

# RSAA JOURNAL

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Solonari, Vladimir. (1) *Purifying the Nation: Population Exchange and Ethnic Cleaning in Nazi-Allied Romania*.

Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009. Hardcover, 451 pp.

Solonari, Vladimir. *Purificarea națiunii. Dislocări forțate de populație și epurări etnice în România lui Ion Antonescu, 1940-1944*. România: Editura Polirom, 2015. Paperback, 424 pp.

In September of 1940 the tumultuous reign of Carol II of Romania came to an end as he abdicated his throne, leaving his Prime Minister, Ion Antonescu, at the helm of what would turn out to be a short and violent period in Romanian history. Vladimir Solonari's *Purifying the Nation* commences with a brief history of what led to Antonescu's ascent to power in order to outline the processes and governmental apparatuses that allowed him to remain in a position that would essentially eradicate certain factions of Romania's population, predominantly the Jews and Gypsies.

Solonari reminds his readers that shortly after coming to power Antonescu pursued his plans for creating an "ethnically pure" Romania without ever having been urged by Nazi Germany to do so. Antonescu worked in tandem with, but independently from Germany in attempting to purify the nation. He strongly believed foreign entities were depriving true Romanians socially and economically. He used fear tactics to drive the population into a frenzy of xenophobic nationalism and anti-Semitism, fueled by the fear of the rising communism in Russia that threatened to infringe upon a nation that had in Antonescu's eyes been weakened by the presence of the Other. Ethnic purity and unification were his solutions for political and national strength.

*Purifying the Nation* leads the reader through the complicated maze of politics during the era. The book makes it clear that Romania's polemic sentiments preexisted Nazi Germany, and only operated in accordance to Hitler when Antonescu and his political allies believed Hitler would dispel, or at the very least alleviate the Russian threat. The allegiance was superficial, despite later historiography that proliferated images of coercion by the much larger and more powerful regime.

Further, the book focuses on lesser known or discussed nuances of the harrowing period, such as the deportation attempts in which Hungarians and Germans were sent back to their respective countries.

The last twenty years have seen a large number of books on the Holocaust in Romania, but few have addressed this topic in both English and Romanian. This endeavor has greatly expanded the audience for such scholarship, even if at times the book relies on previous knowledge. Lastly, despite the blunt and direct tone of this work, Solonari maintains an unbroken delicacy. While this may appear jarring at first, in light of the topic discussed, his euphemisms do not aim to cushion the facts, but rather approach them from a strictly academic stance, which Solonari definitely achieves through rigorous, well executed research and analysis. *Purifying the Nation* is definitely worth the time for anyone seeking a well-documented work on the darker aspects of relatively recent Romanian history.

## Notes:

Dr. Vladimir Solanari earned his Ph.D. at Moscow State University, and is currently a faculty member in the History department at the University of Central Florida. His research focuses on the policy of ethnic cleansing in World War II Romania. He was a Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Fellow at the National Endowment for Democracy, and a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. He is the author of a number of articles on the history of Romania and Moldova, as well as on Moldovan politics.