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The Mass Deportation from Bessarabia/Moldavian SSR in mid-June 1941. Enhancing Security, a Social Engineering Operation, or something else?

In an article published in 2005 in a Harvard journal, the Russian-Canadian historian Alexander Statiev claimed that Soviet mass deportations from the new Soviet western borderlands on the eve of the German attack on the USSR in summer 1941 were determined mainly by security reasons. I challenge this approach in this study. I argue that, more like the mass deportations from the Baltic republics, weeks before 22 June 1941, the forced population resettlement from Bessarabia, and Northern Bukovina, seized by the Soviets from Romania a year prior, were conceived as purge campaigns as well, much in line with Soviet policing doctrine of the previous decade. An alternative theory related to the eve of the war deportations was put forward by two distinguished professors of Tartu University in Estonia, Olaf Mertelsmann and Aigi Rahi-Tamm. According to them, these mass deportations from Estonia, and implicitly from the Soviet Western borderlands as a whole, should be understood not as motivated by state security reasons in the incidence of war, but as purge or social engineering operations. Drawing on David Shearer and Paul Hagenloh, I argue, however, that the enhancing security thesis and the social engineering one are not mutually exclusive but rather complement each other.

Short historical background

In the interwar years, Bessarabia, a former Tsarist province for a century (1812–1917) became part of the Romanian Kingdom. By the end of the First World War, the ethnic composition of Bessarabia had changed dramatically, but still, the ethnic Romanians made up a slight majority. The Soviet Union, however, did not recognize the Union of Bessarabia with Romania (27 March 1918) and tried to recover it several times. The last attempt was setting up an abortive rebellion in South Bessarabia in September 1924, at Tatarbunar, on the Black Sea shores, inhabited by large swaths of population highly dissatisfied with Romanian policies both in social and ethnic realms. In the late 1930s, the geopolitical situation in the region changed, and Moscow took the opportunity to claim Bessarabia as a former Tsarist territory. Besides, Moscow claimed that the area was inhabited by a majority of Moldavians, deemed to be ethnically different from Romanians. Accordingly, the Soviet-Nazi Pact, known as the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, of 23 August 1939, stipulated that Bessarabia was part of the Soviet sphere of influence. On 28 June 1940, the Red Army invaded Eastern Romania. It occupied Bessarabia together with Northern Bukovina, a territory that

did not belong to the Tsarist Empire and that was not mentioned in the 1939 Nazi--Soviet Pact. Contrary to the ethnographical evidence reckoned by the Soviets before and afterwards, the Soviet ultimatum sent to Bucharest on 26 June 1940 stipulated that Bessarabia was inhabited by a majority of Ukrainians. This claim went in contradistinction to both Tsarist and Soviet statistics, but it was meant at that moment to serve the narrative outside the Soviet Union that occupying Romanian territories was nothing more than the continuation of the unification of Ukrainian-inhabited territories commencing a year before with the annexation of ex-Polish territories.[1]

On 2 August 1940, a Moldavian Union republic was proclaimed in Moscow by a session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Immediately after the occupation, the NKVD, the Soviet political police, became one of the leading institutions in the Sovietization of the former Romanian territory. Archival documents disclosed after the year 2010 from the former KGB archives in Chișinău register no less than 136 persons executed by the Soviets in 1940–1941 in the Moldavian SSR (further used also in the abbreviated form, MSSR). The majority of them were former Romanian gendarmes and collaborators of Siguranța, the Romanian political police in the interwar period. Another category of victims were active members of the Romanian political life from 1918 to 1940. In the former category, persons of Slavic origin accounted for about 70%, with the rest being ethnic Romanians, one Armenian, one Jew, etc.[2] The available data are insufficient so far to put forward an explanation related to the ethnic composition of this contingent slotted for physical elimination. The late historian, Gheorghe Palade from the State University in Chișinău, hypothesized that it could be that the Soviets were more lenient in this period to ethnic Romanians than to Ukrainians and Russians and other Russian-speaking minorities, and hence the difference in punishment. In other words, it might be that the Soviets had higher expectations from Slavs as far as loyalty concerns. Their implication in Romanian security services was seen as high treason both to the Soviet state and their ethnic groups forming the backbone of the USSR. Conversely, ethnic Romanians displaying more eagerness to collaborate with the state in which they made up a majority was something logical and predictable.[3]

Preparation for the mid-June 1941 deportation

Large-scale arrests and political convictions took place later. The issue of deporting undesirable social strata and other socio-professional categories was raised in the autumn of 1940. On 11 November 1940, under the confidential order No. 29032 of the

1 See more in KING, Charles: *Moldovans. Cultural Policy between Romania and Russia*. Hoover Institution Press, Stanford 2000, pp. 36–62; CAȘU, Igor: Considerații despre ultimatumul sovietic adresat României în iunie 1940 (Notes on the Soviet ultimatum to Romania in June 1940). *Revista de Istorie a Moldovei*, 2004, No. 4, pp. 34–48.

2 See details in CAȘU, Igor: *Dușmanul de clasă. Represiuni politice, violență și rezistență în R(A)SS Moldovenească, 1924–1956* (Class Enemy. Political Repressions, violence and resistance in Moldavia /A/SSR, 1924–1956). Cartier, Chișinău 2015, pp. 119–144.

3 Author's conversation with Professor Gheorghe Palade, Chișinău, 24. 1. 2016.

Moldavian NKVD, County and district NKVD sections were ordered to keep a record of all anti-Soviet elements. These included former landowners, tradespeople, high-ranking public servants from the police and gendarmerie, Romanian security agents, ex-white guards, and leaders of political parties in the interwar Romanian Bessarabia regardless of their ideological affiliation. Almost two months after the issuance of the order, Deputy Commissar of the Moldavian NKVD, Iosif Mordovets ascertained that a significant part of the district and county officers failed to fulfil the order. Among them were Chișinău town and all districts from Chișinău County, the districts of Briceni, Lipcani, Chișcăreni, Edineț, Brătușeni, Ungheni, Balatina, and Râscani, all the districts of Bălți County; the districts of Căușeni, Comrat and Căinari of Bender County; Răspopeni and Susleni, Orhei County; Cotiujeni, Vertiujeni, Soroca, Zgurița, Otaci, Ocnița, Soroca County; Taraclia, Congaz, Vulcănești, and Cahul County.[4]

Due to this generalized failure to compile the lists of anti-Soviet elements, the NKVD officials in Chișinău prolonged the deadline for more than two weeks, until 25 January. At the same time, Mordovets recalled that the lists had to be accompanied by questionnaires annexed to the order of 11 November 1940, and other information about the targeted people. The required related documents differed from one socio-professional category to another. Certificates issued by village councils were required for former landlords and "kulaks". Those placed in the category of manufacturers and big traders needed certificates from district financial sections, or copies of the official records of interrogation of witnesses confirming their status. Former public servants – policemen, gendarmes, secret service agents – besides certificates from their place of residence, also had to submit copies of archive documents proving their status.[5] The identity of former white guard members and members of Romanian political parties had to be confirmed by witnesses during interrogation. The deputy head of the republic's NKVD said that arguments should be brought in favour of the need to deport other socio-professional categories falling under the order of 11 November 1940, such as teachers, writers, painters, artists, doctors, engineers, agronomists, and others.[6] There is no clear information on the matter. Still, it can be inferred from the available documentation that at the end of January – beginning of February 1941, the Soviet political police already had the lists of the most important, potential, or virtual enemies of the regime.

On 31 May 1941, the representative to Moldavia of the Central Committee (CC) of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party (CP/b/) of the Soviet Union and of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR, Serghei Arsenievici Goglidze (1901–1953)[7],

4 *The Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Moldova*, former Ministerstvo Vnutrennikh Del Moldavskoi SSR (Arhiva Ministerului de Interne al Republicii Moldova, fostul MVD al RSS Moldovenești, hereafter referred to as AMAIRM–MVD), Fund 19 (First Special Department), inv. 1, dosar (d.) 2, Ukazaniia, perepiska i spiski na SOE, vyslannyi iz MSSR (Orders, correspondence and lists of special contingent deported from MSSR), 13. 6. 1941, pp. 1, 3.

5 Ibid., p. 1.

6 Ibid., p. 2.

7 Ironically enough, Goglidze would become a victim of political repressions too. He was arrested in July 1953 and executed in December the same year, being accused of belonging to the Beria group.

sent a report to Stalin. He listed the reasons why, from his point of view, undesirable elements had to be arrested or deported. The decision, however, had been taken in Moscow before, and his visit to Chișinău starting on 7 May 1941, was aimed at identifying the most dangerous socio-professional categories, estimating their number and organizing their transportation and other aspects related to deportation. According to Goglidze, the most *dangerous elements* were the former members of the Iron Guard (Garda de Fier), a political organization deemed to be *the most clandestine organization, having years-long experience of illegal activities*, having *terrorist staff organized in special troops*. The members of another far-right formation that operated before 1938 – National Christian Party (Partidul Național Creștin) – were considered dangerous too because of their *counter-revolutionary activities* given that they were believed to still have tight relations with bodies from the right bank of the Prut river (Romania after Soviet territorial losses of 1940), despite drastic control set at the border after 28 June 1940. Former members of interwar Romanian democratic parties – the National Peasants' Party (Partidul Național Țărănesc) and the National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal) – were among those targeted for deportation as they allegedly tried to organize illegal activities. These two Romanian democratic and pro-Western parties had about 1,000 identified members remaining in Bessarabia. Other targeted cohorts to be annihilated were big landowners (137 people), policemen and gendarmes (440), former Russian white guard members during the Russian Civil War (83) or former officers of the Romanian Army taking anti-Soviet actions (64), big real estate owners (652) and the big traders (1,948). The category of anti-Soviet elements also included *prostitutes, who, after the establishment of Soviet power, no longer provided useful social labour*. But contrary to initial lists that accounted for dozens, only two from this category would end up being deported.

All in all, Moscow's representative to Chișinău suggested deporting about 5,000 family heads together with their family members. In his report to Stalin, Goglidze did not specify the deportation date. Still, judging by the tone of the letter, it can be assumed that the issue was very urgent and was part of a bigger plan for cleansing the newly-acquired territories at the western border of the USSR.[8] While the planned number of deportees would coincide with the one envisaged in the correspondence sent to Stalin by Goglidze, the social composition of the actual cohorts will differ (see below).

Following Goglidze's request and as a result of Moscow's approval, in the first days of June of 1941, the chief of the NKVD of Moldavian SSR Nikolay Sazykin sent to district and county sections of political police and internal troops a guideline of instructions related to the organization of mass deportations scheduled for the night

KHLEVNIUK, Oleg V.: *The History of the Gulag. From Collectivisation to Great Terror*. Yale University Press, New Haven – London 2004, p. 348. Beria group referred to people connected to Lavrentiy Pavlovich Beria (1899–1953), former chief of NKVD, 1938–1945 and deputy chairman of the Soviet government, 1945–1953.

8 PASAT, Valeriu: *Trudnye stranitsy istorii Moldovy, 1940-e-1950-e gg.* (Difficult pages in the history of Moldova). Terra, Moscow 1994, pp. 147–148.

of 12 to 13 June. It specified that the operation should be conducted so as to avoid unwanted accidents and any excesses from both those included on lists and from people supportive of or hostile to the Soviet regime. Operative quarters, set up at the district and county level, were in charge of carrying out the operation. They had the task to use all NKGB[9] and NKVD collaborators, the three sections of the Commissariat of Defence, military commanders, employees of the political and ideological sector, servicemen of interior troops and NKVD border guards serving in districts and counties. The leadership of the operation was to be ensured by an operative group comprising representatives of the three key ministries involved: the one of state security (NKGB), the one of internal affairs (NKVD) and the one of defence (NKO).[10] According to instructions, the operation had to start at dawn and to last 24 hours. Before entering the house of a family due to be deported, the operative group had to establish precisely the address, entrances, and exits from the house to avoid any complications. Power representatives were advised to take precautionary measures and to prepare for possible resistance. Once in the house, the operative group had to specify the composition of the family and the whereabouts of every member at that moment. The category of "family members" included the wife, husband, children, parents, brothers, or sisters if they lived under the same roof and were supported by the head of the family. If other people lived in the dwelling, they had to be detained until their identity and relationship with the family were established. The next step was to search the house to make sure that there were no weapons, counter-revolutionary books, and foreign currency. After the search, an inventory of property had to be made in the presence of witnesses, such as neighbours, local party organizations, or the local administration.

Only after the search and property inventory, were family members to be informed about the deportation decision, how, and where they would be deported, while the head of the family was to be arrested. Next, the family had the right to pack their luggage, which should not have exceeded 100 kg per family, regardless of the number of their members. They were allowed to take clothes, bed linen, footwear, dishes, and foodstuffs for a month. The deportees were also allowed to take money (officially, the amount was not limited) and jewellery, such as rings, watches, earrings, bracelets, brooches, etc. The rest of the deportees' property could be sold by relatives or neighbours within 10 days, with the money due to be subsequently transferred to the deported family. Should the head of the family or any other family member be ill, it was mentioned that they were to be deported only after they had recovered.

The deportees were to be transported by cars or carriages to the closest railway station. This was usually done by transportation means that belonged to the deported family, after which the family was taken into custody by the local authorities. If the deported family had no transportation means, the village council had to provide them with one. Concerning instructions given to operative groups and those accompanying them (servicemen and local activists), they were instructed to use guns only

9 People's Commissariat for State Security, a new Commissariat created in April 1941 as a result of splitting of the NKVD in two.

10 People's Commissariat for Defence.

in extreme cases, such as attacks against the operative group, resistance, or attempts to escape. It was strictly forbidden for the operative group to confiscate from deported families anything other than weapons, counter-revolutionary books, and foreign currency. If it failed to follow this requirement, the operative group could be subject to criminal sentencing.

While the family was being transported to the nearest railway station, the operative group had to hand the nominal list and files of deportees and arrestees to the closest train station. Two files were put together for each family. The first file concerned the head of the family with all compromising materials, and the second one comprised material about the other family members. The second file (on the family members) was supposed to contain a copy of the file of the head of the family.[11]

The files of deportees were prepared beforehand. In villages, peasants were interrogated several evenings in a row. All family members were deported, including pregnant women. This is what happened to the Bodareu family from Vadul lui Vodă, deported at the beginning of the summer of 1941: *Our father started coming home late every evening as he was being held for interrogation. Uncertainty created a very heavy atmosphere in our house. Our parents did not discuss these problems in front of us. They did not feel guilty; therefore, they were hoping that they would continue to work, and things would settle down. On the evening of 13* (actually 12 – author's note) *June, our father was summoned for interrogation and arrested. On the same evening, they sequestrated our horses and carriage. On the morning of 13 June 1941, our mother woke us up crying. She hugged us and told us to get dressed. We were scared and trembling. That summer night seemed so cold to us! Our father was brought home with his hands tied behind his back. There was a group of armed servicemen in the courtyard. In front, there was a man who announced to us that we were going to be deported. He put a gun to our father's head and forced him into a carriage. They put our brother Gheorghe next to him. Our mother was pregnant. She started resisting, saying that she was pregnant, but the head of the group brutally stopped her. They loaded us and our mother in the carriage with horses they sequestrated on the eve. My brother Gheorghe managed to grab a sack of flour and throw it into our carriage. They allowed us to take up to 100 kg of luggage*.[12]

The mid-June 1941 deportation from Moldavian SSR in motion

The arrest and deportation operation in the MSSR was scheduled for the night of 12 to 13 June 1941. It was part of a larger "cleansing" operation in the newly-occupied territories of the USSR in 1939–1940. This operation started on 22 May and ended on 20 June 1941, only two days before Hitler's troops invaded the USSR.[13] According

11 *AMAIRM–MVD*, Fund 19, inv. 1, d. 2, Ukazaniia, perepiska i spiski na SOE, vyslannyi iz MSSR, 13. 6. 1941, pp. 4–12.

12 BODAREU, Galina: "O familie deportată din Vadul lui Vodă: între viață, durere, suferință și dezamăgirii". *PROMEMORIA. Revista Institutului de Istorie Socială*, 2012, Vol. 3, No. 4, p. 270–271.

13 WERTH, Nicolas: Introduction (Vvedenie). In: MIRONENKO, Sergey V. – WERTH, Nicolas (eds.): *Istoriia Stalinskogo Gulaga. Tom 1*, *Massovye repressii v SSSR* (History of Stalin's Gulag. Vol. 1. Mass Repressions in the USSR). Rosspen, Moscow 2004, p. 76. See also STATIEV, Alexander: "Motivations and Goals of Soviet deportations in the Western Borderland". *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2005, Vol. 28, No. 6, pp. 977–1003.

to a report by the USSR deputy Commissar of State Security, Bogdan Kobulov, dated 13 June 1941, the operation involved 32,423 people from former Romanian territories – Bessarabia, Northern Bucovina, and Herța County. Among them, 6,250 people were arrested. All of them were family heads. In addition, 26,173 family members were deported to special settlements.[14] A report on the results of the operation presented to Stalin, Beria, and Molotov on 14 June 1941 showed that the number of arrestees and deportees fell from the initial 32,423 to 31,419. Where did this difference come from, and why does it matter? Available data only covers Bessarabia, where 1,183 people managed to avoid forced displacement. Among them, 3 people managed to hide, 133 were not arrested because of sickness, 318 changed their address shortly beforehand, and 829 were removed from the lists, with accusations against them being dropped due to "insufficient compromising materials".[15] There is comprehensive data on why dozens of people from Vertiujeni district, Soroca County, managed to avoid deportation. Some of them were simply on business trips, such as Maxim Coșciug from Stoicani village, who on the night of 12 to 13 June 1941, was in Soroca. Izya Cușnir from Vertiujeni village was at his relatives in Rezina town; the wife of Peysya Zimbenberg, Lyuba Zimbenberg, as well as Imira Goikhman and Moisey Goikhman were in a hospital in Soroca town, whereas Rivka Gherman was in a hospital in Chișinău. Others were in Chișinău for studies, such as the daughter of trader Volf Plitman, named Musya, a student at the Teachers' Training Institute. Others, such as Haya Tesler, two weeks before deportation moved in with their sons. Peysya Zimbenberg was transferred to Cernăuți for work, and the authorities failed to establish his exact address to deport him. Elena Bălănuță, the wife of deportee Vasile Bălănuță, a wealthy peasant, managed to hide right when the operation was being conducted. Elizaveta Codreanu, 17-years-old, daughter of Gheorghe Codreanu, who served as a public servant in Romania from 1924 through 1938, was not at home at the moment of deportation, just like Lidia Secară, the 18-year-old daughter of Vasile Secară, etc.[16]

All available information indicates that about 1/3 of those escaping deportation changed their residence by chance, not on purpose, to avoid being forcefully resettled outside MSSR. The other 2/3 of the individuals initially introduced in the list but avoiding their fate was due to insufficient compromising materials. Hence it is safe to admit that the preparations for the deportations were made in secret and both party and government agencies in the republic's centre and at the local level kept the information undisclosed until the launch of the operation. This contrasts with the postwar deportation of early July 1949, in the wake of which rumours widely circulated about the upcoming operation. Because of that, the great bulk of those evading deportation left home on the eve of the operation on purpose either by changing

14 PASAT, Valeriu: *Trudnye stranitsy istorii Moldovy, 1940-e-1950-e gg*, p. 164. The pattern of arresting the family heads and sending the family members to special settlements became an established practice from the early 1930s. See more in VIOLA, Lynne: *The Unknown Gulag. The Lost World of Stalin's Special Settlements*. Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009.

15 PASAT, Valeriu: *Trudnye stranitsy istorii Moldovy, 1940-e-1950-e gg*, pp. 165–166.

16 *AMAIRM–MVD*, Fund 19, inv. 1, d. 2, Ukazaniia, perepiska i spiski na SOE, vyslannyi iz MSSR, 13. 6. 1941, pp. 151–157.

their residence to other localities or by hiding at their relatives' property or in places like nearby forests. The sources of information leakage concerning the preparations were various, such as local party and state officials, but also MGB[17] or MVD[18] operatives or their wives. One of the reasons for this significant difference between this aspect of the 1941 and 1949 deportations might have been the low representation of local population in the structures of power both at the central and local level in the MSSR in 1940–1941 and a higher rate of local representatives within the regime after the war. The local functionaries felt obliged to warn their relatives or friends that the Soviet regime had targeted them while the cadres coming from outside experienced the urge to share the confidential information with the locals much less. The other explanation of higher discretion in the 1941 compared to the 1949 deportation could pertain to the different contexts in which they were organized, and the intensity of pressure and threat party and police officials were under. In the former instance, the pressure and the risk of being harshly punished for disclosure of secret information was much higher as the war was imminent and inevitable. Martial law was very much in effect from June 1940.[19]

As concerns the ethnic origins of deportees, it is still not known how many ethnic Romanians and how many minority representatives were dispatched for Siberia on 12–13 June 1940. According to some partial estimation, based on the *Book of Memory*, Jews accounted for about 33% in some Bessarabian settlements, including Chișinău and Bălți.[20] At the same time, as of January 1953, ethnic Romanians accounted for about 50% of Gulag inmates and special settlers from Moldavian SSR.[21] If these data are accurate, one can infer that in the mass operation of mid-June 1941 alone, the ratio of the titular nationality was even lower given the high number of Jews among the tradesmen and other urban professions targeted specifically in that deportation. In this, I agree with Statiev that the ethnic factor did not play an essential role in the Soviet mass deportations in Western borderlands in the wake of the war, save in the case of the Polish osadniki.[22] Indeed, the selection of the deported was made according to the class criterion, as claimed officially. Yet, the ethnic component cannot be discarded altogether. By targeting political, economic, and cultural elites of the interwar Bessarabia, in the mass operation of mid-June 1941, the Soviet regime decimated the national elites of the main ethnic groups. Not only Romanian or Jewish elites were subject to forced resettlement, but also Ukrainian, Russian, Bulgarian, and Gagauz ones, to name the main ethnic communities of Bessarabia at that time.[23] The same is

17 Ministry of State Security, the name of the Soviet political police from 1946 to 1953.

18 Ministry of Internal Affairs, the name of the Soviet civil or regular police from 1946 up to 1991.

19 See more on the 1949 deportation in CAȘU, Igor: *Dușmanul de clasă*, pp. 256–280

20 FRILING, Tuvia – IOANID, Radu – IONESCU, Mihail E. (eds.): *Comisia Internațională pentru Studierea Holocaustului din Romania*. Polirom, Iași 2004, p. 105.

21 BUGAY, Nikolay: „40-e-50-gody: Posledstviia deportatsii narodov" (1940–1950s: The consequences of the deportation of peoples). *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, 1992, No. 2, p. 142.

22 STATIEV, Alexander: *"Motivations and Goals of Soviet deportations in the Western Borderland"*, p. 977. Osadniki – Polish colonists settled in Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia after the Soviet-Polish war of 1920.

23 For the full list of names, see POSTICĂ, Elena (ed.): *Cartea Memoriei. Catalog al victimelor totalitarismului communist* (Memory Book. Inventory of Victims of Communist totalitarian Regime), Vol. 1–4. Știința, Chișinău 1999–2004.

true for the Baltic republics as not only ethnic Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians were targeted but also the elites of other ethnic groups.[24]

In their own words: The memories of deportations vs. official evidence

How exactly did the deportation take place? In this respect, there is a difference between the official instructions and the eyewitness testimonies. As a rule, the family targeted for deportation was woken up at night, several people wearing military uniforms and others in plain clothes were breaking into their house, checking their passports and checking if their names were found on the list compiled by the village council and approved by the republic's government. Next, they made a short statement: *In the name of the supreme leadership, you are deported to remote Siberian regions*. Contrary to instructions, some families were given only 40 minutes to prepare their luggage instead of the 2 hours officially provided for, and the baggage should not have exceeded 40 kg, despite the official instructions of 100 kg.[25] In this way, the lives of those deported were being changed in less than an hour. Subsequently, they were transported by cars or carriages to the nearest railway station, where they were distributed into trains depending on the destination set by the NKVD ahead of time.

Those who expressed sympathy with the deportation victims ran the risk of facing trouble. From the viewpoint of the Soviet authorities, it was more serious and more unacceptable when some party members acquainted with the shortlisted ones displayed their sympathy. Such an incident took place in Chișinău on the night of 12 to 13 June 1941. At about 2:00 a. m., an operative group, comprising C. S. Dubchyak, a lieutenant colonel at the NKVD school, I. V. Stiborski, police lieutenant colonel, and Cherkasov from the Agricultural Institute, arrested citizen Bistritski, residing on 31 Gogol Street. As they needed a witness to confirm and sign the inventory paper, the three knocked at the door of a neighbour named I. H. Ivanov, whom they had to ask for 45 minutes to open the door. He probably feared being arrested and deported himself. He agreed to witness the arrest of his neighbour with whom, as it turned out, he was on good terms. The three members of the operative group were highly astonished and annoyed at the behaviour of Ivanov, who was a party member, when at 6:30 in the morning, Bistritski and his family were loaded into a car to head to the Revaca railway terminal. At that moment, Ivanov and his wife kissed the Bistritskis and their daughter. Later on, at a party meeting, Ivanov was accused of displaying open and sincere empathy towards his deported neighbour's family, the more so as he had tears in his eyes when they separated. The report that included this "incident" underlined that *the facts, as mentioned earlier, prove that comrade Ivanov had tight relationships with the Bistritski family* and that *the behaviour of comrade Ivanov during the removal of the hostile class element Bistritski was of an anti-party nature*. The fact was

24 MISIUNAS, Romuald J. – TAAGEPERA, Rein: *The Baltic States. Years of Dependence, 1940–1991*. University of California Press, Berkeley 1993, pp. 39–43; MIRONENKO, Sergey V. – WERTH, Nicolas (eds.): *Istoriia Stalinskogo Gulaga. Tom 1*, *Massovye repressii v SSSR*, pp. 394–399, 402–408.

25 Memoirs of Vadim Pirogan (1921–2007). In: SAKA, Serafim (ed.): *Basarabia în Gulag*. Editura Uniunii Scriitorilor, Chișinău 1995, p. 84.

even more reprehensible from the point of view of the party organization as Ivanov was hired within the Central Committee of the Moldavian Communist (Bolshevik) Party.[26] The full name of the head of the family was Solomon Aronovichi Bistritski, who can be found on the list of those deported from Chișinău in 1940–1941. Yet, it is not specified what he was accused of and what his social status was.[27] Most probably, he was an ex-merchant or an owner of a shop. This and other cases shed light on inter-human relationships during deportations, pointing out the fact that group solidarity and empathy among acquaintances, friends, and neighbours did not disappear during critical moments, despite the risk of punishment for those displaying them openly. On the other hand, one can notice that the party claimed complete and blind subordination of its members, with its decisions having to be accepted and put in place without any opposition.

Decades on, Vladimir Bodareu recalled conditions in the train, the reaction of their children and shortages they had to bear on their way to Kazakhstan: *I saw my father in the railway station in Chișinău. They allowed my brother Gheorghe to come with us. They put us on different trains. My father was crying. He managed to tell our mother to take care of us. This was the last time I saw my father alive* [...]. *We stood one more night in the station. The next day our train headed in an unknown direction. Children were crying. Some were speechless out of fear, others wanted food and water. They put us in a carriage in which coal used to be shipped* [...]. *The carriages were full to bursting. My face and arms were black. The trip lasted two weeks, practically without water or food.*

Boris Vasiliev, a 9-year-old boy at the time of deportation, recalled those events decades on: *They huddled us into carriages as if we were cattle* [...]. *On the morning of 15 June 1941, the train was crossing the Dniester in Tighina. It stopped in Tiraspol for quite a while; it seemed like an eternity to us* [...]. *The victims were suffocating* [...] *urine was flowing on the floor, whereas faecal* [...] *was staying there; you couldn't even move at all. People were fainting because of the stink* [...]. *Men looked stoned; women were crying and cursing the day they were born; children were shouting, sticking to their mothers' skirts* [...]. *When mothers wanted to nurse their babies, men were cordoning them off so that nobody could see their breast and they were feeding their babies in a hurry* [...].[28]

Regarding the transportation of deportees in carriages, these were meant for freight and were adapted in a hurry, so as to transport people. Official data concern-

26 *The Archive of the former Institute of Party History of the Central Committee of Communist Party of Moldova*, currently *The Archive of Social-Political Organizations of the Republic of Moldova* (Arhiva Organizațiilor Social-Politice din Republica Moldova, hereafter AOSPRM), Fund 51, Central Committee of the Communist Party of Moldavia. inv. 1, d. 74, Spravka o rassledovanii faktov nepartiinogo povedeniia chlena VKP(b) Ivanova I. Kh. (Report on the investigation of facts about the non-party behaviour of the member of all-Union Communist /Bolshevik/ Party Ivanov I. Kh), 18. 6. 1941, pp. 70–72. The document does not give full names of Dubchyak, Cherkasov, Stiborski, Bistritski and Ivanov.

27 *AMAIRM–MVD*, Fund 19, inv. 1, d. 2, Ukazaniia, perepiska i spiski na SOE, vyslannyi iz MSSR, 13. 6. 1941, p. 272. His name is not in POSTICĂ, Elena (ed.): *Cartea Memoriei. Catalogul al victimelor totalitarismului communist*, Vol. 1–4, either in Volume 1 in the chapter on Chișinău (589 people) or in Volume 4 in the annexes, where the list of deportees from Chișinău in 1940–1941 is supplemented by another 1,193 people.

28 VASILIEV, Boris: *Stalin mi-a furat copilăria*. Editura Baștina-Radog, Chișinău 2010, pp. 127–128.

ing carriages differ from the ones provided by witnesses and victims. Thus, according to official statistics, one carriage was meant for 20 people on average. But according to survivors' confessions, sometimes 70–100 people had to share the same freight carriage for 2–3 weeks until they reached their destination. Officially, the daily ration of bread was 600 gr per person.[29] The daily ration of water was 200 ml, and some deportees were given only salted fish, a slice of black bread, or sour porridge of oats or barley.[30] Others were given 300 gr of bread and boiled water in the morning and nothing more the whole day.[31] Unlike them, train guards stayed in first-class carriages, those without ranks were paid 8 roubles a day, and officers were paid 26 roubles a day (calculated for 25 days); doctors were paid 800 roubles per month, paramedics 400 roubles per month and nurses 350 roubles per month, whereas the regime allotted three roubles per day for one deportee.[32]

A distinctive feature of the mid-June 1941 deportation compared to the 1949 one rested in the separation of families as the political police pleased. Family heads were sent to concentration camps for war prisoners – 5,000 people to Kozelshchansk and another 3,000 to Putivlsk, whereas their family members were sent to special settlements for deportees, in the regions of Karaganda (Kazakhstan), Omsk, and Novosibirsk (Central Siberia).[33] It turns out that the number of family heads that were to be arrested and their deported family members proposed by Goglidze on 31 May 1941, was exceeded by about 60%. According to a document dated 15 September 1941, signed by Mikhail Kondratov, the head of the section for special settlements and labour of GULAG within the NKVD, deported family members alone from the MSSR (that is, excluding family heads) amounted to 22,468 people, of whom 9,954 were deported to Kazakhstan, 352 to Komi Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), 470 to Krasnoyarsk region, 6,085 to Omsk region, and 5,787 to Novosibirsk region.[34] One can see that, despite the initial plans, 352 reached Komi and 470 Krasnoyarsk and it is still unknown what caused this change in destination. One explanation might be that family members went there to follow their family heads sentenced to concentration camps in the region. It is more difficult to find a reasonable explanation for those who reached Krasnoyarsk since no family head from the MSSR was sentenced to that region. Probably, those 470 people were redirected for unknown reasons to Krasnoyarsk from the neighbouring region of Novosibirsk, which is mentioned in the list of deportees from the MSSR.[35]

29 PASAT, Valeriu: *Trudnye stranitsy istorii Moldovy, 1940-e-1950-e gg*, p. 161.

30 OLARU-CEMÂRTAN, Viorica: "Deportarea masivă a populației din RSSM din 12–13 iunie 1941" (Mass deportation of population from MSSR on 12 to 13 June 1941). *Destin românesc*, 2006, No. 3, p. 65; POPOVICI, Ludmila – LAMPHEAR, Molly (eds.): *Destine spulberate/Shattered destines*. Centrul de Reabilitare a Victimelor Torturii „Memoria", Chișinău 2005, pp. 21, 25.

31 Memoirs of Vadim Pirogan. In: SAKA, Serafim (ed.): *Basarabia în Gulag*, p. 99.

32 PASAT, Valeriu: *Trudnye stranitsy istorii Moldovy, 1940-e-1950-e gg*, p. 154–156.

33 Ibid., pp. 159–160.

34 MIRONENKO, Sergey V. – WERTH, Nicolas (eds.): *Istoriia Stalinskogo Gulaga. Tom 1. Massovye repressii v SSSR*, p. 407. No full name known.

35 GUR'IANOV, Aleksander: „Masshtaby deportatsii naseleniia v glub' SSSR v maye 1941" (The scale of the population's deportation in the interior of the USSR, May 1941); GUR'IANOV, Aleksander: *Repressii protiv polyakov i pol'skikh grazhdan* (Repressions against Poles and Polish citizens). Zven'ia, Moscow 1997, p. 236.

An eyewitness describes the separation of fathers from their families and the life in the train carriages as follows: *We were all waiting for the night to come, as the heat cooled down and we could breathe fresh and cold air. And nobody, absolutely nobody suspected that it was going to be the most tragic night, the most awful night in our lives, the night after which men would die, without seeing their wives and children ever again. In contrast, wives and children would never see their husbands and fathers also. By midnight, the locked doors opened (the communists used to commit crimes at night, like ordinary bandits), and another kind of NKVD-ists entered the carriage, holding by belts some wild animals with their mouth opened, these were dog-wolves* [...]. *And the crime started all over again. The communist genocide started. Our family plaited as bread and salt: my mother was holding her child to her breast by one hand, and the other was held by my father, my little sisters and I were sticking to our mother's skirt and our father's feet. Three lads got closer to us, speaking an unknown language, with their dirty, black faces, narrow eyes and squat noses. Two of them twisted my father's hands at the back. My mother started to cry out, holding as strong as she could to my father's neck* [...]. *"Don't leave me, Ilie, with four children among foreigners, without bread or clothes..." The third torturer put the gun between my parents, taking by force my mother and the child she was holding from my father. He barred her from him. The other torturers were carrying my father out of the carriage* [...]. *I have never seen him since then* [...]. *All the men, old men, and young men over 18 were hunted from the carriage this way. This was my first day and my first night lived in the USSR, across the Dniester, where "People breathe so freely"* (A line from a famous Soviet poem – author's note).[36]

Zooming down: Deportation at the local level

Data available for certain districts or counties reveal interesting aspects unknown until recently concerning the deportation on the night of 12 to 13 June 1941. Archive data for Călărași district, Chișinău County, show that the initial list of deportees was several times longer than the final one. There was a list of "kulaks", including 159 family heads, and a list of anti-Soviet elements, including 33 people. Of the total of 192 families, only 66, that is, one third were selected for deportation.[37] Further research will shed light on how exactly deportees were selected and to what extent there was some collusion between those initially targeted and finally removed from the lists, on the one hand, and the local authorities, on the other hand. Perhaps, some of them bribed the Soviet authorities to avoid deportation. The gap between the initial and the final number of deported families in Călărași district raises a number of questions to which we have no answer yet. For instance, to what extent this deportation operation differs from the previous ones in the Soviet Union, during the Great

36 Sentence frequently used by the communist propaganda. VASILIEV, Boris: *Stalin mi-a furat copilăria*, pp. 127–128. Another witness too confirmed the separation of families: Lucia Caranicolov, born in 1932, deported in 1941 to Novosibirsk region. See POPOVICI, Ludmila – LAMPHEAR, Molly (eds.): *Destine spulberate/Shattered destinies*, pp. 12, 88.

37 *AMAIRM–MVD*, Fund 19, inv. 1, d. 2, Ukazaniia, perepiska i spiski na SOE, vyslannyi iz MSSR, 13. 6. 1941, pp. 32–35, 60–74.

Terror of 1937–1938, which targeted categories of "enemies" and a type of punishment was provided for every category, such as arrest, imprisonment, deportation, or death sentences. Also, for Călărași district, there is exact data on the social status and socio-professional category of deportees, their wealth, and political activity before 1940. Thus, 11 family heads were former policemen or gendarmes, 23 were former big merchants, 11 were local leaders of Romanian political parties during the interwar period, 4 had defected from the Soviet Union, one family was deported because its head had previously been sentenced to death.[38] Of all those included on the final lists – 66 family heads – 49 were Romanian, 9 Jews, 7 Russians, and 1 Pole. In terms of property, most of them lived in villages and owned from 10 to 30 hectares of farmland, while those involved in trade had a turnover of several hundreds of thousands of lei annually. With regards to their political affiliation, most of them were liberals (National Liberal Party – 39 people, including a member of the organization of liberal dissidents headed by historian Gheorghe Brătianu), followed by National Christian Party members (10), members of the People's Party (3), and members of the National Peasants' Party (2).[39]

As a rule, every operative group had the task of arresting 2–3 families and bringing them to the established railway station. Therefore, on the night of 12 to 13 June 1941 there were plenty of operative groups on the ground with their number being commensurate with the number of families due to be deported. An explanation to this is the eagerness of the authorities to prevent the detainees from evading them and to conduct the deportation operation as discretely as possible. Thus, in the village Mașcăuți (presently, Criuleni district), there were three operative groups, comprising 2 or 3 members in charge of the operation and two servicemen or militiamen accompanying them as well as representatives of the village authorities. They ensured the arrest and deportation of 8 families with a total of 26 people whom they transported in 7 carriages. In the village of Bălășești (presently, Sângerei district), one four-member family was deported. In the village of Murovaia (now, Orhei district), two operative groups were in charge of the deportation of two families, headed by Epifan Crețu and Grigore Solomon, comprising ten people. In the village of Molovata (presently, Dubăsari district) four operative groups deported nine families comprising 29 members.[40]

As many as 1,315 train carriages were allocated for the deportation of the night of 12 to 13 June. They were based in different railway terminals all over Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina: 90 carriages in Taraclia, 44 carriages in Basarabeasca, 44 in Căușeni, 48 in Bender, 187 in Chișinău, 48 in Ungheni, 83 in Ocnița, 133 in Bălți, 73 in Florești, 40 in Râbnița, 38 in Bolgrad, 103 in Arțiz and 340 in Cernăuți.[41] There is more information on how deportation took place in Chișinău County. Fifteen carriages were allocated for Leova district, with the deportees due to be brought to the

38 Ibid., p. 115.
39 Ibid., pp. 32–35.
40 *AMAIRM–MVD*, Fund 19, inv. 1, d. 2, Spisok kulakov, prozhivayushchikh v Karalashskom rayone, Kishinevskogo uezda Moldavskoi SSR, 12. 6. 1941, pp. 64–65.
41 PASAT, Valeriu: *Trudnye stranitsy istorii Moldovy, 1940-e-1950-e gg*, p. 153.

railway station in Iargara, whereas the terminal in Basarabeasca was where deportees boarded trains to be transported to the eastern regions of the USSR; 8 carriages were allocated for Călărași district, with the deportees being gathered in the Călărași station and the final embarkation station being in Revaca; 15 carriages were allocated for deportees from villages of the Lăpușna district, they left from Revaca to the embarkation station in Bender; 7 carriages were meant for Budești district, they took off in Mereni heading to Bender; 14 carriages were for Nisporeni district, the railway station where deportees gathered was in Bucovăț, with the embarkation station being in Revaca; 11 carriages were for Kotovski district at the station Revaca; 11 carriages were allocated for the districts of Strășeni and Chișinău, with Revaca being the embarkation station for both of them.[42] From the initial station to the embarkation station, there were 5 mandatorily armed representatives of the operative groups in every carriage. All in all, 2,268 people were deported from Chișinău County, including 550 family heads sentenced to concentration camps and 1,718 family members, spouses, children or elderly people living together with them (sent to special settlements). As many as 131 police operatives were initially meant to carry out the operation in Chișinău, of whom 34 were from the NKGB, 35 from the NKVD (probably the state security department), and 62 militiamen (NKVD, department of civil police). Therefore, the operative group from Chișinău County insistently demanded, several days before the operation, to supplement their groups with 242, 241, and respectively 214 people from the "organs", that is, a total of 697. There were also other problems related to the organization of deportation and pointed out by the Moldavian NKGB representatives in the operative group in Chișinău County. One of them was the shortage of cars to transport deportees to railway stations. According to data of 9 June 1941, Leova district reported a shortage of 18 cars which were to transport 212 people, Nisporeni 13 cars for 165 people, Lăpușna 19 cars for 227 people, Vadul lui Vodă 10 cars for 115 people, Kotovski 12 cars for 136 people and Chișinău 17 cars for 200 people. Three days before the deportation operation, the county was lacking 89 transport means for 1,055 people, that is, an average of 12 people per car, plus the guards and luggage. Some districts such as Călărași and Strășeni had to transport the deportees by horse-driven carriages, whereas the transport means allocated to them were to be redirected to such districts as Lăpușna and Nisporeni, probably because the distance between them and the nearest railway station was greater than for the first two.[43] As a rule, thus, one car was meant to transport three families, every family having an average of 4 members, plus 100 kg of luggage and the guards.

42 *AMAIRM–MVD*, Fund 19, inv. 1, d. 2, Ukazaniia, perepiska i spiski na SOE, vyslannyi iz MSSR, 13. 6. 1941, p. 25.
43 Ibid., pp. 26–29.

Zooming up and down: Conceptualization by synchronic and diachronic comparison

According to available official evidence, on the night of 12 to 13 June 1941, 18,392 people were deported from the MSSR, and another 11,844 people from the other Romanian territories annexed to the USSR on 28 June 1940.[44] The legal basis of deportations from the MSSR and other territories annexed in the wake of the Soviet-German Pact of 1939 is rather unclear. Some researchers, such as Valeriu Pasat, assert that the deportations in 1940–1941 were based on a decision of 2 March 1940, on the deportation of Poles – the so-called "osadniki" from Ukraine and Western Belarus, and a decision of the CC of the CP(b) of the Soviet Union and the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR dated 14 May 1941, on the deportation of "counter-revolutionary" and "nationalist" elements from former Polish territories.[45] The decisions are believed to have been extended to the Baltic States and the occupied Romanian territories: Bessarabia, Northern Bucovina, and Herța County. Other researchers, such as Nicolas Werth and other editors of the series of documents on the Stalinist Gulag, believe that the decision to start deportations from these regions in May – June 1941 was based on a draft decision of the CC of the CP(b) of the Soviet Union and the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR dated 16 May 1941 on measures of "cleansing" the Lithuanian SSR, Latvian SSR and Estonian SSR from "anti-Soviet", "criminal" elements "dangerous from a social point of view",[46] which was subsequently extended to the Moldavian SSR as well, the counties of Cetatea Albă and Hotin (annexed to Ukraine), as well as Northern Bucovina.

The final composition of deportees from MSSR differed in some respect from the plan sent to Stalin in late May by Goglidze. More precisely, in a report sent to Vsevolod Nikolayevich Merkulov, the USSR Commissar of for State Security (NKGB) by Nikolay Stepanovich Sazykin, chief of the Moldavian NKGB on 19 June 1941, on the results of the deportation, the categories mentioned were as follows: former members of the bourgeois political parties and active members of White Guard organizations – 1,681 persons (and 5,353 members of their families); jail warders, gendarmes, police officers, as well as rank and file policemen – 389 persons (and 1,124 family members); large landowners, factory owners, ex-high-ranking state functionaries – 1,719 (plus 5,764 family members; ex-officers of Romanian, Polish and White Guards – 268 persons (and 623 family members). The other categories were Soviet refugees in interwar Romania (249 and 607, respectively), family members of persons condemned previously to execution (113), persons willing to repatriate in Romania after 28 June 1940 when the Red Army occupied Bessarabia but for certain reasons did not succeed in

44 PASAT, Valeriu: „Deportatsiia antisovetskikh elementov iz Moldavskoi SSR v 1941". In: DIMITRIENKO, V. P. (ed.): *Vlast' i obshchestvo v SSSR: politika repressii (1920–1940)* (Power and Society in USSR. Policy of repressions /1920–1940/). Institut Rossiiskoi Istrorii Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk, Moscow 1999, p. 297–328

45 PASAT, Valeriu: *Trudnye stranitsy istorii Moldovy, 1940-e-1950-e gg*, p. 146.

46 WERTH, Nicolas: Introduction. In: MIRONENKO, Sergey V. – WERTH, Nicolas (eds.): *Istoriia Stalinskogo Gulaga. Tom 1. Massovye repressii v SSSR*, pp. 76–77, 394–400.

doing so (36 and 101, respectively), prostitutes (2) and criminal elements (163 heads of families and 203 members of their families). In total, 4,507 heads of families were arrested and sent into camps, and 13,885 members of their families were sent to special settlements.[47]

These data on the social composition of the deportees are essential to address the main question this chapter raises. Namely, how can one define the mid-June 1941 mass deportation? A security operation organized in the wake of the imminent war with Nazi Germany and its satellites? The Russian-Canadian historian Alexander Statiev argued in support of this hypothesis. He refers to late May-mid June 1941 Soviet deportations from the Western borderlands in that *most Soviet deportations were pragmatic actions of a state facing an insurgency and unrestrained in its choice of coercive measures*.[48] One might ask if it was rather a social engineering operation much in accordance with many repression campaigns of the 1930s in the old Soviet territories. This version has been put forward by two Tartu University professors, Olaf Mertelsmann and Aigi Rahi-Tamm. In their words, in the deportations from Estonia in mid-June 1941 *the target groups included members of the national elite, their families, and "unreformed" criminals and prostitutes, indicating that social engineering and purging society of its "alien social elements" was the main goal rather than enhancing security in preparation of a war with Germany*.[49] Both approaches, the security argument, and social engineering thesis are useful in the endeavour to seek the motives and aims of the mass deportations on the eve of the German-Soviet war from former Romanian territories in particular. But also, from other Soviet Western borderlands, the Baltic States in particular, as well as Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia in so far as the contingents were more or less the same. Ostensibly, these two interpretations are bound to exclude each other. Which one is more convincing, or what if both are flawed in their way, given their implicit claim to exclude or downplay other explanatory factors? When answering this crucial question, one should take a broader view of the state terror campaigns during Stalinism. The best conceptualization of Soviet repressions to date has been provided by David Shearer and Paul Hagenloh. Both focus on the 1930s and offer insights into the pattern of Stalin's mass operations and many other small ones in between. According to Shearer, *repression became a fundamental part of the way the Stalinist regime related to its citizens: the way the regime attempted to impose public order and reshape the Soviet social body*. He stresses the fact that during the 1930s, the *Soviet leadership came to equate social order with the political security of the state*, pointing to the conflation of public order and social engineering with state security. Regarding the Great Terror, he calls Great Purges of 1937–1938, Shearer stipulates that *the prospect of imminent war and invasion, and fear of "fifth column" uprisings motivated the timing and level of violence of the purges*.

Further, Stalin linked class war and criminality and hence social order to state security. In other words, social order, purge, social engineering, and security were in-

47 PASAT, Valeriu: *Trudnye stranitsy istorii Moldovy, 1940-e-1950-e gg*, p. 166.
48 STATIEV, Alexander: *"Motivations and Goals of Soviet deportations in the Western Borderland"*, p. 978.
49 MERTELSMANN, Olaf – RAHI-TAMM, Aigi: Soviet Mass Violence in Estonia Revisited. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 2009, Vol. 11, No. 2–3, p. 310.

tertwined in the Stalinist state repression. To Stalin, the social order in the 1930s was under threat from both alien social classes and criminals, sometimes the former and latter overlapping in certain areas. Furthermore, in case of an external threat, both class enemies and criminals were susceptible to siding with the foreign enemy to destroy the Soviet state. The oppositionists within the party, all those criticizing Stalin, were crushed with the same brutality as the class aliens on the assumption that they could offer leadership to internal enemies and when the chance would allow, with external enemies as well.

Paul Hagenloh does also stress the fact that *Stalinist policing was fully predicated on the idea of identification, surveillance, and eventual excision from the body politic of those population cohorts identified by top Communist Party and police officials as "socially dangerous" or otherwise threatening for the regime.* He is less, however, explicit in highlighting the link between social order, social engineering, criminality, and state security for the whole 1930s, but in principle, he agrees with Shearer that all four dimensions were intimately intertwined, especially during the Great Terror he dubbed as Mass Operations, of 1937–1938.[50]

Consequently, neither the security thesis nor the social engineering one can render exclusive explanatory virtues in understanding the motives and goals behind the Soviet mass deportations from Moldavian SSR in mid-June 1941 and, for that matter, other "Ribbentrop-Molotov territories". The very pattern of the 1930s repressions consecrated the intrinsic connection between social engineering, ideology-driven terror aiming at reshaping the Soviet body politic, on one hand, and the state security considerations that class enemies were bound to revenge in case of foreign invasion. The May – June 1941 forced mass resettlements came just on the eve of the German-Soviet war. Even though it is assumed Stalin thought Hitler would not attack that year, these deportations were meant to address security considerations by eliminating the higher echelons of the proprietary classes – large landowners and manufacturers deemed innate enemies of the Soviet regime in peacetime and more so in a time of war with an external power. The most important politicians of the interwar period, no matter their ideological affiliation, and ex-officers of Tsarist, Denikin, Romanian and Polish armies, prison warders, and secret service operatives were targeted since, in wartime, they could organize sabotage and resistance against the retreating Red Army. Criminals, the third most important category of the deportees, much smaller in numbers, had to be annihilated as virtual and potential "fifth column" sympathizers. For the security thesis to be stronger to uphold, one might ask why the Soviets did not focus on large numbers and stick only to homestead heads (4,507) by excluding the family members (13,885). The high ratio – three to one in favour of family members among MSSR deportees – speaks for the persistence of the social engineering pattern of punishing the whole families, not only their heads in imminent war circumstances of summer 1941.

50 HAGENLOH, Paul: *Stalin's Police. Public Order and Mass Repression in the USSR, 1926–1941*. The John Hopkins University Press – Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Baltimore – Washington, D.C. 2010, pp. 8, 227–287.

For the social engineering thesis to look more convincing, one might ask why a large number of the initially planned contingent of tradespeople and large estate owners dropped dramatically in the actual deportees' toll. The difference could have local agency explanations, but as it was huge, it might have been rather intentional in the first place. The other weakness of the purge or social engineering approach has to do with the very low number of "kulaks" among the deportees of mid-June 1941 from MSSR and indeed from any other newly annexed Soviet territory. It was said that in most of the postwar deportations from the Western borderlands, the "kulaks" made up the majority as a prerequisite for the pacification strategy to succeed and especially smoothen the path to all-out collectivization. Still, in 1937–1938 in a country already collectivized the "kulaks" were among the largest social cohort both among the arrested and executed. The rationalization of doing so was premised on the fact of their purportedly innate animosity and loathing toward the Soviet regime and their extreme dangerousness in case of the war with Germany that was certain to happen already in the late 1930s. In the Spring and early summer of 1941, the war seemed imminent as never before, but the annihilation of "kulaks" was a low priority as district-level data on MSSR shows both at the level of intent and implementation.

For these reasons, both Statiev's and Mertelsmann-Rahi-Tamm's explanatory models are defective in neglecting the 1930s Stalinist pattern of repression and its dynamics that informed in main not only the eve of war deportations but also the postwar ones in the Western borderlands. Shearer's and Hagenloh's conceptualization of Stalin's repressions of the 1930s and beyond provides the best and most convincing theoretical background in that it allows us to consider a multitude of factors behind Soviet state terror. In this, it delivers both the security and social engineering theses in their own right in explaining so cumbersome a phenomenon as mass repression, but side by side, rather mutually completing each other than competing for an exclusive and hegemonic explanatory model.

Conclusion

The mass deportation from Bessarabia/Moldavian SSR on the eve of the German-Soviet war raises questions regarding the timing, contingents, and motivations. Using archival published and recently disclosed unpublished evidence from Moldovan archives, I tried to address this question in this study. Drawing on several interpretations regarding the mass deportations from the Soviet Western borderlands in late May-mid June 1941, I analyse the social composition of the deportees from Moldavian SSR on 12–13 June 1941, aiming at verifying if and to what extent those theories can stand closer scrutiny. Alexander Statiev has argued that the deportations from the Western borderlands on the eve of the war were motivated by security reasons about the imminence of war with Nazi Germany. I am challenging this argument because about half of the contingents repressed do not qualify explicitly for the "fifth column" definition. At the same time, I agree with Statiev's claim that ethnic criteria did not play any role in the mass deportations, but I show that all elites of the main ethnic groups were decimated as a result of the deportations. I agree with Statiev as

well in that the deportations strained relations between the Soviet authorities and the local population, and probably produced more enemies than they eliminated. The second important theoretical framework was expressed by two historians, the German-Estonian Olaf Mertelsmann and the Estonian Aigi Rahi-Tamm. In a co-authored article, they both argue that the deportations in the wake of the German-Soviet War from Estonia – and implicitly those from Latvia and Lithuania – should be qualified mainly as social engineering and purging society campaigns rather than enhancing security. Focusing on the deportations from Moldavian SSR as a case-study, I argue that the former and the latter theories express apparently two opposing and mutually exclusive positions, but in fact, they do not exclude each other and to an extent they overlap. In this sense, I draw from contributions made by David Shearer and Paul Hagenloh on Stalinist mass repressions and policing in the 1930s that stipulate an intrinsic connection between fighting internal and external enemies.

A group of intellectuals from Soroca, victims of the Soviet state terror, 1940–1941
Reproduction: POSTICĂ, Elena (ed.): Cartea Memoriei. Catalog al victimelor totalitarismului communist, Vol. 1, p. 204

High school students from Orhei, victims of the Soviet state terror, 1940–1941
Reproduction: POSTICĂ, Elena (ed.): Cartea Memoriei. Catalog al victimelor totalitarismului communist, Vol. 1, p. 207

Rural elites from Ciuciuleni village, Nisporeni district, victims of Soviet state terror in Bessarabia, 1940–1941
Reproduction: POSTICĂ, Elena (ed.): Cartea Memoriei. Catalog al victimelor totalitarismului communist, Vol. 1, p. 199

Iosif Mordovets, deputy Commissar of NKVD MSSR, 1940–1941
Source: The National Archive of the Republic of Moldova