

Book review: Antonio Faur, Implicarea diplomatului roman dr. Mihai Marina in actiunile de salvare a evreilor din Transilvania de Nord si Ungaria (1944) (The involvment of the Romanian diplomat Dr. Mihai Marina in the actions of salvations of the Jews from Northern Transylvania and Hungary (1944))

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Antonio FAUR, Implicarea diplomatului român dr. Mihai Marina în acțiunile de salvare a evreilor din Transilvania de nord și Ungaria (1944), Oradea, Editura Muzeului Țării Crișurilor, 2014, ISBN 978-973-7621-63-4.

By Anca Oltean

Antonio Faur, Professor of History at the Faculty of History, International Relations, Political Sciences and Communication Sciences within the University of Oradea, has recently published a significant book for the history of the Jews in North-Western Transylvania: *Implicarea diplomatului român dr. Mihai Marina în acțiunile de salvare a evreilor din Transilvania de Nord și Ungaria (1944)* (*The involvement of the Romanian diplomat Dr. Mihai Marina in the Actions to Rescue the Jews from Northern Transylvania and Hungary (1944)*). His concern for the history of the Romanian Jews is not new, as he published another interesting book in 2012 entitled *A decade in the Existence of the Jews in Bihor County (1942-1952)*. (*Historiographical and Documentary Contributions*), which was also the subject of our review¹.

In his publications concerning the fate of the Jews from North-Western Transylvania under Hungarian occupation during the years 1940-1944, Antonio Faur tried to defend the idea that, although the faith of the Jews in this region was tragic, their majority being deported to concentration camps in Germany and Poland, there was always a benevolent category of Romanians who protected the Jews from Transylvania and helped a few of them to escape in Romania where the regime was not leading towards their annihilation. Sometimes, even the authorities were involved in giving the Jews a helping hand to escape, and this was the story of Mihai Marina, the Romanian consul to Oradea. He got involved in these escapes, also convincing members of the Consulate to help the Jews, thus becoming a hero in the history of the brave Romanians who shared tolerance and support for the Jewish community, saving humanity by their actions. Another idea accredited by the author is that, for the Jews who escaped the Hungarian occupation, Romania was a genuine oasis where their lives were not threatened and their survival was possible until the end of the war. And this reality, underlined by the author, happened in spite of the fact that Romania was fighting in the war on the side of Germany, in the East, against the Soviet Union. Therefore, if the reality outlined by the author proves to be true, despite the fact that there was also an anti-Jewish legislation in Romania during the years 1940-1944, the situation was still bearable for the Jewish minority.

The author Antonio Faur tries to convince his readers about the truth of his story, namely that the Romanian ethnics helped the North-Western Transylvanian Jews to escape into Romania and, in this regard, he quotes other works that acknowledge this idea. Thus, he quotes the work entitled *Final Report*, a genuine collective work that analyses the Romanian attitudes and policies towards the Jews during the Holocaust, a work that urges for the idea that these “actions of salvation” made by Romanian ethnics be researched further. Moreover, Antonio Faur quotes the words of the well known Nobel Prize winner of Jewish origin coming from Transylvania, Elie Wiesel who shows his gratitude to these brave Romanians who, by their actions, saved a number of Jews from certain death. Last but not least, Antonio Faur quotes Randolph Braham, a well known historian specialized in the *History of the Jews* and in the *Holocaust*, who refers to

¹ See Anca Oltean (book review of) Antonio Faur, *Un deceniu din existența evreilor bihoreni (1942-1952)*. *Contribuții istoriografice și documentare*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Mega, 2012, ISBN 978-606-543-263-5 in *Annals of the University of Oradea, History-Archaeology Series*, Tom XXIII, 2013, p. 202-205.

Romania as to “an oasis” where the Jews from the North-West of Transylvania tried to escape the opposition of the Hungarian authorities.

Using these opinions as starting points, Antonio Faur considers that it is important to look into the activity of the General Consulate in Oradea and to have a close look at the activity of the General Consul, Mihai Marina and his contributions to the actions of saving the Jews by crossing them the frontier in anonymous places. Focusing on the activity of the consul Mihai Marina, Antonio Faur reveals that the consul graduated Law at the University of Cluj, was awarded his most important distinction, the title of doctor, and that he had a 10-year-experience as an employee of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in several institutions in Transylvania. On July 9, 1941, he was appointed as Consul of Romania to Oradea, proving to be a very active political personality, cooperating not only with the Romanian inhabitants of the city but also with the Jews, with the upper classes and the peasants alike. His diplomatic efforts for the well being of Romanian and Jewish population were acknowledged by the general Ion Rășcanu, the mayor of Bucharest, and also by the Romanian minister to Bucharest, Eugen Filloti. With the consent of the Legation of Romania to Budapest, the Romanian consulate in Oradea was given the order of General Consulate (1943), and the consul Mihai Marina received the title of General Consul in 1943. The same year, Mihai Marina received the title of First Class General Consul.

In order to establish the merit of the Romanian diplomats in the actions to save the Romanian Jews of Oradea, the author Antonio Faur provides the name of the employees at the General Consulate of Romania in Oradea, that were: Anghel Lupescu (vice-consul), Ion Isaiu (law expert and vice-consul), Ion Romașcanu (vice-consul and officer in diplomatic field), Mihai Bologna (vice-consul), Alexandru Olteanu (vice-consul), Vasile Hossu (vice-consul), Rupert Gamber (secretary), Geta Cănciulescu (secretary), Tinuca Sabău (secretary), Steinkolar (secretary), Mihai Hotea (administrator) and Mihai Mihai (administrator). Antonio Faur urges that these secret operations of crossing the Jews over the border from Oradea into Romania to be known in detail in order to constitute a genuine evidence data base. The fact that many members of the Legation were, in fact, tenants of the Jewish families in the city stands as a proof that the General Consulate in Oradea had good relations with the Jews of Oradea before ghettoization and deportation. Seeing the communism in perspective and as a counter force to fascism, the general consul Dr. Mihai Marina had a good relationship with Ludovic Schwartz, one of the leaders of the communist movement in Oradea. Dr. Marina even offered to support his crossing the border in Romania, but, because of his communist mission, Ludovic Schwartz refused the proposal.

The author offers details about how these illegal border crossing took place. Thus, three cars were used, the ones belonging to the council, the vice-consuls Anghel Lupescu and Ion Romanășcu. The Jews were transported with these cars to secure places where they were expected by people of confidence and they were crossed the borders.

Not all the authors believe the idea that Romanian people were natural friends of the Jews, trying to rescue them from Nazi and Hungarian extermination. Antonio Faur gives the example of Zoltán Tibori Szabó, a Hungarian publicist from Cluj-Napoca, that asserts that the contribution of the Romanian peasants and intellectuals to saving certain Jews is a doubtful fact that has not been confirmed by any other sources.

In order to reply to Zoltán Tibori Szabó, Antonio Faur brings to light genuine scientific sources that confirm the willingness of the Romanians to help the Jews. These testimonies add value to the data brought by the General Consul Mihai Marina, thus confirming their existence. The first source presented by Antonio Faur is Katona Béla who wrote in a memoirist book about

the situation of Oradea in 1944. In this book he acknowledged that the Romanian consul of Oradea and almost all members of the consulate tried to cross a considerable number of Jews over the border, sometimes using the consul's car. The second proof, that the General Consul Mihai Marina and the other members of the consulate were helping the Jews to escape in Romania, was provided by Miksa Kupfer, an important Jewish doctor from Oradea who was saved by the consul Mihai Marina and who consequently wrote a statement on September 2, 1946. Thus, he confessed that during the period when the Jews of Oradea were deported to ghettos, he and his family were saved by the consul Mihai Marina and his men. In his generous actions, the consul did not claim any money or jewellery from the rescued Jews. As far as Kupfer family is concerned, Antonio Faur comes with another evidence. Thus it seems that the group of Jews which included Miksa Kupfer was caught by authorities while illegally trying to cross the border. The group consisted of Miksa Kupfer, his wife Elisabeth born Czeizler, their son Rafael aged 14 and Rozalia, his mother, aged 76 as well as Alexandru Balint (with his life Iuliana, born Fogel, aged 39). It seems that the consul arranged the group to escape in Şauaieu and they took a train to Arad, where they were caught by the authorities. The Martial Court condemned them to imprisonment in the Political Camp in Târgu Jiu which they were liberated after August 23, 1944. For medical grounds, two members of Kupfer family were not sent to the Military Court in Timișoara, namely Rozalia Kupfer and Rafael Kupfer. Rozalia Kupfer was not confined in the political camp for medical grounds. The author brings forward the evidence in order to prove to Zoltán Tibori Szabó that there were voices that acknowledged the contribution of the consul to the salvation of the Jews.

Another topic tackled by Antonio Faur is *The Report of the Romanian General Council of Oradea about the Situation of the Jews from Northern Transylvania (1944)*. During the communist times, as Antonio Faur asserts, the consul Mihai Marina published a report in the review *Magazin istoric* concerning the salvation of a number of Jews by himself and the other employees of the Romanian consulate in Oradea. In the summer of 1944, the Jewish inhabitants of Oradea were gathered together in the two ghettos of Oradea, the bigger of them being the second largest one in Hungary and Northern Transylvania. With regard to the attitude of the consul Mihai Marina concerning the anti-Jewish legislation in Hungary and North-Western Transylvania, the memorialist Katona Béla wrote that the consul protested against the obligation imposed for the Jews to wear the yellow star, stating that although collaboration with fascism was obvious in Romania, such obligation had never been imposed. The author also added other proofs regarding Mihai Marina's benevolent and favourable to the Jews character. Moreover, in his report, Mihai Marina talked about the ghettoization of the Jews in Oradea as a reality achieved "with dramatic consequences". A testimony of the Holocaust was the journal kept by Eva Heyman, a 13-year-old little girl from Oradea, coming from a bourgeois Jewish family, who died during deportation to Auschwitz².

The consul organized a strategy to save the Jews in the days of deportation and many Romanian families hid Jews in their houses. In the summer of 1944, the consul conceived a report which was sent to the International Red Cross in Geneva, informing them on the situation of the Jewish population on the territory of Hungary. The consul tried to gather data about the ghettos organized by the local authorities in Northern Transylvania. Therefore, members of the consulate were sent to different localities in Transylvania: Ion Isaiu (in Cluj and Năsăud), Ion Romaşcan (in the territory inhabited by the Székely), Mihai Bologa (in Sighet and Satu Mare),

² See the journal of Eva Heyman, *J'ai vécu si peu. Journal du ghetto d'Oradea*. (Préface de Carol Iancu, traduit du hongrois par Jean-Léon Muller), Editions des Syrtes, 2013.

Vasile Hossu (Sălaj și Someș) and Alexandru Olteanu (near Mureș). Thus he found out that 150,000 of Jews were confined in the ghettos in Transylvania. As a consequence of the report written by the consul Mihai Marina, a neutral commission was constituted comprising representatives of the International Red Cross from Switzerland, Portugal and Spain. They established the following rules to be implemented for the Jews of Budapest: 1. Jewish children, younger than 14, to be taken care of by their parents, 2. The establishment in Budapest of protected houses where the final solution would not be applied³.

After 23 August 1944 when King Mihai proclaimed the breach of alliance between Romania and the Germans, the Hungarian militaries occupied the building of General Consulate of Romania in Oradea and the members of the Consulate were, in consequence, arrested⁴. After 30 of days of sequestration in the Consulate, they were deported to a camp in Budapest.

Another chapter refers to *Memoir reflections (1946-1976) on the Actions to Save the Jews from Hungary and Northern Transylvania from Death (1944)*. In this section, Antonio Faur tries to identify the main writers who wrote about the activities to save the Jews from Hungary and Northern Transylvania from death in the year 1944 as they were reflected in the historical writings in the first years after the instauration of communism. A first work mentioned by the author belongs to David Arnold Finkelstein with his book *Rază de lumină în noaptea groazei (Sunshine in the Night of Terror)*. Not only Antonio Faur noticed this book but also the publicist Zoltán Tibori Szabo who considered it “a very good documentary source”, remarking both its exaggerations and its authenticity. A.D.Finkelstein established good relations with the Romanian authorities, asserting that there were a lot of people in Romania belonging to public authorities who helped the escaped Jews from Cluj and Turda after their arrival in Romania. Antonio Faur also states that the author of the foreword of the book written by A.D. Finkelstein, Adler József, shared the opinion that the Romanian people were very willing to help the Jews who crossed the border from Hungary to Romania. A.D.Finkelstein offers details about the Jews’ escape on their way from Cluj to Turda⁵. As Antonio Faur says, the main actions regarding the salvation of the Jews were concentrated in the city of Turda. The Jews continued to gather in Turda with the purpose of escaping to Romania and, among them, there were also Jews from Poland and Hungary. Furthermore, the author A.D.Finkelstein wrote about certain situations of the Jews who individually, with their family or in groups succeeded to escape to Romania. A last writing referring to the benevolence of the Romanians towards the escaped Jews belongs to the consul Mihai Marina. Being a remembrance of the events happening in Oradea in the summer of 1944, the text dates back to the year 1976 and has a forward written by Ion Lăcustă. Ion Lăcustă writes about the good intentions of the Romanians towards the Jews who were oppressed by the Nazis. On the other hand, the consul Mihai Marina asserted that, in spite of the fact that he was an employee of the Antonescu regime, he felt obliged to help the Jews from Oradea and Transylvania. Thus he made public his effort to save the Jews while he was a General Consul in Oradea during the years 1941-1944.

Having a very good documentation, Antonio Faur tries to study aspects that are less known to the public, such as the generous character of the consul Mihai Marina and other Romanians, be them diplomats or not, who saved many Jews from Oradea and neighbourhood areas from deportation. It happened in an era when Romania had to acknowledge some faults

³ Antonio Faur, *Implicarea diplomatului român dr. Mihai Marina în acțiunile de salvare a evreilor din Transilvania de Nord și Ungaria (1944)*, Editura Muzeului Țării Crișurilor, Oradea, 2014, p. 54.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p.55.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p.63.

such as the state policy towards its Jews, the existence of anti-Jewish legislation during the years 1940-1944, the pogroms of the time, the persecution of the Zionists and the Jews by Iron Guards, and, in some cases, even deportation to Transnistria. This book tries to reveal a drop of the humanity shown by certain Romanians in the storm of the Holocaust.