

RELIGION AND VIOLENCE IN ROMANIA. RELIGIOUSLY OR ETHNICALLY MOTIVATED ANTISEMITISM?

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ABSTRACT: Religion and Violence in Romania. Religiously or Ethnically Motivated Antisemitism?

This article proposes an analysis of the forms of violence in the post-communist Romanian religious market, with a focus on the types of aggression directed against Jews. The text is a continuation of the research published by L.Tănase & C.Dascălu entitled “Religion and Violence in Romania: The Impact of Secularization on Interreligious Conflicts” (2024), which provides an x-ray of the conflicts between Orthodox vs. Greek-Catholics and Orthodox vs. neo-Protestant denominations in Romania after 1990. Using a similar methodology, the research starts from the hypothesis that the antisemitism manifested in post-communist Romania is mainly motivated by ethnic and conspiracy factors, rather than religious ones. In this process, we analyzed official documents (the reports of the US State Department on religious freedom in Romania, the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs, the Center for Monitoring and Combating Antisemitism in Romania (2003-2015), INSHR-EW, etc.), as well as about 70 articles from the local and national press. Subsequently, we conducted a semi-structured interview with a Jewish community leader. The types of violence examined include verbal, psychological, physical, and spiritual forms, the legal framework being provided by the Criminal Code and special legislation (Law no. 157/2018, GEO no. 31/2002). The results reveal that antisemitism in Romania is expressed mainly through symbols, rhetoric, and stereotypes, without being correlated with religious motivations, religious proselytism, competition between cults, or patrimonial claims.

Keywords: *Antisemitism, violence, religion, religious conflicts, secularization, Romania.*

Introduction

The Jewish community in Romania counted 756,930 members at the 1930 Census, constituting about 4.2% of the census population (13.6% of the total urban population). At the end of World War II, the number of Jews halved, about 400,000 people survived the Great War. Between the 1950s and 1960s, 350,000 Jews emigrated to Israel, their story becoming the story of the existence and growth of the State of Israel itself.¹

Censuses after 1990 showed a decrease in the number of Jews to 0.04 percent of the total population. Thus, in 1992, 9670 people declared their belonging to the Jewish community in Romania, in 2002, 6057, and in 2011, 3519². Most of the Jews in Romania are elderly people who live in Bucharest and require social assistance³.

As far as Romanians' attitude towards Jews is concerned, the report of the International Commission for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania (2004), as well as the analyses of the Center for Monitoring and Combating Antisemitism in Romania (2003-2015) or of the National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania "Elie Wiesel" highlighted the presence of antisemitism after the fall of the communist regime. "The roots of Romanian antisemitism are intertwined with the origins of the modern Romanian state";⁴ the Jews (...) being perceived unfavorably, both for political, cultural, economic and religious reasons, regardless of the segment of the population to which they belong. However, the perpetuation of positions hostile to the Jewish community in Romanian society, where the Jewish presence is almost non-existent, falls into the typology of the "new

1 Sef Rabin Dr. Moses ROSEN, *Primejdii, încercări, miracole*, Editura Hasefer, București, 1991, p. 334.

2 Institutul Național de Statistică, „Ce ne spune recensământul din anul 2011 despre religie”, 2013. Sursa : https://insse.ro/cms/files/publicatii/pliante%20statistice/08-Re-censamintele%20despre%20religie_n.pdf.

3 Centrul de Monitorizare și Combatere a Antisemitismului în România, *Antisemitism în România: Raport 2002*. Sursa : <https://antisemitism.ro/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/MCA-Romania-Raport-de-Monitorizare-2002.pdf>.

4 T. Friling, R. IOANID, & M. E. IONESCU. Comisia Internațională pentru Studierea Holocaustului în România. *Raport final*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2004, p.21.

antisemitism”⁵ Antisemitism in post-1990 Romania is related to themes of national memory, to the legacy of totalitarianisms and to the development of a strident anti-communism, and less to concerns about the Jewish community living today⁶.

Methodologies

This article continues the academic approach through which we tried to outline an overview of the violence in the Romanian religious market, research published under the title „*Religion and Violence in Romania: The Impact of Secularization on Interreligious Conflicts*”⁷, in 2024. This highlighted that in Romania there were significant tensions between religious groups (especially in the early 1990s), conflicts being classified into two types:

a. Orthodox vs. Greek-Catholics: the conflict is mainly of an identity and patrimonial nature (disputes that have as their object the restitution of the churches of the Greek-Catholic communities, confiscated by the communists in 1948 and which were passed into the property of the Romanian Orthodox Church). Both religious denominations have positioned themselves in this dispute, both as aggressor and victim. Although the number of violent incidents has decreased significantly in the last 15 years, in some communities the state of tension persists, fueled by the fact that the courts in Romania have not yet solved all the pending cases. Moreover, the decrease in tensions is attributed to the restitution/construction of places of worship to Greek-Catholics, the sharp decrease in the number of believers, and the emigration process.

b. Orthodox vs. Neo-Protestants: the conflict is one-sided and motivated by proselytism, migration of believers, doctrinal differences, and perceptions of the threat to national identity (“ethnic nationalism”). Violence peaks around 2000 but decreases significantly after 2007. Seculariza-

5 J. JUDAKEN, „So what’s new? Rethinking the “new antisemitism” in a global age” în *Patterns of Prejudice*, 42(4-5), 2008, pp. 531–560. doi:10.1080/00313220802377453.

6 R. CARSTOCEA, „Between Europeanisation and Local Legacies: Holocaust Memory and Contemporary Antisemitism in Romania” în *East European Politics and Societies*, 35(2), 2021, pp. 313-335. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325420906201>

7 Laurențiu D. TĂNASE, Cezar DASCĂLU, „Religion And Violence In Romania: The Impact Of Secularization On Interreligious Conflicts” în *Jurnalul Libertății de Conștiință (Journal for Freedom of Conscience)* – ISSN 2495-1757 (Print) ISSN 2966-7011 (Online) – Vol. 12., Nr. 3, 2024, pp.39-74.

tion and anticlericalism have become, in the last decade, the main “common enemies” of all confessions, a context that has led to cooperation between them and to the notable reduction of interreligious tensions.

In the mosaic of tensions that mark religious life in post-communist Romania, there is a form that is distinguished by its specific nature, not fitting into the patterns of conflict discussed above: *antisemitism*. Violence against Jews manifests itself predominantly in the symbolic and identity register, not being associated with religious competition, migration of believers, or patrimonial claims. Thus, this text proposes an evaluation of *patterns of violence against Jews* and analyzes how the conflicts were religiously motivated. As a research hypothesis, we propose the statement: *the antisemitism manifested in Romania after 1990 is mainly motivated by ethnic factors, not religious, according to press reports, official documents, and the interviewees' perception.*

Since the consulted statistics on antisemitism in Romania do not fully cover the analyzed period and do not accurately reflect reality, the approach was completed by using empirical research and documentary analysis methods, along with qualitative tools, such as semi-structured interviews and direct observation. We evaluated the reports of the US State Department on religious freedom in Romania, the reports of the Secretary of State for Religious Affairs, the analyses of the Center for Monitoring and Combating Antisemitism in Romania (2003-2015), of the National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania “Elie Wiesel”, as well as about 70 articles from the local and national press (*Dilema Veche, Revista 22, Magazin Sălăjean, Adevărul, Evenimentul Zilei, Ziua, Cotidianul, Mesagerul de Neamț, Jurnalul Național* etc.). Subsequently, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the president of the Jewish Community in Bucharest, Paul Schwartz, on 7.04.2025.

“The forms of violence to which we will refer in this text are: **verbal violence, psychological violence, physical violence, spiritual violence.** Their definitions, as well as of some related offences (e.g. threat according to Article 206 of the Criminal Code; harassment according to Article 208 of the Criminal Code) are regulated by the Criminal Code, Law no. 217/2003 for the prevention and combating of domestic violence updated, Law no. 26 of February 28, 2024 on the protection order.”⁸ Regard-

8 Laurențiu D. TĂNASE, Cezar DASCĂLU, *op.cit.*, p.40.

ing **antisemitism**, we will use the legislative framework proposed by Law 157/2018 and GEO no. 31/2002.

We will not only refer to cases of violence against the person (in the forms discussed above, which are much less frequent in Romania than in Western European states), but also to a very wide range of attitudes and justifications for them.

Law no. 157/2018 stipulates that “**antisemitism** means both the perception of Jews expressed as hatred against them, and verbal or physical manifestations, motivated by hatred against Jews, directed against Jews or non-Jews or their property, against the institutions of Jewish communities or their places of worship.”

In the category of anti-Semitic manifestations we mention actions of “inciting, supporting or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist interpretation of religion”; “the production of false, dehumanizing, demonic or stereotyping statements about Jews as such or about the collective power of Jews” (e.g., the myth about Jewish control over public finances); “the accusation of Jews, as a people, of being responsible for reprehensible acts committed by a person or group of persons of Jewish origin, or even for acts committed by non-Jews”; “intentional denial of the genocide of the Jewish people”; accusing the Jews of having “invented or exaggerated the Holocaust”; “accusing Jewish citizens of other states of being more loyal to Israel or to alleged Jewish world priorities, rather than to the interests of their own states”⁹ (cf. the definition adopted in 2005 by the European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC)).

Shafir proposes a detailed analysis of anti-Semitic manifestations and makes a distinction between their producers, grouping them into 6 categories: a) “Nostalgic antisemitism selfexculpatory. Orientation Past” (the category that concerns the interwar authoritarian past as a model for solving present problems); b) “Self-propelling antisemitism. Future orientation” (alternative models to the democratic regime are proposed); c) “Neo-populist mercantile antisemitism. Orientation Present, Future” (using antisemitism to promote party/personal interests, attracting votes)

9 Centrul de Monitorizare și Combatere a Antisemitismului în România, *Antisemitism în România 2009-2014*: <https://antisemitism.ro/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/MCA-Romania-Raport-de-Monitorizare-2009-2014.pdf>

d) "Utilitarian antisemitism. Orientation Present" (the occasional use by people, who are most likely not anti-Semitic, of anti-Semitic prejudices for momentary benefits); e) "Reactive antisemitism. Orientation Past-Present-Future" ("reactive anti-Semites are anti-Semites despite themselves") f) "Vengeance antisemitism. Orientation Eternal" (the oldest form, hatred of the Jews, no matter what they do).¹⁰

Antisemitism. Expressions of violence and the religious substratum

After researching the cases of antisemitism mentioned in the reports of the aforementioned institutions, as well as in the national/local press, we discovered two situations that can be classified in the category of **physical violence**.

a. the report of the Center for Monitoring and Combating Antisemitism in Romania. 2006-2009¹¹ (pp. 51-52) has a subchapter called "The death of the patient Ghild", which presents the death of a Romanian citizen, ethnic Jew, who died in the hospital in Galati, in 2008. The patient was 89 years old, suffered a heart attack and received medical assistance at the County Hospital. The family complained that the older man was tied to the bed and was assaulted by a medical professional, later filing complaints with the College of Physicians, the Ministry of Health and several organizations that militate against antisemitism.

b. a second case, which can be found in news articles of national and local newspapers (but not in the reports of the institutions) is that of the former parliamentarian of Jewish origin, Nati Meir. He was sentenced to prison for deception and after a suicide attempt he was admitted to the psychiatric department of the Jilava Penitentiary Hospital, in October 2010. Here he was assaulted by a cellmate, who, finding out that he was Jewish, hit him, causing him several fractures. He said: "a prisoner beat me, he said that I was one of the Jews who killed Jesus Christ".¹²

10 M. SHAFIR, „Rotten Apples, Bitter Pears: An Updated Motivational Typology of Romania’s Radical Right’s Anti-Semitic Postures in Post-Communism” in *Journal for The Study of Religions and Ideologies*, 7, 2010, pp. 150-187.

11 Centrul de Monitorizare și Combatere a Antisemitismului în România, Antisemitism în România: Raport 2006-2009, pp. 51-52. Sursa: <https://antisemitism.ro/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/MCA-Romania-Raport-de-Monitorizare-2006-2009.pdf>

12 P. DOBRESCU, „Nati Meir are fractură dublă de mandibulă. Află cine l-a bătut în închisoare și de ce” in *Libertatea*, 12 Aprilie 2011. Sursa: <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/nati-meir-are-fractura-dubla-de-mandibula-afla-cine-l-a-batut-in-inchisoare-si-de-ce-571326>

In the category of psychological violence, we can mention several cases of insults, threats, and harassment directed against current members of the Jewish community. For example, on December 31, 2004, Nazi symbols were drawn on the door of the house of a member of the Jewish community in Bucharest. Similar graffiti was found on a building in Suceava, where a couple of Holocaust survivors lived. In January 2005, prosecutors in Buzau initiated criminal proceedings against a minor who had created a website inciting violence against two Jewish teenagers in the same city¹³.

The most famous episode of threat directed against a member of the Jewish community is the one aimed at actress Maia Morgenstern, director of the State Jewish Theater in Bucharest. The message received by her, on March 27, 2021, on the evening of Pesach, is an explicit death threat and is signed by a supporter of the AUR Party. The leadership of the AUR Party denied involvement in this incident, condemning the action of the signatory. Subsequently, the authorities identified the perpetrator as a citizen with mental problems¹⁴.

As a first conclusion, from the analysis of the investigated incidents concerning violence directed against current members of the Jewish community (except Nati Meir's statement), we did not find obvious religious motivations for them.

Most forms of psychological violence, however, do not target specific individuals in the current Jewish community but are incitement to hatred against Jews in general. Threatening, denigrating, and humiliating messages are written on private or public buildings, a trend observed throughout the analyzed period. The virtual space, where the identity of the individual can be hidden, is a place where the dissemination of antisemitic messages is much easier and implicitly more common than in the physical world. A quantitative analysis on the recurrence of antisemitic messages for the period 2022-2023, provided by the National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania "Elie Wiesel", highlights that out of "10 posts about the Jewish community or the Holocaust, two are negative, three are positive, and five are neutral or ambivalent". The authors note the existence of

13 U.S. Department of State, *International Report on Freedom of Religion*, An 2005.; Sursa: <https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2005/index.htm>.

14 Institutul Național pentru Studierea Holocaustului din România „Elie Wiesel”. (2021). *Antisemitismul în stradă. Raport de monitorizare. Mai 2020-Aprilie 2021*. Sursa: <https://www.inshr-ew.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Raport-monitorizare-2021.pdf>

contextualized groups and targets, which vary according to the evolution of events in society. If the Pandemic discussed the involvement of Jews in the transmission of the disease and in vaccination campaigns, along with the evolution of the military conflict in Ukraine, the Jewish origins of Ukrainian President Zelensky are often discussed, "presented as an instrument through which Jews control the world"¹⁵

There are also situations where antisemitism takes bizarre forms. For example, in August 2014, a news item was broadcast in the Romanian press regarding an ad on a sales platform, in which a person from Târgu Jiu offered a lampshade made of the skin of a Jewish victim of the Holocaust, at the price of 20,000 euros. The seller mentioned that he has a certificate of authenticity, which certifies that the object is made of human skin and not animal skin. MCA Romania has filed a complaint for human organ trafficking at the Gorj County Police Inspectorate¹⁶.

US State Department reports note and Recurrence of desacralization and vandalization of several Jewish synagogues and cemeteries (Spiritual violence). For example, in November 1999, 25 tombstones were destroyed in the Jewish Cemetery in Satu Mare and another 26 in Reșița; in September 2002, the Jewish Cemetery in Piatra Neamț is desecrated (two funerary monuments are affected by destruction); In May 2002, antisemitic messages were written on the walls of a synagogue in Suceava County, after a Torah scroll had previously been stolen¹⁷. The document issued in 2010 by the US State Department highlights that there are no significant changes in their frequency compared to previous periods¹⁸. The phenomenon continues after 2010, (but for the period May 2022-April 2023, INSHR EW announces that no similar acts have been registered). Cemeteries in Bucharest, Ploiesti, Sighisoara, Timisoara, Husi, etc. were affected by destruction and vandalism.¹⁹ (in Romania, there are over 700

15 Institutul Național pentru Studierea Holocaustului din România „Elie Wiesel”. (2023). *Antisemitism de 20%. Raport de monitorizare. Mai 2022-Aprilie 2023*. Sursa: <https://www.inshr-ew.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Raport-monitorizare-20-IULIE-2023.pdf>

16 U.S. Department of State, *International Report on Freedom of Religion*, An 2014.; Sursa: <https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/index.htm>

17 Miruna PANĂ, „Antisemitismul în România și în lume” în *Jurnalul Național*, octombrie 2002 (Anul 10, nr. 2853-2879)2002-10-14 / nr. 2864, p.3.

18 U.S. Department of State, *International Report on Freedom of Religion*, An 2010; Sursa: <https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/index.htm>

19 „Doi adolescenți, ridicați pentru că ar fi desenat simboluri naziste pe o sinagogă

cemeteries, most of them in localities where Jews no longer live). For example, the Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania (F.C.E.R.) takes a position against the vandalization of the Jewish Cemetery in Bucharest (Sos. Giurgiului) on the night of April 23-24, 2017. The destruction of the 10 funerary monuments, on the day when the Jewish community commemorated the victims of the Holocaust, was an event that “saddened, offended and outraged” all Jews in Romania. Finding the culprits and punishing them according to the legislation in force meant “a moral reparation for the ten families and for the entire Jewish community, but also a natural and democratic way for Romanian society to discourage such acts of vandalism and antisemitism in the future.”²⁰

As a second conclusion, from the analysis of the examples of psychological and spiritual violence that are not directed against current members of the Jewish community and from the research of the reports of the aforementioned institutions and about 70 articles in the national/local press, we did not find obvious religious motivations for them. In most of the cases analyzed, the authorities reported that the aggressors were either young

din Sighișoara” – *Antena 3*, 5 martie 2015. Sursa: <https://www.antena3.ro/actualitate/doi-adolescenti-ridicati-pentru-ca-ar-fi-desenat-simboluri-naziste-pe-o-sinagoga-din-sighisoara-285778.html>; F. NĂȘUI, „Casa Memorială Elie Wiesel, vandalizată” – *Graiul Maramureșului*, 6 august 2018. Sursa: <https://www.graiul.ro/2018/08/06/casa-memoriala-elie-wiesel-vandalizata/>; S. VOICU, „Au fost descoperite persoanele care au vandalizat cimitirul evreiesc Huși: trei elevi teribiliști, inspirați din filmele de arte marțiale” – *Adevărul*, 5 mai 2019. Sursa: <https://adevarul.ro/stiri-locale/vaslui/au-fost-descoperite-persoanele-care-au-vandalizat-1941625.html>; C. ANDREI, „Provocări | Cimitir evreiesc vandalizat. Steagul Ungariei pe statuia lui Mihai Viteazul” – *Radio Europa Liberă*, 6 iunie 2021. Sursa: <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/provocari-cimitir-evreiesc-vandalizat-steagul-ungariei-statuia-lui-mihai-viteazul/31292868.html>; S. PRICOP, „Un nou incident cu caracter antisemit: Sinagoga din Orăștie a fost vandalizată” – *Libertatea*, 28 iunie 2021. Sursa: <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/sinagoga-din-orastie-a-fost-vandalizata-3622968>; A. TOBIAS, „Poliția a identificat persoanele care au vandalizat Cimitirul Evreiesc din Ploiești. Cine sunt autorii” – *Mediafax*, 7 iunie 2021. Sursa: <https://www.mediafax.ro/social/politia-a-identificat-persoanele-care-au-vandalizat-cimitirul-evreiesc-din-ploiesti-cine-sunt-autorii-20123788>; „Sinagoga din Făgăraș, construită în 1870, vandalizată la nicio o lună de la finalizarea lucrărilor de reabilitare a fațadei” – *HotNews.ro*, 6 ianuarie 2022. Sursa: <https://hotnews.ro/sinagoga-din-fagaras-construita-n-1870-vandalizata-la-nicio-o-luna-de-la-finalizarea-lucrarilor-de-reabilitare-a-fatadei-152441>.

20 Federația Comunităților Evreiești din România. „Comunicat de presă - Monumente vandalizate la Cimitirul Evreiesc din Șoseaua Giurgiului”, 24 aprilie 2017. Sursa: <https://www.jewishfed.ro/index.php/actualitate-fcer/1883-24-aprilie-2017-comunicat-de-presa-monumente-vandalizate-la-cimitirul-evreiesc-din-soseaua-giurgiului>.

people or adolescents, or people considered to have mental disorders, and the forms of antisemitism expressed by them were predominantly ethnic and conspiratorial in nature.

In addition to the various forms of vandalism, another frequent expression of antisemitism is the denial and trivialization of the Holocaust, post-communist practices found among the country's intellectual and political elites²¹. The introduction of courses on the Holocaust into school curricula in 1999 was an essential step towards raising awareness of these tragic historical events, even though approaches to reconstructing the past varied, depending on the authors of the textbooks, from the complete omission of the subject to its detailed ²²description. The analysis of the reports of the aforementioned institutions showed a decrease in the number of those who, in the public space, assumed a discourse of denial of the Holocaust. Law no. 217/2015, which provides for prison sentences from 6 months to 3 years or a fine, was a decisive factor. However, Holocaust denial has not disappeared from the baggage of anti-Semitic expressions, and the document issued by INSHR EW 2024, p. 136 underlined: "in the context of the introduction of the new discipline of study on the history of Jews and the Holocaust in high school education in Romania, there is an intensification of Holocaust denial messages and the promotion of the theory that Romania is controlled by Jews, themes that are recurrently present on websites and blogs that systematically disseminate extremist content".²³

The relationship between the Jewish Community and the Romanian Orthodox Church

Regarding the relations between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Mosaic Denomination, they are considered "very good" (Rosen, 1991, p. 301), the ROC expressing categorical positions of disapproval of anti-Se-

21 V. CHELARU, „Tradition, nationalism and Holocaust memory: Reassessing anti-semitism in post-communist Romania” în *Plural*, 10, 2002, pp. 58-84.

22 Ana BĂRBULESCU, „Discovering the Holocaust in our past: competing memories in post-communist Romanian textbooks” în *Holocaust Studies*, 21(3), 2015, pp. 139–156. doi:10.1080/17504902.2015.1066056.

23 Institutul Național pentru Studiarea Holocaustului din România, „Elie Wiesel”, „Antisemitismul în România înainte și după 7 octombrie 2023. Raport de monitorizare. Mai 2023-Aprilie 2024”, 2024, Sursa: <https://www.inshr-ew.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Raport-monitorizare-2024-30-iulie-final.pdf>

mitic attitudes and actions, rejecting “any xenophobic ideology with a religious flavor”.²⁴ But in the variety of religious life, a theme that strained the relationship between a certain part of the Orthodox clergy and faithful and the Jewish community was that of praise of the former legionnaires who suffered imprisonment during the communist regime. As we mentioned, from an official point of view, the ROC has categorically underlined the detachment from any ideology with a xenophobic, racist, fascist character. Law no. 217/2015 also stipulates “the prohibition of fascist, legionary, racist or xenophobic organizations, symbols and deeds and the promotion of the cult of persons guilty of committing crimes of genocide against humanity and war crimes”. The reports analyzed for this article, however, mention the presence of Orthodox clergy at various events commemorating leaders of the Legionary Movement throughout the period analyzed. Moreover, some of those whom the Orthodox Church places in the plethora of “great confessors” and “Saints of Prisons” are also priests who were part of the Legionary Movement or who were sympathizers of it. Thus, a conflictual axis was outlined: at one pole, those who want to honor the memory and praise writers/theologians/priests who have left their mark on the life of the Romanian Orthodox Church, minimizing or canceling the legionary past, and at the opposite pole, those who want to sanction and “forget” them.

We offer as an example the case of the monk Teodot from the Petru Voda Monastery in Neamt, who in 2014 was filmed at an event that marked 87 years since its establishment. The monk stated: “We must all have the conviction that the Legionary Movement was from the Holy Spirit (...) We have a duty to save what can be saved, namely, first of all, to save our souls from temptations, from sins, from all kinds of falls (...) Let’s help those around us to carry on this holy Legionary Movement.”²⁵ Regarding the pro-Legionary and antisemitic position (expressed in several sermons) of the monk Theodotus, the Romanian Patriarchate issued a trenchant

24 Biroul de Presă al Patriarhiei Române. „Biserica Ortodoxă Română respinge antisemitismul și xenofobia”, iunie 2014. Sursa: <https://www.jewishfed.ro/index.php/actualitate-fcer/1475-comunicat-de-presa-biserica-ortodoxa-romana>.

25 Elvira GHEORGHIȚĂ, „Reacția Patriarhiei, după ce un călugăr a elogiat Mișcarea Legionară: BOR respinge antisemitismul și xenofobia” în *Mediafax*, 30 iunie 2014. Sursa: <https://www.mediafax.ro/social/reactia-patriarhiei-dupa-ce-un-calugar-a-elogiat-miscarea-legionara-bor-respinge-antisemitismul-si-xenofobia-video-12861465>.

statement: *“The Romanian Patriarchate categorically disapproves of antisemitic attitudes and actions and rejects any xenophobic ideology with a religious flavor, because they are contrary to God’s love for all people. These manifestations that incite religious or ethnic hatred do not represent the official opinion of the Romanian Orthodox Church, they are isolated cases of indiscipline or manifestation of individual freedom without community responsibility. True monks can be good patriots and without any association with anti-Semitic and xenophobic political ideologies. As such, the Romanian Patriarchate asks the Archdiocese of Iasi to continue to explain to the monks of the Petru Voda Monastery that such opinions and attitudes harm the Romanian Orthodox Church nationally and even internationally, so that they can also affect the pilgrimages of the Romanian Orthodox faithful to the Holy Places, organized as an expression of piety, but also of mutual respect and knowledge between different peoples and religions. In conclusion, faithful to the Gospel of Christ’s love for all people, the Romanian Orthodox Church permanently promotes peace, dialogue and good understanding between people of different faiths, ethnicities and cultures.”*²⁶

Evolution of antisemitism

After an overview of the reports on the monitoring of antisemitism in Romania (Center for Monitoring and Combating antisemitism in Romania, INSHR EW, US Department of State), the media articles consulted (from national/local newspapers), the documents issued by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights we can conclude that there is no single ascending/descending path in terms of the evolution of the various forms of violence against Jews (according to the classification in the initial theoretical framework)/antisemitism. This can also be seen from Table No. 1., when the number of cases increases for 6 consecutive years, then drops steeply in 2017, so that in 2022 8 more cases are counted than in 2012.

The number of situations in which streets or public buildings bore the names of convicted persons decreased, the number of vandalizations decreased (they were no longer reported between May 2022 and April 2023, but they reappeared in 2023-2024), the distribution of literature and propaganda materials was intensified (INSHR EW, 2024, p. 164). There

26 Biroul de Presă al Patriarhiei Române. „Biserica Ortodoxă Română respinge antisemitismul și xenofobia”, iunie 2014. Sursa: <https://www.jewishfed.ro/index.php/actualitate-fcer/1475-comunicat-de-presa-biserica-ortodoxa-romana>.

is talk of a “latent antisemitism that erupts on certain occasions” (Center for Monitoring and Combating Antisemitism in Romania, 2014, p. 108), a perspective also reinforced by the results of the study *Responsible for the Holocaust in Romania: Hitler or Antonescu*²⁷, in which it is mentioned that only 5% of Romanians would be disturbed if they had Jewish neighbors.

Tabel. 1. Number of Antisemitic Incidents in Romania (2012–2022)

Year	Antisemitic incidents
2012	6
2013	9
2014	12
2015	13
2016	14
2017	22
2018	13
2019	16
2020	18
2021	31
2022	51

Source: Office of the Prosecutor General attached to the High Court of Cassation and Justice, 2013–2023 in European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2023, p. 99)

Interview with Mr. Paul Schwartz, President of the Jewish Community of Bucharest

In an attempt to strengthen the preliminary conclusions drawn from our analysis of official reports and press articles, we conducted a semi-structured interview with Mr. Paul Schwartz, president of the Jewish Commu-

27 Avangarde. Institutul Național pentru Studierea Holocaustului din România „Elie Wiesel”. (2021). *Responsabil de Holocaustul din România: Hitler sau Antonescu*. Sursa: <https://www.inshr-ew.ro/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Holocaustul-in-Romania-vic-time-responsabili.pdf>

nity in Bucharest, on April 7, 2025. The discussion revolved around several questions: *How do you perceive the current level of antisemitism in Romania? Have you noticed a significant recent development? What types of anti-Semitic acts are most frequently reported today (speech, vandalism, aggression)? How do these incidents affect the religious and social life of members of the Jewish community? What is the current relationship between the Mosaic cult and public authorities in combating antisemitism? To what extent does collaboration with other religious denominations in Romania contribute to reducing interethnic or religious tensions?*

We mention a series of conclusions of the discussion with him:

1. The Jewish community is very small, aged, and not very religiously active. Young people are affected by the secularization process, a situation similar to most religious denominations in Romania. Indicators in regression have been named: presence in the synagogue, preservation of religious traditions in family and social life (e.g., circumcision), etc. In this context, one cannot discuss religious competition and the migration of believers.
2. The relationship with the ROC is very good. There is a serious collaboration at the institutional level, the Orthodox Church being sensitive to cases of antisemitism. Currently, a vulnerable point is the reactivation of the population's interest in the Legionary Movement, which included priests in the interwar period.
3. He does not know examples of Jews in Bucharest or in the country who were the target of religiously motivated antisemitism, but he highlighted the case of a member of the community who complained about the sermon of an Orthodox priest, who mentioned that «The Jews crucified Christ»;
4. When an economic crisis occurs, antisemitism flourishes;
5. Antisemitism in Romania does not refer to the religious identity of the Jews, but to the ethnic one. Conspiracy theories support it.
6. The destruction of Jewish cemeteries and the aggressions against synagogues and monuments dedicated to the Holocaust are expressions of Romanians' ignorance of history and lack of respect for the role that the Jewish community had in Romania's development.
7. There is more tension and antisemitism in Romania today compared to the 1990s, and a possible increase in religiously motivated antisemitism in the context of the development of extremist movements.

8. Religious Denominations collaborate very well in Romania, with the Law on Cults serving as a good mediator.

Conclusion

If in the cases of conflicts between the Orthodox and Greek-Catholics and Orthodox/neo-Protestant Denominations we could easily follow the religious substratum and positioned them in the pattern of competition in the religious market (according to the proposed theoretical model), as far as antisemitism is concerned, it should be emphasized that it is not an expression of competition between religious Denominations (there is no rivalry for the retention/attraction of believers) nor a reflection of common patrimonial interests. Most of the members of the Jewish community are people over 75 years old and are not “religious Jews”, easily identifiable in society. The few “religious Jews” retain positions only within the community (Center for Monitoring and Combating Antisemitism in Romania, 2014). Moreover, antisemitism is not a mark of the clergy/believers of the majority Orthodox Church who, with minor exceptions, are not involved in actions hostile to the Jewish community. Few cases of violence directed explicitly against current members have been discovered, most of which were aggressions against property or concerned the Jewish community in general. In fact, the aforementioned monitoring reports show that in cases of vandalism/destruction of synagogues/cemeteries/properties of the Jewish community, the perpetrators identified by the research bodies are mostly teenagers or people with mental disorders. They do not motivate their actions by reference to their own religious identity.

The analysis of official reports, press articles, specialized literature, as well as the information provided from the interview with Mr. Paul Schwartz, reinforces the statement that the research hypothesis has been confirmed: *the antisemitism manifested in Romania after 1990 is mainly motivated by ethnic factors, and not religious, according to press reports, official documents, and the perception of the interviewees.*

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