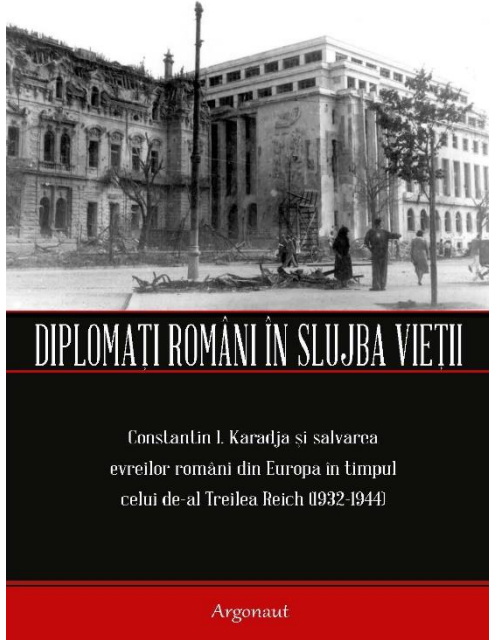


KİTAP DEĞERLENDİRME – BOOK REVIEW

**Ottmar Trașcă and Stelian Obiziuc, *Diplomați români în slujba vieții: Constantin I. Karadja și salvarea evreilor din Europa în timpul celui de-al treilea Reich (1932-1944)/ Romanian Diplomats in the Service of Humanity: Constantin I. Karadja and the Salvation of Romanian Jews in Europe during the Third Reich (1932-1944)*, Argonaut, Cluj-Napoca, 2017 (748 pp., index, list of facsimiles and abbreviations, 331 unpublished documents) [Introductory Study in Romanian and English by Ottmar Trașcă and Stelian Obiziuc, preface by Radu Ioanid, postface by Dennis Deletant], ISBN: 9789731096735.**

**Liliana BOȘCAN\***



Constantin Karadja was born on November 12/24 1889, in Hague. The birth certificate mentions his parents as being Prince Ioan Karadja, beylerbey of Rumelia - who, at the time, was appointed Minister Plenipotentiary of the Ottoman Empire to Sweden and the Netherlands - and Marie-Luisa Smith, Swedish citizen, descendant of an affluent family.

After his father's early passing, Constantin I. Karadja left for Sweden with his mother. Upon completing his high-school studies in Stockholm, in 1908,

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Karadja enrolled in the Faculty of Law, in London; after graduating two years later, he was called to the Bar of England.

At this point, young Karadja opted to pursue a career in diplomacy, which would span - with minor interruptions - over almost three decades and would prematurely meet a sudden end in 1947.

Thus, between 1910-1913, he conducted his activity in the Political Department of the Ottoman Ministry of Exterior, first as legation attaché, and then as legation secretary. Resigning from the diplomatic service of the Ottoman Empire in 1912, Constantin I. Karadja returned to Sweden, where, for the following years, he worked for the “Sveriges Privata Centralban” bank (1914-1915).

**Prince Constantin Jean Lars Anthony  
Démétrius Karadja**



Photo by courtesy of the Diplomatic Archives of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

In 1916, he settled down in Romania, following his marriage to Lady Elena Marcela Caradja, and in 1920 he obtained Romanian citizenship. The following year he was appointed consul within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a moment which marks the debut of his career in Romanian diplomacy, where he would hold important positions: consul to Budapest

(01.08.1921- 01.02.1922); director of the Directorate for International Policies (June-October 1927); consul general to Stockholm (01.03.1928-15.08.1930); Head of the Consular Division within Romania's Legation to Berlin (01.02.1932-01.08.1936); consul general to Berlin (01.08.1936-15.06.1941); director of the Directorate for Consular Affairs within the Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs (01.07.1941-23.08.1944); tasked with drafted the Diplomatic and Consular Manual (10.05.1945-01.05.1947). His diplomatic career ended suddenly, when, as a result of Ministerial Decision no. 58.378 from August 21, 1947, his post as general consul, grade I was abolished starting September 1, 1947.

In the course of his extensive and remarkable diplomatic career, Constantin I. Karadja conducted a sustained, well-organized and thorough activity, demonstrating exceptional moral and professional probity. As head of the Consular Division within the Romanian Legation to Berlin (1932-1936) and Consul General of Romania to Berlin (1936-1941), Constantin I. Karadja was best situated to observe not only the economic, social and political unrest preceding the rise of Nazism, or the radical transformations which marked the political scene of the Third Reich after January 30, 1933, but also the irreversible decline in the situation of Jews on German territory, as a result of propaganda and anti-Semitic measures perpetuated by Nazi authorities. As expected, his activity as Romania's diplomatic representative to Berlin did not only concern the protection of Romanian citizens of Jewish origins, but that of all Romanian citizens, based on the principle – reiterated many times in the reports he drafted – that “all citizens with rights rooted in their Romanian nationality are entitled to benefit from our protection, no matter their ethnic origin or their religion” (p. LI).

Constantin I. Karadja was the first Romanian diplomat to draw the attention of the decision-making circles in Bucharest to the measures implemented by Nazi authorities for the deportation of Jews from Germany, Austria and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, to camps set up for this purpose in occupied Poland.

The expansion of the Second World War and the spectacular victories obtained by the German war machine in 1940 constituted just as many factors that led not just to the radicalization of anti-Semitic policies in the Third Reich, but also to the harshening of anti-Semitic measures and legislation in Romania.

The assumption of power by the general Ion Antonescu and Legionary Movement tandem in September 1940, as well as their massive immersion in the state apparatus - including in the diplomatic personnel - made the stipulations of anti-Semitic legislation be applied strictly, abuse on the part of the civil servants not lacking.

Thus, for example, the renewal of passports of Romanian Jewish nationals residing in various European states was denied for the most diverse reasons – such as the non-payment of military taxes – and, consequently, their return to Romania became more and more difficult, to the point that even when they would be legally expelled from certain countries, they were not granted the right to return to the countries, which generated protests from some governments.

Consequently, general Ion Antonescu not only maintained the existing anti-Semitic legislation, but extended it, an action which also prompted negative repercussions for the status of Romanian Jewish citizens, residing in Germany, or on territories occupied/ controlled by the Third Reich. Therefore, acting on the order of the Leader of the State, on March 7, 1941, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued circular message no. 17.157 which directed Romania's diplomatic missions to “dispose the future marking of national passports issued to Romanian Jewish citizens by your office with the mention «JEW». This mention will be placed on the top-left corner of the first page. The criteria for applying these mentions are those specified in Decree Law no. 2650 of August 8, 1940, on the Legal status of Jews – published in the Official Gazette no. 83 from August 9, 1940. This mention is to be applied not only to passports issued from now on, but also to those presented for exchange or extension”.

Constantin I. Karadja proposed the application – in lieu of the “JEW” mention – on the passports of Romanian Jewish citizens, of a conventional sign “known by our authorities, but kept as discreet as possible, if not confidential, for example, on the second page of our passports, marking the ‘particular signs’ rubric with an X when a Jew is concerned, without insisting upon their race in writing”, (p. LVII) a proposal which was accepted by the Leader of the State.

Returning to the headquarter of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and being named as the head of the Directorate for Consular Affairs marked the beginning of a new stage in Constantin I. Karadja's diplomatic career, one

characterised by efforts undertaken - especially between 1942-1944 - to save Romanian Jewish citizens in Reich controlled/occupied territories. To understand the major difficulties that Constantin I. Karadja had to face, we believe a short presentation of the evolution of Jewish affairs in the context of Romania-Nazi Germany relations to be necessary.

In 1941, the policy adopted by the Romanian Government vis-a-vis the Jewish population was excessively marked by the massacres committed by Romanian authorities (the Army, the Military Police, and the Police) in Bessarabia, Bukovina, Odessa and Transnistria, and of the survivors' deportation, in the fall of 1941, to the camps and ghettos constructed in Transnistria. The excesses characterising the application of "the Romanian Solution to the Jewish question" – as it was referred to in historical writings – even amazed those in the leadership of the Third Reich. In this context, a new important step was taken by Berlin, in November 1941, when the German Legation in Bucharest queried the Romanian Government as to whether they wished to recall, in a certain time frame, the Romanian Jewish citizens from Reich controlled territories, or if they would let it up to the German party to "deport them to the Eastern ghettos". In his answer, the vice-president of the Council of Ministers, Mihai Antonescu held that "The Romanian Government has no interest in the return of Romanian Jews", (p. LXII) their deportation left for the Reich to deal with the decision, probably adopted in secret by Marshal Ion Antonescu together with the vice-president of the Council of Ministers Mihai Antonescu and relayed to the German government by the latter, is not at all surprising. On the contrary, it is perfectly aligned to the general framework of the anti-Semitic politics then promoted by the Antonescu regime.

Therefore, at a time when nothing seemed to stop the advances of the German war machine in the USSR military operations theatre, and when the Antonescu regime made considerable efforts for "solving the Jewish question" - deportations of Jews from Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to Transnistria were in full swing - Marshal Ion Antonescu and Mihai Antonescu came to the conclusion that the easiest way to avoid the return of Romanian Jews established abroad to the country, was to let their fate be decided by the Third Reich. As it will be observed in the following, this nefarious decision practically sealed the fate of thousands of Romanian Jews in Germany or in European states occupied/ controlled by the Reich, who were left, especially in 1942-1943, with no protection against the anti-Semitic measures promoted by Nazi authorities.

Subsequent to the answer received from the Romanian government, in the course of 1942, German authorities started including Romanian Jews in the deportation operations undertaken on Reich territory or in occupied/controlled states, an action which prompted repeated protests from the Romanian diplomatic offices. These interventions are explicable by way of the dispositions received by Romanian legations and consulates, during 1941, regarding the statute of Romanian Jewish citizens abroad.

The Directorate for Administrative and Judicial Affairs within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs elaborated and sent to Romanian diplomatic missions abroad circular message no. 81.557 which required them to offer “full protection to all Romanian citizens abroad, with no distinction between them, signalling all cases where their person or property were afflicted by special discriminatory measures” (p. XIV).

For reasons which can only be speculated on, as for example keeping the secret and the fear of negative repercussions for the Romanian government if the decision was found out, the vice-president of the Council of Ministers Mihai Antonescu omitted to inform Romania’s diplomatic offices of the acceptance given to the Reich leadership’s request on the matter of the deportation of Romanian Jews.

As a result, based on the provisions of circular message no. 81.557 from November 11, 1941, Romanian consulates and legations initially protested against the application of anti-Semitic measures by German authorities, against Romanian Jews in the Reich, or territories controlled/occupied by Germany and, subsequently, against their deportation to Nazi extermination camps. As a result, all the Romanian diplomatic missions in the Reich, and states under its control/ occupation, continued formulating new protests against the anti-Semitic measures adopted by German authorities against Romanian Jews, which led to tension and irritation in Berlin.

The protests against German authorities by Romanian diplomats, beginning with the spring of 1942 mark the moment of actual implication by consul general Constantin I. Karadja in the action for rescuing Jews, through notes and reports addressed to the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in which he pointed out the discriminatory treatment that Romanian Jews were subject to, in the Reich and its controlled/ occupied territories.

On August 8, 1942 during a discussion between minister plenipotentiary Gheorghe Davidescu and the counsellor for Jewish affairs within the German Legation in Bucharest, SS-Hauptsturmführer Gustav Richter, was informed for the first time of the agreement existing between the two governments regarding the submission of Romanian Jews in the Reich - and territories under its occupation/ control - to a treatment similar to that of German Jews.

Indeed, shortly after this conversation, on August 21, 1942, ministerplenipotentiary Gheorghe Davidescu addressed a telegram to the Romanian Legation in Berlin, as follows (p. XXXVII):

*“Following an understanding between Marshal Antonescu and Minister von Killinger, the main orders contained in circular message 81.557/November 11, 1942 and in a number of subsequent addresses and telegrams are revoked. Stop. You will no longer protest against the measures possibly taken by German authorities against our Jews.”*

The previously cited disposition practically sealed the fate of Romanian Jews in Germany or in the other states controlled/ occupied by the Reich. The attitude of the Antonescu regime vis-a-vis the Jewish population in Romania, and the Romanian Jews in the Reich and states under its occupation/ control would take a decisive turn at the end of 1942, and the beginning of 1943. Accordingly, the internal and external protests formulated against the regime’s plans to deport the Jews from the Old Romanian Kingdom, as well as the continual worsening of the military situation in the different military operations theatres determined Marshal Ion Antonescu to review the politics promoted to date in the Jewish question.

The exceptional results of the activity carried out by Constantin I. Karadja in his capacity as director of the Directorate for Consular Affairs within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would not have been possible without the contribution of the aforementioned Romanian diplomats, themselves in office, as well as without that of others more or less well-known. Without their contribution, saving such a considerable number of Romanian Jews from extermination would have been difficult, if not downright impossible to achieve.

Pragmatic by nature, the Leader of the State realised that with the Stalingrad defeat, from a military perspective, the Third Reich's chances of tipping the scales in its favour on the Eastern Front drastically decreased. In his desire to avoid Germany's fate and resume talks with the Allies to secure Romania's exit from the War, Marshal Ion Antonescu considered the "humanization" of the politics promoted by the Bucharest government against the Jewish population in Romania, but also in regards to the Jews of Romanian citizenship residing abroad, which would constitute, if the need arose, precious political capital.

This explains why, in December 1942, Marshal Ion Antonescu permanently renounced the plan for deportation of Jews from Romania in favour of emigration to Palestine as a solution to the Jewish question. The "new course" of the Antonescu anti-Semitic politics was officially announced in Berlin in the first half of December 1942, and would be maintained in the following years, despite repeated protests and interventions by the Third Reich.

In 1941 the Turkish Ambassador in Bucharest, H. Suphi Tanröver, had suggested a plan to Franklin Mott Gunther, the American Ambassador there, for the relief of the Rumanian Jews. Ambassador Tanröver had proposed that Britain and France join Turkey in transporting 300,000 Jews across Turkey to Syria, and thence to Palestine for temporary cantonment. H. Suphi Tanröver also requested the support of the United States, and Gunther forwarded to John Van MacMurray, the American Ambassador in Ankara, some background material, and asked the Department of State to cable instructions to him. S. Tanröver's plan was submitted to Cavendish Cannon of the Department of State's Division of European Affairs, who without undue delay outlined the reasons for rejecting it in the following terms<sup>1</sup>:

"(1) Assuming that Jews or others elsewhere in the world would be willing to provide clothing, housing, medical attention, and food for these 300,000 refugees, there would still remain the problem of shipping to supply this colony. It was doubtful if ships were available for such a service.

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<sup>1</sup> FRUS, *Diplomatic Papers 1941. Europe*, vol.2, p.850-866. *Memorandum by Mr. Cavendish W. Cannon of the Division of European Affairs* addressed to the Acting Chief of the Division of European Affairs (Atherton) and the Adviser on Political Relations (Dunn), WASHINGTON, November 12, 1941.



(2) The project would at once reopen the Arab question, not withstanding the announcement that the sojourn of the colony was “temporary.”

(3) The argument regarding the temporary nature of the project lost force in view of the lack of progress in plans for a permanent settlement (the allocation of territory in Africa or in Russia had been hardly more than a suggestion put forward in the press).

(4) Endorsement of such a plan was likely to bring about new pressure for an asylum in the Western hemisphere.

(5) By removing the remaining Jews from Rumania, the plan would relieve the Rumanian government of all responsibility for participation in a general settlement of the question, and in a backhand fashion would demonstrate that the brutal policy of the Rumanian authorities had been effective and realistic.

(6) An almost identical situation prevailed in Hungary, though there had been less publicity of the atrocities. A migration of the Rumanian Jews would therefore open the question of similar treatment for Jews in Hungary and, by extension, all countries where there had been intense persecution.”

Chaim Barlas, head of the Immigration Department of the Jewish Agency, wrote to H.S.Tanröver in September 1943:

*“I know that it is thanks to your benevolence that many Rumanian Jews have been saved. I take this occasion to call your attention to the frightful situation of the Jewish population of 150,000 deported. It would be an act of humanity on your part to use your influence with the members of the Rumanian government on behalf of these unfortunates, so that they might be authorized to return to their homes.”<sup>2</sup>*

*Ulus* newspaper carried the following news item on the plight of the Jews of Central Europe and the Balkans:

*“Numerous parties of Jewish children bearing transit visas came from Hungary, Bulgaria and Rumania in 1943 and 1944, crossing Turkey on the way to Palestine. At the present moment a group of forty-three children is en route from Bulgaria bearing Turkish visas. Every week at least forty to fifty people received visas from our Consulates at Bucharest, Budapest and Sofia for transit. Five groups totaling 1,826*

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<sup>2</sup> Barry Rubin, *Istanbul Intrigues*, Pharos Book, 1992, p. 214.

*Jews, having no time to apply at our Consulates for visas and obliged to depart immediately in order to be saved, left Kōstence in motorboats and upon arrival at Istanbul were given Turkish transit visas and left for Syria by train.”<sup>3</sup>*

On November 1, 1941 Minister Tanrıöver met with Gh. Davidescu, Secretary General of the Romanian MFA.<sup>4</sup> The first problem of discussion were the economic relations between Romania and Turkey.

The second problem was that he was assaulted by requests from Romanian Jews to persuade the Turkish Government to facilitate the transit to Palestine.<sup>5</sup> Romanian ships with Jewish refugees leaving Romanian ports bound for Palestine - *via* Turkey - continued until the end of Marshal Antonescus regime. A tragic case is the sinking of the *Struma* ship with Romanian Jews who were on their way to Palestine.<sup>6</sup>

Why is this book of interest to Turkish historiography?

Because it opens up many avenues of research, one of them being Turkey’s role in rescuing Romanian Jews from Nazi persecution. The diplomatic archive of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a rich inventory in this matter.

Also, another research topic could be the activity of the Turkish ambassador in Bucharest, H. Suphi Tanrıöver in rescuing the Jews from Romania.

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<sup>3</sup> *Ulus* Newspaper, (August 8, 1944).

<sup>4</sup> AMAE, fund 71/Turcia, volume 62, pp. 153-154.

<sup>5</sup> *Loc.cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>6</sup> *Cumhuriyet* Newspaper, (February 25, 1942).