 'Today, I published an article on revisionism which the *Führer* said to be very good. Goga and Cuza can use it now in their interests.'<sup>45</sup> In *Țara Noastră*, one of the PNC official newspapers, Octavian Goga took credit for Rosenberg's article and spoke again in favour of normal relations with Germany: for economic and political reasons.<sup>46</sup> Rosenberg's article also caused an important debate on foreign policy in parliament in December 1936. Foreign minister Antonescu declared that there 'are no differences which divide us from Germany' and Gheorghe I. Brătianu, a liberal politician, argued that on the basis of Rosenberg's article, German support for revisionism was no longer a threat to Romania. He was, therefore 'categorically in favour of an improvement of relations with Germany'. Members of the National Peasant Party outlined the importance of keeping the alliance with France but were also open for a nonaggression pact with Germany, as long as it included a reassurance of Romania's territorial integrity.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 218; Telephone note, 19 Nov. 1936, Politisches Archiv Auswärtiges Amt, Bukarest, 17.5.2.

<sup>39</sup> Schreiben of Raban Adelman sent to Berlin, 10 Sept. 1936, Politisches Archiv Auswärtiges Amt, Bukarest, 17.5.2.; Telegram sent from Berlin to Ernst von Weizsäcker, 2 Nov. 1936, Politisches Archiv Auswärtiges Amt, Bukarest, 17.5.2.

<sup>40</sup> Telephone note from Berlin to Deutsche Gesandtschaft Bukarest, 29 Oct. 1936, Politisches Archiv Auswärtiges Amt, Bukarest, 17.5.2.

<sup>41</sup> Schmitt, *Codreanu*, 169–74; Lungu, *Romania*, 115–16; For a detailed analysis on how the government tolerance towards the PNC between 1935–6 manifested see: Maner, *Parlamentarismus*, 224–7.

<sup>42</sup> Schmitt, *Codreanu*, 172; Maner, *Parlamentarismus*, 224–5.

<sup>43</sup> Artikel des Reichsleiters Rosenberg über Revisionismus, Wilhelm Fabricius, Deutsche Gesandtschaft Bukarest an das Auswärtige Amt Berlin, 19 Nov. 1936, Politisches Archiv Auswärtiges Amt, Bukarest, 17.5.2.

<sup>44</sup> Telephone note, 19 Nov. 1936, Politisches Archiv Auswärtiges Amt, Bukarest, 17.5.2.

<sup>45</sup> Matthäus and Bajohr, *Rosenberg*, 218, 222–3.

<sup>46</sup> Artikel des Reichsleiters Rosenberg über Revisionismus, Deutsche Gesandtschaft Bukarest an das Auswärtige Amt, Berlin, 19 Nov. 1936, Politisches Archiv Auswärtiges Amt, Bukarest, 17.5.2.; Telephone note, 21 Nov. 1936, Politisches Archiv Auswärtiges Amt, Bukarest, 17.5.2.

<sup>47</sup> Haynes, *Romanian Policy*, 27.

However, the relations between the two countries would be far from easy or straightforward in the next years. As Romania's economic dependence on Germany grew, it became difficult to act in a politically independent manner. As shown in the second half of 1936, there was a period of a few months when King Carol II and the government sought out various ways for a quick rapprochement towards Germany. After years when relations with Germany were at a low point due to Titulescu's politics,<sup>48</sup> the PNC congress, that bluntly 'imitated' Hitler's and Mussolini's mass gatherings,<sup>49</sup> was the harbinger of a major political change. Inside the country, the PNC parade in Bucharest signalled that anti-Semitism had become part of mainstream politics. As Diana Dumitru explained, by the 1930s, anti-Semitism had moved 'to the forefront of political and social affairs' and 'it did so unhindered by governmental restrictions'.<sup>50</sup>

### Congress Preparations

Since Bucharest and its surroundings had not been a centre of power for Cuza's LANC nor Goga's Agrarian Party, the PNC's plan was to bring in supporters from other regions. Even after the merger when the PNC boasted of organisations in sixty-six out of Romania's seventy-one counties, the party's stronghold was still in the east, and it was from there where most of the congress attendees were expected. Since the majority of the supporters came from rural areas, the date of the congress was set strategically. First, the PNC announced that the event would take place in the early fall but, after discussions, it was postponed to 8 November when the harvest was over and the peasants were less busy.<sup>51</sup> There were also political reasons to change the date. Octavian Goga had spent August abroad lobbying for his party at the NSDAP and had little time for the congress preparations. On 8 November, Alexandru Constantin Cuza, 'the "father" of twentieth-century Romanian anti-Semitism',<sup>52</sup> turned seventy-nine, and while the Iron Guard, the PNC's main rival, celebrated its ninth anniversary in small provincial towns, all the public attention was focused on the capital where around 100,000 PNC supporters would hold their event.<sup>53</sup>

The party began the preparations in early 1936 by holding regional congresses in order to mobilise its supporters for a national congress.<sup>54</sup> Each month, various cities and towns in Moldova, Bukovina and Bessarabia hosted PNC mass events. In Bessarabia, the highlights of this exceptional propaganda tour were the congresses in Bălți on 21 May and in Chişinău on 2 June 1936 – each gathered over 60,000 supporters, as the official party newspaper *Apărarea Națională* reported.<sup>55</sup> The national and local leaders, the paramilitaries and thousands of peasants attended the congresses. As the general prosecutor of Hotin County explained to the Justice Minister in June 1936, the masses were shouting 'the usual stereotypes' like 'the Jews are stealing our bread' or 'we have to clean the country from Jews'.<sup>56</sup> In their speeches, the PNC leaders attacked the opposition, especially the National Peasant

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>49</sup> Tuvia Friling, Radu Ioanid and Mihail E. Ionescu, eds., *International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania. Final Report* (Iași: Polirom, 2004), 38.

<sup>50</sup> Dumitru, *The State*, 70.

<sup>51</sup> Informative note from Chişinău Regional Police Inspectorate to Soroca Police Office, 8 Aug. 1936, Arhiva Națională a Republicii Moldova (National Archive of Moldova, ANRM), Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 451; Informative note from Bălți Police Office to Bessarabian General Siguranță Office, 22 Oct. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 616.

<sup>52</sup> Livezeanu, 'Fascists', 219.

<sup>53</sup> 'Manifestație național-creștină din Bacău', in *Universul*, 12 Nov. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 83.

<sup>54</sup> Letter from Architect Enescu I. D. to Octavian Goga, ANR, Octavian Goga, 4, 46.

<sup>55</sup> 'Măreța adunare național-creștină dela Bălți. Peste 60.000 de congresiști cer guvernarea țării', in *Apărarea Națională*, 21 May 1936, 3; 'Marele congres regional național-creștin de la Chişinău', in *Apărarea Națională*, 2 June 1936, 4.

<sup>56</sup> Report of General Prosecutor of Hotin County Court to Justice Minister, 16 June 1936, ANR, Ministerul Justiției-Direcția Judiciară, 18.1936, 252–3.



Party that they saw as 'infiltrated by Jews'.<sup>57</sup> They also frequently used religious allusions. At the congress in Orhei, a teacher emphasised that the PNC leaders were 'not politicians' but 'the saviours of the nation. Before us stands Jesus and his cross. Relying on this belief, we will bring glory to our nation against Judea and the Jews'.<sup>58</sup> At a PNC gathering at the Orhei orthodox church in September 1936, the priest Iacob Grigore, PNC leader in the Bessarabian village of Onițani, 'criticized the Jews for being the enemies of Christianity and because their ancestors had crucified Jesus Christ'. At a gathering in August 1936 in the village of Orbic, Neamț County (Moldova), the priest encouraged 'the Christians' to 'fight against Jewish parasites' and to join the PNC, according to a police report.<sup>59</sup>

Anti-Semitic acts took place in the aftermath of these regional congresses. For example, as hundreds of Cuzists were returning home from the congress in Chișinău, they attacked a group of Jews at the train station in Cornești, Ungheni County. Gendarmes tried to warn the Jews as the train with the PNC congress attendees was approaching. An American Jew, the fur buyer Samuel Palanker, aged forty, a native of Cornești who had emigrated to New York City back in 1914,<sup>60</sup> and his relatives 'insisted on going to the station, otherwise, he will miss the ship [back to America] for which he already had a ticket' – reported the gendarmerie. When the train with the PNC supporters arrived, the Jews hid in the rear part of the station but someone denounced them to the congress attendees. The Cuzists beat them almost to death. The gendarmes intervened at the very last moment and brought them to a hospital.<sup>61</sup> After another PNC meeting in Glodeni, Bălți County, around 200 Cuzists attacked the homes of Jewish families, smashing windows and threatening the Jews with death.<sup>62</sup> On his way to a congress in Bivolari, a peasant 'smashed 7 windows of a Jewish house and drew with a piece of coal swastikas on the wall'.<sup>63</sup>

The PNC's intensified propaganda efforts in the course of 1936 radicalised the party's base. The prefect of Bălți, Emanoil Cately, a member of the Liberal Party (PNL), wrote to the Justice Minister on 22 June 1936 that the police in the cities in northern Bessarabia were in urgent need of back-up troops to maintain public order and safety against 'continuous acts of violence and provocations the LANC members have committed in recent times'.<sup>64</sup> The commandant of the gendarmerie, Barbu Părăianu, complained to the Interior Ministry in September 1936 that 'day by day, the tensioned relation between the Cuzists and the Jewish population in Bessarabia is getting worse'. This situation constituted a 'danger for the country's safety and order'.<sup>65</sup> To illustrate this danger,

<sup>57</sup> Report from Police Office Iași to Bucharest General Police Office, 15 Aug. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 187.

<sup>58</sup> Informative note from Orhei Police Office to Chișinău Police Office, 28 Sept. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 552–4.

<sup>59</sup> Radiogram of Orhei Police Office to Chișinău Regional Police Inspectorate, 28 Sept. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 552–4; Informative note, Informant Arhei, 29 Sept. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 558–9; Report of Piatra Neamț Police Office to Iași Regional Police Inspectorate, 22 Aug. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 28.1936, 229.

<sup>60</sup> Palanker eventually reached his ship and arrived on 15 June 1936 in New York City. *Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1820–1897*. Microfilm Publication M237, 675 rolls. NAI: 6256867. Records of the U.S. Customs Service, Record Group 36. National Archives at Washington, DC; United States, Selective Service System. *World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917–1918*. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration. M1509, 4,582 rolls. Imaged from Family History Library microfilm, accessed at: ancestry.de (30 Nov. 2020).

<sup>61</sup> Report of General Prosecutor of Bălți County Court to Justice Minister, 22 June 1936, ANR, Ministerul Justiției-Direcția Judiciară, 18.1936, 293–4.

<sup>62</sup> Report of Bălți Police Office to Chișinău Regional Police Inspectorate, 7 Aug. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 453–4.

<sup>63</sup> Report of Iași Police Office to Bucharest General Police Office, 10 Aug. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 28.1936, 149.

<sup>64</sup> Report of the secret Collaboration Commission, led by Emanoil Cately (Comisia de Colaborare secretă), 22 June 1936, ANR, Ministerul Justiției-Direcția Judiciară, 18.1936, 255.

<sup>65</sup> Report of Barbu Părăianu to the Interior Ministry, 26 Sept. 1936, ANR, Inspectoratul General al Jandarmeriei, 17.1936, 52.

Părăianu gave an example: in the night of 13 to 14 September, Cuzists of Buhnești, Bălți County, smashed the windows of the homes of Jewish families and forced one of the inhabitants, Simion Rohman, to come out. The man was severely beaten. Părăianu pleaded with the Interior Minister to take the necessary measures. While there is no doubt that the Interior Minister was well informed about the PNC's violent political practices, the king received misleading information from the security forces. At the very same time Părăianu wrote to the Interior Minister, he sent a whitewashed report to Carol II in which he explained how popular the PNC was 'among the rural population. The party organized the propaganda and activities respecting the order and the laws. Compared to 1935 in 1936 the number of its members has grown 85 per cent'.<sup>66</sup>

To understand why the Bessarabian counties had routinely organised mass gatherings and why the preparations for the national congress were making progress it is crucial to look closer at how the LANC had functioned the year before. There was a major case that the Cuzists used for political mobilisation: the Jew Leib Tendler, the mayor of the Jewish market town of Briceva, an important trading hub in northern Bessarabia, was accused by the party of killing a LANC member. Located at the border between Soroca and Bălți County, peasants, as well as Jewish tradesmen, had been gathering there every week for the past sixty years.<sup>67</sup> Since the beginning of the 1930s, the LANC paramilitaries had been appearing in Briceva regularly on market days, shouting anti-Semitic slogans. On 19 October 1935, the violence escalated when Alexandru Toader Damian, a member of the paramilitaries, was killed by a stone somebody had thrown at him.<sup>68</sup> The LANC accused mayor Tendler and initiated a campaign to close down the Briceva market. The authorities detained the mayor but released him as there was no evidence against him. The Cuzists staged boycott actions at the weekly market, and members of the paramilitaries prohibited the peasants to 'trade with the Jews'.<sup>69</sup>

Shortly thereafter, there was a second incident at Briceva when a peasant was found dead on the street by the gendarmerie. Investigations had revealed that the man had been intoxicated, suffered a fall in the night and succumbed to his injuries.<sup>70</sup> Again, the LANC accused the Jews of killing 'Christians', and Leib Tendler of being part of a Jewish-communist conspiracy against the Cuzists.<sup>71</sup> In Bucharest, the Chișinău police asked for additional troops to be sent to Briceva as it feared a violent escalation of unknown proportions: 'Despite all the measures the authorities have taken to protect the inhabitants of Briceva against a possible attack from the peasants ... the peasant masses plan to attack the market and to destroy it completely', reported the general police office in Chișinău to the main police office in Bucharest.<sup>72</sup> After the regional congress in Bălți, 'a large number of Cuzists' led by the almost eighty-year-old Alexandru Constantin Cuza headed to Briceva to 'burn down the market'. Thanks to negotiations between the latter and the gendarmerie, the anti-Semitic leader intervened and calmed down his supporters.<sup>73</sup> Several months later, on their way to the national congress in Bucharest, Cuzists from northern Bessarabia planned to make a stop in Briceva 'to smash the windows of the Jewish houses'.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Report from commandant of the gendarmerie, Barbu Părăianu to Carol II., 1936, ANR, Casa Regală-Miscelanee, 786, 3.

<sup>67</sup> Report of Ionescu Darzeu, General Prosecutor of Chișinău Court to Justice Minister, 25 May 1936, ANR, Ministerul Justiției-Direcția Judiciară, 18.1936, 245–6.

<sup>68</sup> Report of C. Ionescu, General Prosecutor of Soroca County Court, to the Justice Minister, Jan. 1936, ANR, Ministerul Justiției-Direcția Judiciară, 82.1935, 182.

<sup>69</sup> Report of Ionescu Darzeu, General Prosecutor of Chișinău Court to Justice Minister, 25 May 1936, ANR, Ministerul Justiției-Direcția Judiciară, 18.1936, 245–6; Report of General Prosecutor of Bălți County Court to Justice Minister, 26 May 1936, ANR, Ministerul Justiției-Direcția Judiciară, 18.1936, 241, 244.

<sup>70</sup> Report of Soroca Police Office to the General Gendarmerie Inspectorate, 20 Feb. 1936, ANR, Inspectoratul General al Jandarmeriei, 60.1936, 50.

<sup>71</sup> 'Asasinatale iudeo-comuniste de la Briceva și Uncești-Vaslui', in *Apărarea Națională*, 15 Dec. 1936, 2.

<sup>72</sup> Informative note of Chișinău Regional Police Inspectorate to Bucharest General Police Office, 30 Mar. 1936, ANR, Direcția Generală a Poliției, 25.1936, 34; Confidential note, 2 Aug. 1936, ANR, Direcția Generală a Poliției, 25.1936, 48.

<sup>73</sup> Report of General Prosecutor of Bălți County Court to Justice Minister, 22 June 1936, ANR, Ministerul Justiției-Direcția Judiciară, 18.1936, 293–4.

<sup>74</sup> Informative note to the General Gendarmerie Inspectorate, 2 Oct. 1936, ANR, Inspectoratul General al Jandarmeriei, 10.1936, 32.

The Cuzists scored a victory on 21 April 1936 when over 20,000 supporters gathered in Baraboi, only around four kilometres away from Briceva, to inaugurate a market established by the PNC. The prefect of Bălți approved the opening of the new market, hoping to ease the tensions. According to reports of the security forces, the local authorities had no control whatsoever over the PNC market.<sup>75</sup> Cuzists forced peasants to avoid the 'Jewish market' and to come to Baraboi.<sup>76</sup> Left with almost no customers, the desperate Jews of Briceva also headed to the PNC market to sell their goods. The gendarmerie in Chişinău complained to their superiors in Bucharest that the behaviour of the Jews was irresponsible 'given the relations between Jews and Christians in the region'. The 'atmosphere is tense and riots can break out anytime' but the Jews were 'too tempted not to make a win', as the gendarmerie maliciously commented.<sup>77</sup>

There is only scarce research on the Leib Tendler 'affair'.<sup>78</sup> It appears that it remained a regional outburst of anti-Semitism used by the LANC for political mobilisation. The conflict had erupted in October 1935 and culminated with the PNC congress in Bălți in May 1936. The fact that the party had made up an 'affair' so easily shows how much power it had already accumulated. In a matter of months, the party carried out violent assaults, interfered in decade-old trade structures in northern Bessarabia and deprived many Jews of their economic basis.

Back to the preparations for the first PNC national congress: County leaders from all regions asked their supporters to dress up in the party uniform or to wear traditional folk costumes, to take flags and, even more important, provisions for three days. Unlike in the case of the regional congresses, the peasants were not allowed to take alcohol bottles, nor guns or any weapons – not even 'clubs or rods' – to Bucharest.<sup>79</sup> No information was offered about accommodation and county leaders had to arrange that the peasants would also have the opportunity for some sightseeing in Bucharest.

There were also legal aspects the party had to deal with. In a letter to Octavian Goga, the PNC general secretary, Stan Ghiţescu, mentioned that the congress had received the Interior Minister's authorisation. On the official invitations that circulated in the villages in Bessarabia, the county leaders outlined that the congress had the 'government's approval'.<sup>80</sup> This had already been the case with the regional events. There were regional authorities that had been reluctant to authorise the PNC gatherings, for instance in Câmpulung or Storojineţ in the Bukovina, but eventually, the general secretary reached out to the Interior Minister Ion C. Inculeţ, who gave his consent.<sup>81</sup>

Another central aspect was the transportation of the congress attendees to Bucharest. As mentioned, in April 1936 the government provided for the Iron Guard's students of Bucharest a train to Târgu Mureş – a friendly gesture at a time when Carol II still hoped to collaborate with Codreanu's Legionaries.<sup>82</sup> For the PNC, this kind of support was not an option, as the party expected to bring as many as 80,000 supporters from various regions. Thanks to negotiations with the Romanian Railways (C.F.R.),<sup>83</sup> the PNC was offered a convenient price, varying from 100 to 150 lei

<sup>75</sup> Report of General Prosecutor of Bălți County Court to Justice Minister, 18 May 1936, ANR, Ministerul Justiţiei-Direcţia Judiciară, 8.1937, 176; Report of Chişinău Regional Police Inspectorate to Bucharest General Police Office, 29 Jan. 1936, ANR, Inspectoratul General al Jandarmeriei, 24.1935, 145.

<sup>76</sup> 'Marea Adunare dela Baraboi şi sfinţirea noului obor', in *Apărarea Naţională*, 21 Apr. 1936, 4.

<sup>77</sup> Report of Chişinău Regional Police Inspectorate to Bucharest General Police Office, 29 Jan. 1936, ANR, Inspectoratul General al Jandarmeriei, 24.1935, 145.

<sup>78</sup> Kaltenbrunner, 'Bauernbewegung gegen den modernen Staat', 145–51.

<sup>79</sup> Radiogram of Chişinău Regional Police Inspectorate to Bucharest General Police Office, 6 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranţă din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 657.

<sup>80</sup> Invitation to the great national gathering of the National Christian party, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 27.1936, 51.

<sup>81</sup> Letter from Dr. Stan Ghiţescu to Octavian Goga, 1 July 1936, pp. 23–4; letter from Dr. Stan Ghiţescu to Octavian Goga, 16 July 1936, ANR, Octavian Goga, 4, 34–5.

<sup>82</sup> Maner, *Parlamentarismus*, 225.

<sup>83</sup> Radiogram from the Bălți Police Office to the Bessarabian General Siguranţă Office, 31 Oct. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranţă din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 646–7.

per ticket.<sup>84</sup> Not only was the amount of money the peasants had to pay symbolic, but they could pay it after the congress. A regular third-class return ticket from Chişinău to Bucharest would normally cost around 1,000 lei, a first-class ticket up to 2,000 lei.<sup>85</sup> Hence, the state railroad company was generous with the PNC, as the peasants paid a maximum of 150 lei to travel not from Chişinău but from their remote villages to the capital and back.

On behalf of the Interior Minister, the police headquarters in Bucharest, in cooperation with the regional police offices, prepared for the congress by taking precautionary measures to prevent the congress attendees from indulging in violence. As they had the experience with the regional congresses, the security forces were well aware of the challenges they would face when thousands of PNC supporters were on the move.<sup>86</sup> For example, the safety plan of the prefecture and the security forces of Huşi (Moldova) for the PNC congress on 6 September 1936 show how local authorities prepared for a PNC event. Three thousand participants attended the congress and Gheorghe Cuza gave the key speech. During the congress, all alcohol shops in Huşi were closed down and 'the central office of the Jewish community, the four synagogues and the deposits of the newspapers *Dimineaţa* and *Adevărul*' were protected by policemen and gendarmes. The PNC congress attendees were allowed to march on a 1.2 km route with numerous 'Jewish homes and shops, therefore these should be the entire time protected'. The prefecture asked for help from the neighbouring counties, as the hundred gendarmes and policeman that Huşi had were 'insufficient'.<sup>87</sup>

When the time came for the PNC congress in Bucharest, the officials focused their resources on the train stations. The stations in Moldova, Bukovina and Bessarabia were a hub for different Jewish-owned businesses as Jews were shopkeepers and restaurant owners, newspapers salesmen, warehouse administrators and workers. Anti-Semitic violence at the train stations had already been a topic of discussion in the 1920s when the Bessarabian Jewish senator Leib Tsirelson drew attention to such incidents in parliament.<sup>88</sup> The PNC regional congresses too had shown that the train stations required special attention from the authorities. Besides physical violence congress attendees indulged in, they also attacked salesmen and confiscated and burnt what the Cuzists considered Jewish-owned papers like *Dimineaţa* and *Adevărul*.<sup>89</sup>

The police headquarters in Bucharest ordered the regional police offices to protect newspaper salesmen as well as shop and restaurant owners who had their businesses at or next to railway

<sup>84</sup> Informative note, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranţă din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 652–3.

<sup>85</sup> Mersul Trenurilor C.F.R., valabil dela 16 iunie 1934, pp. 156–8, 268 (Many thanks to Dorin Stănescu for helping me find this information).

<sup>86</sup> Report of Iaşi Police Office to Iaşi Regional Police Inspectorate, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 28.1936, 94–6; Report of Târgu Ocna Police Office to Iaşi Regional Police Inspectorate, 10 July 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 28.1936, 107–10; Report of Bacău Police Office to Iaşi Regional Police Inspectorate, 15 July 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 28.1936, 118; Telephone note of Roman Police Office to Iaşi Regional Police Inspectorate, 10 Sept. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 28.1936, 308.

<sup>87</sup> Report of the Collaboration Council of the Fălciu County, 31 Aug. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 28.1936, 269–70.

<sup>88</sup> Dumitru, *The State*, 89.

<sup>89</sup> Report of Bacău Police Chief to Iaşi Regional Police Inspectorate, 29 Sept. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 27.1936, 56; Report of Iaşi Regional Police Inspectorate to General Siguranţa Office, 2 July 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 28.1936, 19; Report of Iaşi Police Office to Regional Police Inspectorate, 30 June 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 28.1936, 26; Telephone note of Roman Police Office to Iaşi Regional Police Inspectorate, 28 June 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 28.1936, 31; Telephone note of Botoşani Police Office to Iaşi Regional Police Inspectorate, 29 June 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 28.1936, 34; Telephone note of Bacău Police Office to Iaşi Regional Police Inspectorate, 28 June 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 28.1936, 35–6; Telephone note of Bacău Police Office to Iaşi Regional Police Inspectorate, 29 June 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 28.1936, 37; Telephone note of Bacău Police Office to Iaşi Regional Police Inspectorate, 2 July 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 28.1936, 41; Report of Bacău Police Office to Iaşi Regional Police Inspectorate, 26 June 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 28.1936, 43; 28.1936, Confidential note of Iaşi Police Chief to General Siguranţa Office, 2 July 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 28.1936, 51–2.

stations.<sup>90</sup> There is no information on the deployment of extra troops from other regions to the main stations where PNC trains were making stops. Following the orders of the police in Bucharest, the regional security forces intensified their presence at the stations. While at main train stations there were both police and gendarmes present, at smaller stations the gendarmes were in charge of the safety measures.<sup>91</sup> Trains carrying members of notorious radical organisations like that of Bălți County, from where thousands of peasants were heading to Bucharest under the guidance of the doctor Eugen Hâncu and the leader of the Bessarabian paramilitary troops Vladimir Novîchi, were closely surveilled.<sup>92</sup>

### Heading to Bucharest and Attending the Congress

Most congress attendees travelled during the night; they had boarded the trains the day before. The train ride from Cernăuți to Bucharest took around thirteen hours, and from Chișinău, nine and a half hours. The trains were full, food and water were scarce and the atmosphere inside the cars was so tense that the passengers could hardly breathe. Only a few had listened to the orders of their leaders and taken enough provisions with them. Although the PNC had initially planned to charter whole trains for the congress attendees, the C.F.R. had attached separate third-class carriages to regular trains instead.<sup>93</sup> When too many people appeared at a station, the C.F.R. even used freight cars.<sup>94</sup> According to reports the police headquarters in Chișinău sent to the secret service office, the C.F.R., in cooperation with the police, tried to limit the number of the peasants and also made sure that they were always separated from the rest of the travellers so that they would not provoke any riots.<sup>95</sup> Although the security forces do not give a total number of congress attendees, Goga claimed that there were 200,000 PNC supporters while Alfred Rosenberg referred to over 100,000.<sup>96</sup> What is certain is that the PNC did not gather half a million, as some activists would claim. Most of the attendees were peasants and county leaders who belonged to the provincial intelligentsia. There was also a handful of university students – the vast majority from Bessarabia, Bukovina and Moldova.<sup>97</sup>

What the party leadership, including Octavian Goga and Gheorghe Cuza, highlighted in the aftermath of the congress was the discipline, both of the paramilitaries and the supporters. Alfred Rosenberg was also impressed by this, and in *The Final Report*, the congress is mentioned as a ‘massive display of disciplined manpower’.<sup>98</sup> This was a central matter to Octavian Goga and the whole party. Over and over again, the leaders pleaded with their supporters to be disciplined in the way they dressed, the way they marched and sang.<sup>99</sup> Police even reported that county organisations ‘organized

<sup>90</sup> Telegram of Chișinău Regional Police Inspectorate to the Police Offices, 7 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 674; Radiogram of Cetatea Albă Police Office and Soroca Police Office, 7 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 675.

<sup>91</sup> Telephone Note from Cetatea Albă Police Office to Chișinău Regional Police Inspectorate, 10 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 697; Report of Tighina Police Office to Bucharest General Police Office, 11 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 742.

<sup>92</sup> Telephone note of Bârlad Police Chief, 9 Oct. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 31.

<sup>93</sup> Radiogram of Cetatea Albă Police Office to Chișinău Regional Police Inspectorate, 19 Oct. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 607; Radiogram of Chișinău Regional Police Inspectorate to Bucharest General Police Office, 19 Oct. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 608.

<sup>94</sup> Informative note, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 692; Telephone note of the Tecuci Police, 6 Nov. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 64.

<sup>95</sup> Telephone note of Chișinău Police Office to Bessarabian General Siguranță Office, 6 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 659.

<sup>96</sup> Matthäus and Bajohr, *Rosenberg*, 218; Friling, Ioanid and Ionescu, *Final Report*, 38.

<sup>97</sup> Note, 24 Oct. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 27.1936, 55.

<sup>98</sup> Friling, Ioanid and Ionescu, *Final Report*, 38.

<sup>99</sup> Radiogram of Chișinău Regional Police Inspectorate to Bucharest General Police Office, 28 Sept. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 556–7; Radiogram of Bălți Police Office to Chișinău Regional Police Inspectorate, 6 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 656.

their own special police groups' to keep order.<sup>100</sup> The insistence on maintaining discipline among the congress attendees was to help the PNC to display the unity and stability which the party was going to establish once it began to rule.

Despite all precautions by the authorities and the party itself, the journey to Bucharest was not without incidents. Reports reveal the way peasants insulted, robbed and even beat up Jews as they boarded the trains and while the security forces were busy with other tasks.<sup>101</sup> One of these incidents took place in the Moldovan city of Roman where 2,500 peasants from the Bukovinian County Rădăuți destroyed the railway station under the leadership of Nichifor Robu, the same leader that had been present at the Cornești station. When the train stopped, the peasants rushed 'to the restaurant of Ilie Sticlaru, a Jew, whose restaurant was behind the station, and asked him to give them bread. As the merchant was closing up, the peasants smashed the windows and door, went inside, and began to beat up the staff and the owner. They took away bottles with alcohol and food. The offenders have not been identified.'<sup>102</sup>

To signal that the security forces had the situation under control at the train stations, the Minister of Interior issued the following order:<sup>103</sup> At 'small railway stations' where trains with PNC supporters made a stop, the security forces had to detain one or two congress attendees who wore the party uniform. The security forces should collect declarations in which the congress attendees admitted that they were wearing it. At the end of the interrogation they should be released, but the documents should not be sent to the county general prosecutor's offices.<sup>104</sup> Wearing uniforms was illegal but the congress attendees were not issued any fines.<sup>105</sup> The measure was intended to intimidate the peasants and to display a readiness to challenge the PNC and to intervene against anti-Semitic riots. Hundreds of 'I wore a uniform' declarations preserved in the archives offer almost no information on the retained PNC supporters, other than their names and ages. While attentive to avoid any anti-Semitic clashes, the security forces had to look for travellers who were dressed in uniforms and ready to cooperate and make a declaration.<sup>106</sup>

Regional security services reported that not all peasants left the villages with the intention of marching in Bucharest for the PNC. Many took advantage of the cheap fare in order to stay in the

<sup>100</sup> Report of Bacău Police Office to Iași Regional Police Inspectorate, 4 Nov. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 27.1936, 244.

<sup>101</sup> Note, 9 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 683; Telephone note from Soroca Police Office to Bessarabian General Siguranță Office, 9 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 689; Telephone note from Soroca Police Office to Bessarabian General Siguranță Office, 10 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 690.

<sup>102</sup> Informative note No. 56, 8 Nov. 1936, ANR, Inspectoratul General al Jandarmeriei, 96.1936, 15.

<sup>103</sup> Note from Bălți Police Office to Bessarabian General Siguranță Office, 22 Oct. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 616; Note of Hotin District Police Office to Bessarabian General Siguranță Office, 22 Oct. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 621; Radiogram of Cetatea Albă District Police Office to Bessarabian General Siguranță Office, 26 Oct. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 622; Ismail Police Chief to Bessarabian General Siguranță Office, 26 Oct. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 627; Report of Chișinău Regional Police Inspectorate to Bucharest General Police Office, 30 Oct. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 628.

<sup>104</sup> Telephone note, 8 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 679.

<sup>105</sup> Order, 8 Nov. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 9.

<sup>106</sup> Report of Chișinău Police Office to Bessarabian General Siguranță Office, 12 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 719; Declarations attached to the Proces Verbal, issued by Gheorghe Cosma, Secretary at the Chișinău Police Office, 10 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 720–34; Declarations attached to the Proces Verbal issued by Gheorghe Popa, Bălți Police Office, 10 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 767–73; Declarations attached to the Proces Verbal issued by H. Mihalcea, Bălți Police Office, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 776–84; Declarations attached to the Proces Verbal issued by Ioan Năstăsescu, Bălți Police Office, 10 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 785–6; Declarations attached to the Proces Verbal issued by Taodorov Simion, Hotin Police Chief, 12–13 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 791–806.

capital, to find a job and to bring their families.<sup>107</sup> Others visited relatives and looked for entertainment in the big city.<sup>108</sup> The problem was that the railway stations in Bessarabia were overwhelmed by the numbers of peasants, and often carriages were overloaded. Thirty-seven cars of a train with 2,000 peasants from North Bessarabia derailed between Galați and Reni. When the train ran off the tracks, many travellers panicked and jumped off the train. At least two people died on the spot and many more succumbed to their injuries.<sup>109</sup> The accident became the main topic among the congress attendees and rumours began to spread that it was provoked deliberately by Jews. The train victims were quickly turned into martyrs who had lost their lives for the party.<sup>110</sup>

Most of the congress attendees arrived on 8 November in the morning. It was a cold, rainy Sunday. The official programme lasted for about six hours. There were marches through the streets, and anti-Semitic speeches delivered by Octavian Goga who spoke about the 'the Jewish leprosy' and Alexandru Constantin Cuza who talked about 'the Jewish communism (*comunismul jidănesc*)'.<sup>111</sup> Afterwards, the peasants enjoyed a tourist programme and were shown 'the beauties' of the capital by the county leaders. Compared to the regional congresses, the event in Bucharest was much better organised. There were no aberrations from the official programme, and the attendees behaved in a disciplined manner. At the end of the day, the security services took care that the congress attendees did not get lost in the city and found their way back to the railway station.

### Returning to the Villages

Whereas in Bucharest violent clashes had been avoided, the picture changed when the congress attendees left the capital. A toxic mixture of exhaustion and anti-Semitic violence shaped the peasants' journey back home. After intensive exposure to anti-Semitic propaganda, the lack of rest and food made the peasants more prone to identifying a scapegoat for their inconveniences. In addition to that, many congress attendees left Bucharest not only hungry but also drunk. Several county leaders made this situation even worse when they used the masses for their own political interests. Instead of

<sup>107</sup> Telegram of Popov Police Chief to Chișinău Regional Police Inspectorate, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 665; Telephone note of Tighina Police Office to Bessarabian General Siguranță Office, 7 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 666; Radiogram of Chișinău Regional Police Inspectorate to Bessarabian General Siguranță Office, 7 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 667; Telephone note of Bălți Police Office to Chișinău Regional Police Inspectorate, 7 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 668; Radiogram of Chișinău Regional Police Inspectorate to Bucharest General Police Office, 7 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 669; Telephone note No. 4096 of Police Chief Gheorghiu and of Agent Sudiev to Bessarabian General Siguranță Office, 7 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 670; Radiogram of Chișinău Regional Police Inspectorate to Bucharest General Police Office, 7 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 671; Radiogram of Chișinău Regional Police Inspectorate, 7 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 672; Radiogram of Chișinău Regional Police Inspectorate to Bucharest General Police Office, 7 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 673.

<sup>108</sup> Informative note No. 240 of Botoșani Gendarmerie Legion to General Gendarmerie Inspectorate, 8 Nov. 1936, ANR, Inspectoratul General al Jandarmeriei, 44.1936, 37; Informative note No. 49, 20 Oct. 1936, ANR, Inspectoratul General al Jandarmeriei, 96.1936, 13.

<sup>109</sup> Telephone note, 9 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 682; Note, 9 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 683; Telephone note of Ismail Police Office, 9 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 684; Note of Chișinău Regional Police Inspectorate to Bucharest General Police Office, 11 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 711; Report of Tighina Police Office to Bessarabian General Siguranță Office, 17 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 815; Ismail Police Office to Bessarabian General Siguranță Office, 15 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 817.

<sup>110</sup> Informative note from Orhei Police Office to Chișinău Police Office, 15 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 745.

<sup>111</sup> Bozdoghină, *Antisemitismul*, 215.

going back to their villages without stops, numerous congress attendees marched through different county centres like Bacău, Piatra Neamţ, Botoşani and Iaşi under the leadership of regional leaders.<sup>112</sup>

The Interior Minister Dumitru Iuca ordered the police and gendarmerie to make sure that the stations were more or less empty when a train with congress returnees arrived.<sup>113</sup> Since ‘some congress attendees devastated the railway stations on their way to Bucharest’,<sup>114</sup> regional police officers agreed to evacuate all the persons present at the stations, close down all the shops and restaurants, and to take care that Jewish newspaper salesmen were not even in the proximity of the stations. This was the best way ‘to prevent fights between peasants and Jews’.<sup>115</sup> Further on, the Interior Minister insisted that at small train stations the police pretended to fine congress attendees for wearing uniforms (in fact there were no fines).<sup>116</sup> All this suggests the authorities tried to minimise the interactions of the PNC supporters with the outside world, as they had done two days before.

Reading through the reports, one cannot help noticing that whenever a stop would take longer than a few minutes, during a moment of inattention of the security forces PNC supporters took the opportunity to attack Jews and to steal food and alcohol from Jewish-owned shops and restaurants. If the restaurants of the railway stations were closed they were destroyed and looted.<sup>117</sup>

The diagram with anti-Semitic acts (Figure 1), reported by the gendarmerie and police, shows that the measures taken by authorities and the PNC leadership had kept the masses on 7 and 8 November under control. But when the PNC supporters left Bucharest on 9 November in the afternoon anti-Semitic violence escalated. The diagram also shows that physical assaults were more often reported than acts of vandalism and destroying of restaurants and shops. The violence did not end on 9 November. In the following days, mainly PNC groups from northern Bessarabia were still on their way back to their villages. The anti-Semitic acts erupted spontaneously when police and gendarmerie were not paying attention, and the perpetrators (generally small groups of people) remained in most cases unidentified. The statistic does not include verbal violence, as the security forces reported only anti-Semitic acts that had led to injuries, or when the party supporters had provoked material damage.

A detailed analysis of the reports on the anti-Semitic acts, and the mood among the travellers, reveals that the rumours holding the Jews responsible for the train accident were mixed up with alleged plans to derail other trains with PNC supporters.<sup>118</sup> When the peasants found out that there were

<sup>112</sup> Report of Bucharest General Police Office, 9 Nov. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 26; Report of Piatra Neamţ Police Office, 9 Nov. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 46.

<sup>113</sup> Telephone note of the city of Bârlad Police Chief, 8 Oct. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 45; Very urgent order to the Police Stations in Bacău, Botoşani, Bârlad, Tecuci, Vaslui, P. Neamtz, Huşi, Roman, 8 Oct. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 10.

<sup>114</sup> Urgent order from Bucharest General Police Office to all the Police Inspectorates and Police Offices, 7 Oct. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 2.

<sup>115</sup> Urgent order of Iaşi Regional Police Inspectorate to all the Police Offices, 8 Oct. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 10; Report of Chişinău Regional Police Inspectorate to Bucharest General Police Office, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranţă din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 750–1; Proce Verbal, issued by the Soroca Police Office, 10 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranţă din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 754; Note of Chişinău Regional Police Inspectorate to Soroca county attorney, 13 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranţă din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 755–6; Proce Verbal issued by the Soroca Police Office, 10 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranţă din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 758–9.

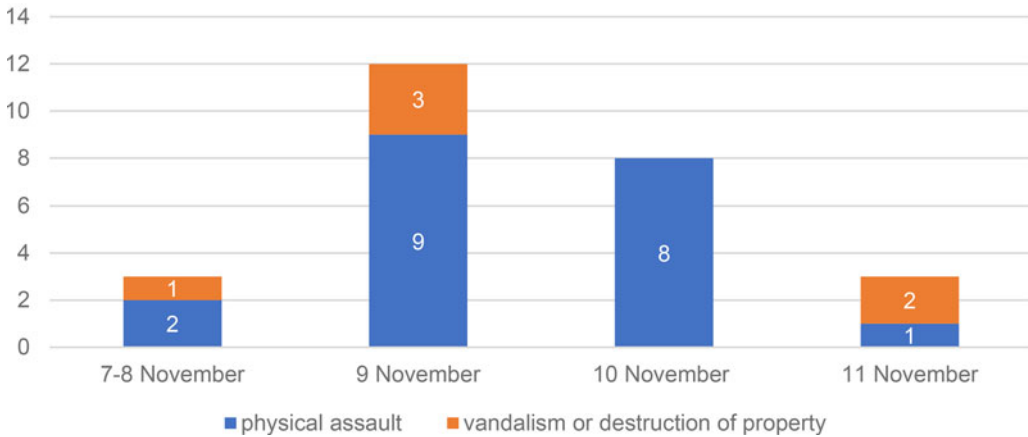
<sup>116</sup> Order, 8 Nov. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 9.

<sup>117</sup> Radiogram of Chişinău Regional Police Inspectorate, 12 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranţă din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 735; Ismail Police Office to Chişinău Regional Police Inspectorate, 12 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranţă din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 736; Copy of report No. 14117 issued by Soroca Gendarmerie Legion to Chişinău Gendarmerie Inspectorate, 10 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranţă din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 753.

<sup>118</sup> Declaration Condra Vasile, issued by Soroca Police Office, 10 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranţă din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 757; Proce Verbal issued by Soroca Police Office, 10 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranţă din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 758–9; Declaration Nicolae Stanchevici, 12 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranţă din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 760.



## Anti-Semitic acts during the PNC first national congress, 7-11 November 1936



**Figure 1.** Anti-Semitic acts during the PNC first national congress

Sources: ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936; Inspectoratul General al Jandarmeriei, 10.1936; 52.1936; 96.1936; ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530.

Jewish travellers in the front carriages, they forced them to get out of the moving train.<sup>119</sup> Another ‘insignificant incident’ was reported by the security forces with ostentatious indifference. At the railway station of Florești in Soroca County, peasants beat up a Jewish merchant.<sup>120</sup>

Nicolae Stanchevici, a twenty-four-year-old university student, PNC activist and member of the party’s paramilitary troops, who was present at the congress and the train journey back to Bessarabia, gave a declaration to the Soroca police because he wore a party uniform. Stanchevici revealed that he had witnessed the attack at the Florești railway station:

In Bucharest, everything went in perfect order. The members of our organization, the *lancierii*, dressed in white shirts, fulfilled the role of the congress’s police responsible for preventing disorder. ... Before we came to Bălți, nobody provoked us and we maintained order the way our leaders wanted. But instead of travelling from Bălți to Soroca with the special train we had ordered, the authorities told us to travel with a regular train to which they attached fourth-class carriages. ... We were crowded together and what annoyed the congress attendees even more was that the yids (*jidani*) were travelling on the same train.<sup>121</sup>

Whether the trip transpired with or without anti-Semitic acts depended on the efficiency of the security apparatus and on its ability to keep the masses under control.<sup>122</sup> In many cases, the police and gendarmes were overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of peasants.<sup>123</sup> In all probability, there

<sup>119</sup> Radiogram of Soroca Police Office to Chișinău Regional Police Inspectorate, 13 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 737; Radiogram of Chișinău Regional Police Inspectorate to Bucharest General Police Office, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 738; Radiogram of Chișinău Regional Police Inspectorate to Soroca Police Office, 13 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 740.

<sup>120</sup> Report of Soroca Police Office to Chișinău Regional Police Inspectorate and to Bessarabian General Siguranță Office, 14 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 748.

<sup>121</sup> Declaration Nicolae Stanchevici, 12 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 760.

<sup>122</sup> Report of city of Vaslui Police Office, 9 Nov. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 48.

<sup>123</sup> Report of Iași Gendarmerie Legion to General Gendarmerie Inspectorate, 10 Nov. 1936, ANR, Inspectoratul General al Jandarmeriei, 44.1936, 43; Note of Bacău Police Office, 9 Nov. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 51.

were discussions between various institutions to figure out which stations needed more police troops to protect them. In bigger cities, the mobilisation of the manpower was better than in provincial towns. When trains with congress returnees arrived in Iași, for example, the reaction of the authorities was swift: pharmacies and shops owned by Jews were either closed or protected by guards and gendarmes.<sup>124</sup> And yet, Iași was not spared from anti-Semitic acts: Iancu Balter's shop at the railway station was plundered, and Sama Sazberg's house suffered damages when a drunken PNC supporter passed by and smashed the windows.<sup>125</sup> Also in Iași, authorities prevented further attacks at the railway station: 'We are informed that the congress attendees on their way back had to stay one or two hours at the railway station Ciurea 12 kilometres from Iași. As they were very tired and hungry, they decided to destroy the station of Iași as a sign of protest'. Somebody then quickly spread the rumour that the army and the police were awaiting the returnees, which was sufficient to calm them down.<sup>126</sup> County and city police officers assured their superiors that they had taken all possible measures 'to shelter in the first place the Jews who were at the stations and around them'.<sup>127</sup> Nevertheless, another wave of anti-Semitic acts occurred on 10 November 1936. At the railway station of Verești, Suceava County, peasants destroyed a Jewish shop and took everything they found there.<sup>128</sup> In Vaslui, they attacked Jews, yelling: 'Long live the king, long live Goga-Cuza!'<sup>129</sup>

Following these incidents, the county police offices were under pressure to explain to the regional police what had happened, and the latter had to report to their superiors in Bucharest and to the Interior Minister.<sup>130</sup> They could have emphasised the lack of troops and resources, but instead their main strategy was to blame the victims: the Jews themselves had allegedly been too visible when the peasants passed by.<sup>131</sup> (A similar strategy had been applied in the Leib Tendler affair.) Moreover, police and gendarmes present at the stations frequently played down the extent of the damage done by the PNC supporters. Here are a few examples: 'A young Jew, Iosif Abramovici of Negrești, was on the regular train from Iași to Galați. In Vaslui, both his train and a train with congress attendees stopped, and he inconsiderately got out of the train and was slightly beaten by the peasants.'<sup>132</sup> When Teodor Burgman, a Jew and head of a night watch company (*pază de noapte*), reported that peasants returning from Bucharest attacked and robbed him, it was the regional police office which ordered further investigations to determine 'if the robbery that Burgman reported has not been staged, as we notice that it had not been reported right away'.<sup>133</sup> Jews were also blamed by the city's police chief for another anti-Semitic attack at the railway station in Vaslui. After a detailed description of

<sup>124</sup> Report from Iași Police Office to Iași Regional Police Inspectorate, Iași, 11 Nov. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 86–7.

<sup>125</sup> Report of Botoșani Police Office to Iași Regional Police Inspectorate, 12 Nov. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 100; Report of Iași Regional Police Inspectorate to Bucharest General Police Office, 12 Nov. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 102.

<sup>126</sup> Note, 12 Nov. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 81.

<sup>127</sup> Report of city of Vaslui Police Office to Iași Regional Police Inspectorate, 15 Nov. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 137–8.

<sup>128</sup> Report of Bucharest General Police Office, 9 Nov. 1936, p. 26; Telephone note of Botoșani Police Office, 10 Nov. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 49.

<sup>129</sup> Report of Bucharest General Police Office, 9 Nov. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 21.

<sup>130</sup> Order from General Police Office to all the Police Inspectorates and Police Offices, 11 Nov. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 80.

<sup>131</sup> Proceș Verbal issued by Soroca Police Office, 10 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 754; Proceș Verbal issued by Soroca Police Office, 10 Nov. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 756.

<sup>132</sup> Report of Vaslui Police Office, 9 Nov. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 48.

<sup>133</sup> Report of Bucharest General Police Office, 11 Nov. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 21; Report from Iași Regional Police Inspectorate to Bucharest General Police Office, 11 Nov. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 78; Report from Botoșani Police Office to Iași Regional Police Inspectorate, 11 Nov. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 79; Report of Botoșani Police Office to Iași Regional Police Inspectorate, 13 Nov. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 108.

the attack, he concluded that ‘this happened because of the stubbornness of these Jews who disregarded the measures we took. If they had been respected, the congress attendees would have passed by in perfect peace.’<sup>134</sup> An attack at the railway station of Râmnicu-Sărat was explained in a similar manner: ‘At one of the railway station warehouses, there were some workers and among them also a Jew, Manu Cosma. When he saw that the congress attendees were demonstrating against Jews, shouting anti-Semitic words, he had an unsuitable attitude. This provoked some travellers to beat him, but nothing to be worried about.’<sup>135</sup> At the railway station in Vasile Alexandri, an anti-Semitic outburst erupted because, according to the police, ‘the Jews’ did not stay where ‘the gendarmes sheltered them. Some of them were even evacuated from the station, but they came back to provoke the peasants when the train arrived.’<sup>136</sup> This argumentative strategy was present at all levels of police reports and was never questioned, at least not in the documents.

There are reasons to assume that the number of anti-Semitic acts was in fact much larger than attested to in the figures given in the sources. Most of the anti-Semitic attacks were registered at the railway stations where the security forces were present. When the peasants left the stations, they had to walk many kilometres to their villages. What happened on the way from the station to the villages is largely unknown: the Jewish population in the countryside only rarely reported attacks.<sup>137</sup> At several railway stations, the returnees from Bucharest were rushed into specially chartered buses and driven straight to their villages. This was definitely the best way to secure their way home, but this option was obviously not available everywhere.<sup>138</sup>

## Conclusion

The right-wing radicalisation of Romanian politics was in line with the pattern of politics that evolved in East-Central and Southeastern Europe in the second half of the 1930s. There ‘authoritarian governments with antisemitic tendencies fought against antisemitic fascist movements’, as Dieter Pohl explained.<sup>139</sup> In Romania though, the political shift to the right brought also the rise of the anti-Semitic movement organised by the LANC, known from 1935 as the National Christian Party (PNC) – an organisation with close connections to King Carol II, to the ruling National Liberal Party, and to the NSDAP. This article has shown that the LANC/PNC was not only a platform for anti-Semitic propaganda but also, as the party rose to power, a channel for its supporters to manifest and implement violent anti-Semitism.

The party’s mass gathering on 8 November 1936, which was probably the largest anti-Semitic event in interwar Bucharest, is a case study for interpreting how the PNC fuelled anti-Semitic violence from the perspective of both the perpetrators and state officials. The congress was, for many party members and supporters, an opportunity to translate anti-Semitism into action – something that the party leadership had encouraged at the numerous regional congresses throughout 1935–6. The government took measures to avoid anti-Semitic violence during the national congress, not as a step towards fighting anti-Semitism but to maintain order and protect Romania’s international reputation and interests. The PNC leaders agreed to this strategy with the goal of proving that it was not merely a gathering of anti-Semites but a party ready to govern and to take King Carol’s side.

<sup>134</sup> 29.1936, Report of the city of Vaslui Police Chief to Iași Regional Police Inspectorate, 15 Nov. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 137–8.

<sup>135</sup> Report of Râmnicu-Sărat Gendarmerie Legion to General Gendarmerie Inspectorate, 11 Nov. 1936, ANR, Inspectoratul General al Jandarmeriei, 52.1936, 31.

<sup>136</sup> Informative note, 10 Nov. 1936, ANR, Inspectoratul General al Jandarmeriei, 96.1936, 16.

<sup>137</sup> Telephone note of Botoșani Police Office, 11 Nov. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 77; Report of Bucharest General Police Office, 11 Nov. 1936, ANR, Ministerul de Interne-Diverse, 29.1936, 78.

<sup>138</sup> Proce Verbal issued Soroca Police Office, 10 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 754; Proce Verbal issued Soroca Police Office, 10 Nov. 1936, ANRM, Inspectoratul regional de siguranță din Basarabia, 680, 3530, 756.

<sup>139</sup> Pohl, ‘Right-Wing Politics’, 25–6.

Diana Dumitru wrote that, in the 1930s, the ‘security forces were not particularly eager to protect the Jewish population from attacks, typically blaming the victims for the violence’.<sup>140</sup> The correspondence between the security forces and government officials used in this article shows a minimisation of the anti-Semitic intent of the violence and an obvious desire on the part of the police and the *gendarmerie* to blame the Jews for the incidents. By not calling the attacks against Jews and their businesses anti-Semitic acts and by failing to take legal measures against the perpetrators, they demonstrated the great tolerance of the ruling elites for the PNC and its anti-Semitism.

The anti-Semitism of the congress attendees reflected a strong anti-Semitic rationale: there were spontaneous physical assaults against Jews, boycott actions and acts of vandalism. Most of the twenty-three anti-Semitic acts chronicled in the security forces’ reports took place at and around train stations during the period after the congress, and the majority consisted of physical assaults against Jews. There were several factors that precipitated the violence, including the PNC supporters being exposed to intensive anti-Semitic propaganda at the congress, heavy drinking and anti-Semitic rumours, which contributed significantly to the escalation of violence and which corroborate Theodor W. Adorno’s well-known definition of anti-Semitism as ‘rumours about the Jews’.<sup>141</sup> Rumours that Jews were conspiring against the anti-Semites fuelled hatred and violence throughout the congress, and there is notably no mention of violence against persons and shops other than Jews and Jewish-owned businesses. Looting and robbery from Jewish merchants reveal the conviction of the congress attendees that Jews had to provide for their necessities, as if Jews were somehow responsible for their material deprivation.

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<sup>140</sup> Dumitru, *The State*, 91.

<sup>141</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia. Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben*, 9th edn (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2014), 125.