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DEPORTATION OF JEWS FROM ORADEA AND BIHOR COUNTY IN THE SPRING OF 1944

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ABSTRACT

Following the Vienna Diktat (also known in historiography as the Second Vienna Arbitration) from August 30, 1940, the North-West region of Romania – named Northern Transylvania in the documents of that period – was ceded to Horthyst Hungary and remained under its administration for four years (September 1940 – October 1944). In that region, together with Romanians, Hungarians and others, there was also a significant minority of Jews who, regardless of being subject to the anti-Semite legislation, managed to survive. But in the spring of 1944, after the occupation of Hungary by the Wehrmacht (on March 19), a ghettoization and deportation operation to Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp was unleashed against the Jews. On this occasion, over 131,000 Jews have been deported from Northern Transylvania. It was set up at Oradea the largest ghetto in the Hungary of that time, and in fact two ghettos were set up – one for the Jews from Oradea and the other one for the Jews living in the counties. Over 30,000 Jews have been deported from Oradea and the Northern part of Bihor County – both being under the Hungarian administration. The ghettoization and deportation actions were carried out under the German surveillance and counselling, but also with the government's complicity and the involvement of central and local administrations coordinated by the Ministry of the Interior. The ghettoization and deportation of the Jews from Oradea and Transylvania took place in inhumane conditions. Over 85% of the deported Jews were killed in the German concentration camps. The hereby paper summarizes information on the ghettoization and deportation (with 9 trainsets) of Jews from the two ghettoes in Oradea, and the tenth transport of Jews who were deported after the dismantling of the ghettoes, but who were still on the territory of Bihor County. In all, over 30,000 Jews have been deported with the 10 trainsets. An element of interest is that of the boarding of Jews on the first train with deportees from the large Oradea ghetto, described by Béla Zsólt, a Jewish journalist and writer from the Oradea ghetto.

Keywords: Northern Transylvania, Bihor County, Oradea ghetto, Jews deportation, Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp

The evolutions on the European political stage during 1940 brought Romania into an extremely difficult situation, due to the destruction of the European security system that was built during the interwar period. Right after the defeat of its main ally, France, in June 1940, Romania was subject to massive external pressures on the part of its revisionist neighbouring countries – including Horthyst Hungary – in order to cede the territory of Transylvania, which had been united with Romania in 1918, by the will of the majority of its inhabitants.

Taking advantage of the new external turn of events favourable to the achievement of its aims, Hungary has managed forcedly (the Vienna Diktat/"arbitration" from August 30, 1940) to obtain part of the territory it had claimed from Romania, namely North-Western Transylvania, a territory which would appear in the documents of that period under the name of *Northern Transylvania*. As a result, that area – comprising important cities such as Oradea, Satu-Mare, Cluj,

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Târgu-Mureș and others like them – were under the Hungarian administration for four years (Sept. 1940 – Oct. 1944), while Southern Transylvania remained under the Romanian administration.

After the concession, starting with the autumn of 1940, Hungary, under the command of Admiral Horthy, extended its anti-Semite legislation over Northern Transylvania. Alongside Romanians, Hungarians and others, a Jewish minority lived here, especially in urban areas. The city of Oradea – the former capital of Bihor County and the capital of the Hungarian Bihor County after the concession – was the city with the largest number of Jewish inhabitants in the whole area, almost 25-28% of the total, but with great merits in its capitalist development as from the second half of the 19th century.

Before long, the Jews from there became the victims of the official anti-Semite policy aiming at depriving them of their civil rights, dispossessing them of properties and businesses, impoverishing, humiliating, marginalising and isolating them within the society. Of the more than 160,000 Jews found on the territory of Northern Transylvania in the autumn of 1940[1], more than 131,000 were deported in May-June 1944, of whom about 85% perished during the Holocaust, in the German concentration camps or fell victims to inhumane conditions in the forced labour detachments.

Despite the legislation and measures taken against the Jews by the conservative-aristocratic government in Budapest – entitled the government of the "civilised anti-Semites" by the important Hungarian Holocaust researcher Randolph L. Braham –, for four years, the Jews from Hungary, and therefore also those from Oradea and from the Northern part of Bihor County, were not put in a position where their lives would be threatened by deporting them to the Nazi concentration camps. However, during that period crimes were also committed against some of them. For example, in August 1941, 18,000 Jews were deported from Hungary to Kamenets-Podolsky (Cameniţa in Romanian language) in Ukraine (on the grounds that they were considered "stateless people" by the government), 16,000 of them were shot dead by the SiPo units (Sicherheitspolizei – security police). Other Jews, together with alleged Yugoslav partisans – around 3,000 people from the newly annexed territories in the South of Hungary from Yugoslavia –, the so-called Délvidek (Southland), in the area of Újvidek (Novi Sad) were also killed. To these must be added all those who perished due to inhumane living conditions in forced labour detachments in the mines and public works in Hungary and, above all, those who were used at mine clearance alongside the Romanians on the Eastern front in Ukraine.

But that period – characterized by discriminations and social marginalization, with the abovementioned exceptions – came to an end after 4 years, in the spring of 1944, when Hitler decided to militarily occupy Hungary in order to avoid for the latter to get out of the war as Italy did in the previous year. Therefore, on March 19, 1944, the Wehrmacht entered Hungary and, a few days later, the conservative government led by the prime-minister Miklós Kallay was replaced with a Germanophile government led by the lieutenant general Döme Stojáy, *who coordinated the Jews' ghettoization and deportation action in Northern Transylvania and East of Hungary*. But its government remained active until August of the same year when Horthy, following the international pressures, replaced it with the general Géza Lakatos.

[1] The International Commission for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania, *Final report* (president of the commission: Elie Wiesel; ed.: Tuvia Friling, Radu Ioanid, Mihail E. Ionescu), Iaşi, Polirom Publishing House, 2004, p. 261. "Before the division of Transylvania, the entire Jewish population amounts here to nearly 200,000 people. Among these, 164,052 lived in the territories ceded to Hungary".

Thus, in an extremely short period of time and for such a large-scale operation, from April to the beginning of June 1944, the "successful" ghettoization and deportation of the Jews from Hungary – except for its capital Budapest – was organized under his command. As prime minister, Stojáy was directly in charge with the *"solving" of the Jewish problem in Hungary*, *i.e.* the ghettoization and deportation of 440,000 Hungarian Jews[2] to the death camps in the Nazi-occupied Poland. Only the Jewish community in Budapest remained untouched until the end of July[3], one of the possible reasons being that the Jews there were totally assimilated – as the historiography mentions it –, many of them had become Christians before the war, and Hungarian was their mother tongue, as it was the case for most of the Hungarian Jews. At that stage, only the Jews from the rest of the country, from the Subcarpathian Ruthenia and Northern Transylvania – *i.e.* the so-called Easterners – were all ghettoized. The places chosen were usually in the big cities or their outskirts, as they were considered the least trustworthy, displaying communist affinities (the well-known accusation of Judeo-Bolshevism) or towards the Romanian population, and therefore untrustworthy.

Once completed the concentration of the Jews (in short-lived concentration ghettoes) and their investigation – applying methods such as those used by the Gestapo to disclose the place where they had hidden their last valuables –, it was proceeded to the *final episode of the anti-Jewish action* – the deportation by train, in animal wagons, to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration and extermination camp. The subordinates of Adolf Eichmann, where appropriate, used their accumulated knowledge and experience, together with Hungarian accomplices, to achieve a rapid successful operation.

During the first half of May, immediately after the completion of the ghettoization operations on the territory of Subcarpathian Ruthenia and Northern Transylvania, discussions on the deportation began: *"The details of the memorandum were discussed at a meeting held in Muncaci* (Mukachevo - our note, A.F.) *on May 8-9, attended by high-ranking heads of the local administrations, police and gendarmerie, county and town chiefs. At the meeting led by Ferenczy László, detailed explanations were given on the procedures applied to the boarding of Jews in wagons and the exact timing of the trainsets with deportees that are about to leave the various ghettoes"*[4] (emphasis added – A.F.).

After March 19, 1944, these tasks were taken over by Lt. Col. Ferenczy, who became the liaison officer between the Hungarian gendarmerie and the German Security Service (SD). He played an important role in the implementation of the *Final Solution*, being the chief in charge with the concentration of Jews in ghettoes and organising their deportation to camps, under the command of the State Secretary, Endre László, from the Ministry of Interior.

During the deportations, Ferenczy set up his office in Muncaci, where he received daily information about what was happening in the Auschwitz camp, and on the basis of that information he sent a report to the Hungarian Ministry of the Interior[5] every two days. Therefore, it can be said with certainty that the governors were aware of the fate of the Jews who

[2] https://www.ushmm.org/learn/timeline-of-events/1942-1945/deportation-of-hungarian-jews, accessed on 29.04. 2021, at 9:32 o'clock.

[3] *Ibidem.*

[4] *20.000 de nume. Evidența deportaților din Transilvania de Nord rămași în viață* (ediție și studiu introductiv de Attila Gidó), Institutul pentru Studierea Minorităților Naționale [*NT = 20,000 names. Record of still alive deportees from Northern Transylvania* (edition and introductory study by Attila Gidó), Institute for Research on National Minorities], Cluj-Napoca, 2020, p. 9.

[5] https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/communities/munkacs/laszlo_ferenczy.asp, accessed on October 2, 2021, at 17 o'clock.

had arrived in Auschwitz-Birkenau camp, *i.e.* of the extermination by gassing or submitting them to destructive labour.

As of May 3, 1944, two ghettoes were organized in Oradea: the large (central) one, where only Jews from the city were concentrated, and a smaller one (in a former lumber yard, near the current Decebal bridge, over the river Crișul Repede River), with Jews from the rest of (Northern) Bihor County. The gendarmes set up there their interrogation-torture teams at the Dreher brewery located on the ghetto's territory, during which the Jews underwent beatings and other tortures, so atrocious that some of them ended with the death of the people under investigation, and the other ones in suicides, all with psychological traumas, difficult for the survivors to overcome. Once information was obtained on where the Jews had hidden their valuables, the question concerning *their urgent deportation* arose, so that the end of this process could be reported by June, 7. The process of ghettoization and deportation would be extended to the other four areas from the inside and western part of Hungary, after which the country would be declared *Judenrein* (freed from the Jews). However, admiral Horthy, under pressure from abroad – especially from the Americans -, accompanied by stern warnings, intervened on July 7 and put an end to deportations. They were resumed when the extremist Arrow Cross Party – led by Ferencz Szalasi – came to power in Hungary on October 15, 1944.

The excellent cooperation between the German S.S. and their Hungarian accomplices began the day after the opening of the ghettoes in Northern Transylvania: "The timetable and routes of the trains with deportees were finalised on May 4-6, 1944 at the meeting held in Vienna and attended by representatives of the railways, the Hungarian gendarmerie and of the German security police (Sicherheitspolizei - SIPO). The Hungarian gendarmerie delegation was led by Leó Lulay, Ferenczy's colleague, and his Sonderkommando was represented by transport expert, Franz Novak"[6].

Following analyses carried out on the basis of military, strategic and psychological considerations, it was decided that the Hungarian Jews would be deported, as of May 15, *"...by trainsets, bound for Auschwitz, via Košice* (emphasis added - A.F.) (Kassa in Hungarian; Cașovia in Russian) and Eastern Slovakia, passing through the towns of Prešov, Muszyna, Tarnow and Krakow"[7]. The State Secretary, László Endre – for the Hungarian side – and Adolf Eichmann negotiated the number of trains that would leave daily for Auschwitz, and they reached an agreement. Endre – being in a hurry to deport the Jews from Hungary as quickly as possible – proposed six trainsets per day, Eichmann – being aware of the overcrowding at Auschwitz – proposed only two per day, and in the end four trainsets were accepted because even so Auschwitz was overcrowded:

"Whilst Endre, who wanted to complete the dejewification of Hungary as soon as possible, had proposed six trainsets per day, Eichmann – who had more accurate information on the capacity of the gas chambers and crematoria at Auschwitz – had initially limited himself to two trainsets. In the end, it was agreed upon sending four transports of deportees daily, in total 12,000 Jews"[8] (emphasis added – A.F.).

A death train averaged between 35 and 40 wagons, and a total of 4 trainsets ranging between 140 and 160 wagons per day arrived in Auschwitz, and if there were between 70 and 90 people in

[6] Randolph L. Braham, Zoltán Tibori Szabó, *Enciclopedia Geografică a Holocaustului din Transilvania de Nord* [*Geographical Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust in Northern Transylvania*], Cartier Publishing House, Chișinău, 2020, p. 33.

[7] *Ibidem.*

[8] *Ibidem.*

a wagon, this meant around 12,000 people per day. Most of them – old people, women and children under 16 – were killed on the very day of their arrival on the grounds that they were useless. The guard was exchanged in Košice, and the Hungarian gendarmes handed them over to the S.S..

The Hungarian gendarmes, who were joining the trainsets on the Hungarian territory, handed them over to the S.S. at Košice railway station (Kassa in Hungarian), who were in charge with them until the final station, on the death station platform at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

The Oradea ghetto was the largest one in Hungary until the creation of the Budapest ghetto in November 1944. Jews from the provinces near Oradea were brought to the small ghetto. For example, Jews from Berekbőszőrmény locality (a locality in the current Hungary) "...were deported to Auschwitz from the Oradea ghetto"[9]. We also have to mention that in the county of Bihor at that time there was *"(...) a temporary rural ghetto at Berettyóújfalu* (emphasis added – A.F.) and the two in Oradea (one in the Jewish quarter of the city for the Jewish inhabitants in Oradea, the second one at Mezey sawmill, for the Jews brought from the districts of Bihor County, which also extended to the current Hungary)"[10].

Immediately after the war, the journalist and writer Béla Zsólt – who had taken up residence in Budapest -, driven by the desire to make these known to the Hungarian public, and not only, the harsh experiences he had gone through during the war, began to publish his memories of the time spent in forced labour detachments on the Ukrainian front, as well as his *experiences in the Oradea ghetto* (May-June 1944), where he hid under an alias. The articles appeared in the weekly newspaper he founded himself – *Haladás* (the *Progress*), in Budapest. On May 30, 1946, the series began with a first article. However, given the political circumstances after World War II, when Zsólt had created a political party, and his opposition to communism, the series was stopped. But we have found out that: "As regards the second part of the story – initially scheduled as a series – remained unfinished after the publication of the first episodes"[11].

His testimony of indubitable historical value is truly exceptional for the sharpness and lucidity of his analysis when describing the situations, explaining the motivations behind the characters' acts in the story, for the impartiality of his observations, presenting a more precise, objective and even cold description – like that of a doctor talking about a medical case, without showing any emotional involvement – of everything he saw and experienced, without even sparing himself. Béla Zsólt died in Budapest on February 1949, but eventually, 31 years after his death, the newspaper serial was published as a book in 1980 under the title *Kilenc koffer*[12] (*Nine suitcases*), which was subsequently translated into various international languages, except Romanian.

In one of its chapters, he describes the shocking scene of the preparation and boarding of the *first transport of Jews from Oradea* into wagons, which he witnessed, together with a doctor, without being noticed by the authorities. At that time, he was admitted to the hospital organised by the ghetto command, in the synagogue of the Hasidic Jews who had fled from Vyzhnytsia – to escape persecution in the Tsarist Empire – to Oradea, during the World War I (the building still exists nowadays, in the stage of red brick, on Crinului Street, behind the dental clinic on Kogălniceanu Street). Together with the head doctor of the ghetto hospital – Dr. Németi, who

[9] *Ibidem*, p. 45.

[10] *Ibidem*, p. 43.

[11] Béla Zsólt, *Neuf valises* [*Nine suitcases*], Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 2010.

[12] Idem, *Kilenc koffer* [*Nine suitcases*], Magvető Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1980.

called him to witness the boarding on the wagons – he recorded the whole scene with great accuracy, of which we reproduce below some significant fragments:

"I watched it all from a small chamber smelling of onions in the synagogue of the wonder-rabbi of Wisznice. In the wall of the chamber there was a window like an embrasure, where Dr. Németi, with his teeth chattering, made me join him – in my nightwear – to watch the first group being deported. From the window we could see and hear everything clearly. I felt like an outside observer, indifferent and almost without emotion. This state of mind (…) had become familiar to me in the Ukraine. It is no brutish apathy or callousness, but rather an inability to believe that what is happening is really happening. If one encounters varieties and degrees of horror that go beyond any possible horrors known or imagined so far, one can only suffer but not really experience them (…)".

The S.S. Obersturmbannführer (colonel) gave instructions, with a broken voice, in laconic sentences. After that, colonel Péterffy went to give orders to his under-officers: *"After receiving the colonel's orders, the staff sergeants with their Hitler moustaches (…) spread out at the double in front of the untidy crowd of Jews (…). Having marshalled them into a straight line, the sergeants started counting. Each time they had counted seventy-five they separated the 'contingents' by inserting a gap of three paces between them. When they had finished, they reported back to the gendarmerie colonel.*

The gendarmerie colonel roared:

'All aboard!'

The staff sergeants passed the message on:

'All aboard!'

… Now the chain of gendarmes unfolded, forming a living fence between the Jews and the wooden one of the ghetto, beyond which lay the town.

And just as if the guard had called out 'All aboard' at Nagyvárad station a minute or two before the departure of the Budapest express, these men and women with their bundles charged the wagons, pushing and shoving desperately, as though they were absolutely determined not to be left behind because they had to go on an urgent journey that brooked no delay, or because they didn't care where the train was taking them if only they could escape the plague, or the war, at the last moment. Of course, the reason they were pushing and shoving and hating each other was that they wanted to grab the best possible places – near the window, the door, the water or the bucket – or that families, friends or contemporaries wanted to remain together. Men were dragging their wives, mothers were fighting, holding their children in front of them, and from the hubbub whole shrieking, screeching, frightened sentences could be heard: 'Jancsika, where are you?' 'Gerber family, over here!' 'Don't leave Grandpa behind!' and so on. The gendarmes, who had been prepared to force the Jews into the wagons, stood behind them with their hands on their hips, watching in motionless amazement as they filled the wagons of their own accord. Only ten or twelve clumsy ones were left behind (…). Then the gendarmes fell upon them, kicking and punching them in the stomach and beating them about the head. And when the poor souls had almost managed to scramble up, there were objections from above.

'There's no room left here, sergeant-major, sir!' (…).

'No room?' (…) 'We'll see if there's no room! Move closer together, you swine, or I'll come up and make room!'

Above, the terrified crowd drew closer together, and the flabby mass swallowed the stragglers one by one. Those who had half wriggled in (…) were squeezed in by the gendarme like raw meat into a grinder. (…) At the same time there was a chaotic din."

We have to mention that it is about the gendarmerie lieutenant-colonel Péterffy Jenő whose notorious brutality has been later mentioned in the testimonies given at the war crimes trials by all the surviving Jews who had met him at the Dreher brewery (the place of torture). And by that kind of behaviour, the gendarmes unnecessarily tormented the Jews who were about to be deported. They have been gathered with their luggage (a backpack or a bundle with a few things in it) early in the morning, being kept standing up for hours, insulted and threatened, lest they make any gesture of disobedience, and the trainset left much later, only at noon. The fact of keeping them in closed wagons, in the increasing heat, without water, which, being insufficient, ran out in a quarter of an hour, was an act of cruelty. From that moment on and until the departure, those inside asked for water, but no one paid them any attention, leaving them to suffer:

'Just like in a synagogue', the gendarmerie colonel sneered, but gradually the people calmed down. All this had taken barely a quarter of an hour. It was thirty-two degrees in the shade, and the sun, instead of standing still or darkening, was calmly climbing and sending out more and more fiery heat. Then the staff sergeants pushed the doors of the wagons shut. For a few minutes there was silence that everybody in these mobile coffins with the German notices painted on them seemed to have died. But when they realised that the coffin had been closed on them, the two thousand seeming-dead suddenly began to shout in chorus:

'Water! Water!'

As Béla Zsólt recorded, *"they must have shouted many other things – cursed, prayed, argued, wept – but this 'Water, water!' was the only phrase that could be heard right to the end, clearly and at almost regular intervals. The thirty wagons, as if directed by a conductor, chanted simultaneously, in unison and in time:*

'Water! Water!'

More time has passed with the manoeuvres of railway engines that had to carry out other transports, whilst the people kept on shouting, of no avail, for water (…)"[13].

Such a treatment led to deaths and even suicides in these wagons, when some of them understood that nothing lay ahead of them, that there was no hope. The corpses were not taken out of the train, until it reached its destination – Auschwitz-Birkenau camp.

Under the careful surveillance of S.S. colonel and Péterffy, the wagons were closed and then sealed. Béla Zsólt records the seriousness and satisfaction felt by these individuals upon the accomplishment of their evil mission, as if the wagons contained merchandises, and not people. The image with those hands pulled out on the train's window remains sort of ingrained on the retina – among the barbed wires -, reaching out and desperately tossing about towards an imaginary salvation that would come from a motherland or hostile Europe that had nothing in store for them. For them, there was no more salvation.

Seeing the scene, Béla Zsólt thought that he would share the same fate in a few days, but destiny has been more generous with him and his wife, Ági, mother of Eve Heyman. Although

[13] Idem, *Neuf valises*, p. 248-252. [TN = The translated quoted fragments were taken from the online book version found on the Website: https://archive.org/details/ninesuitcases0000zsol_e7o2: *Nine suitcases*, Pimlico edition 2005, London, p. 199-200, 207-209.]

Eve and her maternal grandparents had been deported and exterminated at Auschwitz, the couple Béla-Ági Zsólt managed to save themselves due to a fake typhus epidemic and to Rezső Kásztner's famous train, having been chosen to be rescued as Béla Zsólt was part of the elite of nationally renowned Jewish writers and political journalists. His salvation – whereas his step-daughter, Eve, died – would haunt him for the rest of his life and, probably, that was one of the factors entailing him to write about everything he had seen in the Oradea ghetto:

"The gentlemen [the subordinates of Peterffy – our note – A.F.], *led by the S.S. officer and the gendarmerie colonel, officiously strut past the thirty wagons. The gendarmerie colonel stops at almost every wagon and tugs at the lead seal or padlock (…). I stand at the embrasure with the doctor, watching these gentlemen check and complete their work with the seriousness and thoroughness of professionals, with satisfaction and with unmistakable pride. We stand there and watch hands reaching out through the barbed wire barring the wagon windows, fingers both old and young, well-groomed (…), jerking and gesticulating senselessly, like the torn-off legs of a spider. It seems as if they are trying to explain something or to clutch at an imaginary straw thrown to them by their homeland, or by Europe, at the last moment – or at a lifebelt thrown to them by Christianity from the tall towers with the gilt crosses and stars that dominate this town. As I stand there watching with the doctor, a gendarme seizes the butt of his rifle in both fists and, at the very moment when the gentlemen are testing the lead seal on the wagon, with all his strength strikes a blow at an old woman's wriggling hand, which suddenly droops, like fruit about to drop from the branch.*

At this point the numb, dazed doctor suddenly says in his normal expert's voice:

'He's broken her wrist.'

We stand there, watching and failing to understand. Did they really get aboard? Why, for the love of God, did they get aboard? (…)

About midday the proper engine finally arrived, but it too shunted for about half an hour. When the train was coupled to it, the chorus suddenly grew softer. (…)

In the smoke, dust and sunshine the train disappeared towards the Rhédey Garden. We gazed after it through the embrasure long after we could see nothing but the dust raised alongside the empty rails, where two thousand Jews with white bundles had been herded together in the morning"[14].

This concludes the account on how the boarding on the first trainset of deported Jews from Oradea happened. His state of mental excitement was so great that he didn't even notice that he was covered in blood from a torn fingernail[15]. Afterwards, doctor Nemeti called him to bandage the wound on his finger with the broken nail.

Out of the two ghettos from Oradea, *ten trainsets left* the train station between May 23 and June 27, therefore more than a month. Actually, *within 12 days, since May 23 and until June 5*, there have been deported 27,469 of Jews from the Oradea ghettos, in nine trainsets, to which it is added the transport – dated June 27 – of 2,819 Jews that were caught on the territory of the county, not passing through the ghetto. Six deportations took place in May, and four in June. The first deported Jews were the ones from the small ghetto with the Jews from the county, then the ones from the large ghetto, with the Jews from Oradea. Thus, in five weeks (with a break from 5 to June 27, before the last trainset), *over 30,000 people have been deported*. The dates for the ten railway transports – as presented by us for an easier reading – are the following:

[14] *Ibidem*, p. 252. [TN = p. 209-211].
[15] *Ibidem*.

No.	Date of transport	Number of deported people
1.	May 23	3,110
2.	May 25	3,148
3.	May 28	3,227
4.	May 29	3,166
5.	May 30	3,187
6.	May 31	3,073
7.	June 1	3,059
8.	June 3	2,972
9.	June 5	2,527
	Total:	27,469
10.	June 27	2,819
	TOTAL:	30,288 (of inhabitants from the Bihor County, who were part of the Trianon Hungary, recorded by the military commander of Košice railway station)[16]

The chance for these dates to be known is unmistakably owed to another source: the military commander of Košice railway station, who wrote down, with meticulosity and daily, *the number of trainsets, the place where they came from and the people in the wagons*, the Hungarian authorities not being aware of all this. If we gather all the figures from above, comes out a number of over 27,469 of Jews from the ghetto, one last transport being added too, with the Jews gathered from Oradea, from 5 to June 27, adding up to *30,288 people*.

In regard to the reality of the deportation, the town's population was, for the most part, indifferent, some of them even rejoicing and thinking of the properties left behind by the Jews. This was due not only to the long-standing anti-Judaism, but also to the unbridled propaganda, decades of anti-Semitic indoctrination, which the right-wing press, radio and extremist groups[17] made a major contribution to. In *those interwar years and during the war an exacerbation of hatred emerged*, which made it almost impossible to involve public opinion by offering shelter to the Jews who were about to be deported, an indisputable truth noted by Jankó Béla, president of the Budapest People's Court, in 1946: "Despite the presence of German troops and Hitler's violent claims, this bloody action (deportation – author's note, Oliver Lustig) could not have been carried out so completely if there had been more resistance on the part of the Christian population, as it had happened elsewhere"[18]. But if the public opinion has been systematically intoxicated for years – through the public media, such as the press and radio – with anti-Semitic ideas, it would be very difficult for a long period of time to change the society's mentality in this regard. There is no doubt that a large part of the press was controlled by the governments that have come to power successively throughout the interwar period.

To the success of the deportation, without major incidents, the treacherous rumour that the Jews would be transferred from the East to Hungary, across the Danube also contributed, where they would all work in agriculture until the end of the war, in a town that in fact did not even exist (Kenyermező/ Breadfield). The plan to deceive the Jewish population from Hungary began immediately after the Wehrmacht occupied the country on March 19.

On March 28, at Germany's proposal, the first and last meeting of the presidents of the Jewish communities in the province was held in Budapest, where the Obersturmbannführer Herman Krumey, Eichmann's deputy, spoke. With the experience he had already gained, he

[16] R. L. Braham, Z. T. Szabó, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

[17] O. Lustig, *Jurnal însângerat* [*Blood-bespotted diary*], Military Publishing House, Bucharest 1987, p. 186.

[18] *Ibidem*, p. 189.

"reassured" the Jews that the *Germans would not get directly involved in the Jewish problem in Hungary, but would only supervise the Hungarian authorities*. Sándor Leitner, president of the Orthodox Jewish Community of Oradea, who attended the meeting, would recall in connection with this statement: "A wave of relief swept through the room. So, however... the drafting of regulations is in the hands of the Hungarian government. There's no need to exaggerate, as the Hungarians can't get carried away like the S.S. ...".

When he got home, Leitner told his closest collaborators: "Appease, calm down the people, because in such a state of tension one cannot live. Let's have faith in the Almighty, perhaps He will work a miracle again and we will be able to save our lives at least..., after all we are religious Jews and we have the duty to hope"[19].

Unfortunately, it was all a deception, which the Jewish leaders in Hungary passed on to their co-religionists, weakening their motivation to flee to Romania or to try to hide in order to save themselves. It is hard to believe that they had not heard news of what was happening to the Jews in the General Government and other Polish or Eastern areas under German control, but some of them probably preferred the comfort of illusion, stress and the terror of reality. The reasons why they appeased their compatriots, entirely, in the case of each person are hard to prove today. Events followed their course, and the Jews from Bihor became victims of the Final solution, with few exceptions of those who managed to save themselves.

At the beginning of June, after the 5th, the city of Oradea and the county of Bihor were "*judenfrei*" (freed from the Jews). According to Randolph Braham, the last transport, dated June 27 (the tenth one) was also with Jews from Bihor, those who had been assigned to various jobs and those who had gone into hiding and were eventually caught. Thus, the government's objective, in perfect complicity with the Nazis of Eichmann's group – *to dejewify the eastern territory of Hungary* – had been achieved with maximum speed and efficiency. Oradea, once a city with a strong Jewish minority and a major economic, social and cultural role, was now emerging – as the anti-Semites and right-wing extremists had greatly wished for. Their dream came true, and the minister of interior could now declare himself satisfied:

"Today, Oradea has revealed a new face to me... This is nationalist Oradea, where there are no Jews walking on the streets. All toxic substances must be removed from the country's bloodstream. Jewish possessions no longer belong to the Jews..., not only the appearance of the streets must change, but also the mind of the people"[20] (emphasis added - A.F.).

In total, from Zones I and II of operations, the "German and Hungarian experts of the *Final solution*" deported "...in twenty-four days, 289,357 Jews; 92 trainsets, 12,056 people per day, on average 3,145 people in each train. Among them were the *131,639* Jews deported from Northern Transylvania, with 45 trainsets"[21]. The north-eastern parts of Hungary and Northern Transylvania, including Northern Bihor and Oradea, were territories freed from the Jews (Juderein). Over 30,000 of these deportees were from Bihor County. The rulers and all the anti-Semites could now be satisfied as the Jews were no longer an issue, but the Romanians remained.

The speech of Jaross, the minister of interior – heavily imbued with the racism of an age of darkness and hatred – sounded victorious for only four months until the liberation of Oradea and Bihor by the Romanian-Soviet armies (on October 12, 1944), but the Dőme Stójay government had fulfilled its "patriotic" task very well.

[19] *Ibidem*, p. 209.

[20] R. L. Braham, Z. T. Szabó, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

[21] *Ibidem*, p. 35.