



# **The Romanian Population in Northern Transylvania following Occupation by Hungary and Nazi Germany**

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In August 1940, as a result of Adolf Hitler's "Second Vienna Award", Nazi Germany's ally Hungary was awarded the Romanian province of Northern Transylvania. This reversed one aspect of the Treaty of Trianon, one of the Versailles settlements following the loss of World War One by Imperial Germany and the collapsed Austro-Hungarian Empire. That 1920 treaty gave the region to Romania.

Immediately following the Vienna Award, Hungarian armed forces moved into the province, occupying a number of cities, including Sighet. The predominantly Hungarian population greeted these developments with great enthusiasm, and the occupation created an artificial separation of Transylvania. Most of the Hungarian population

in the northern section hoped that when the war ended with Nazi Germany's victory, the province would return permanently to Hungarian rule. In the event, Hungary controlled Northern Transylvania from 1940 through the late summer of 1944, when the rapid advance of the Red Army forced Hungary to leave the region.

Immediately after taking control of the region, Hungarian authorities began both massacring ethnic Romanians, and deporting to Romania proper those considered dangerous or hostile. In autumn 1940, Hungarian military and paramilitary troops massacred non-Hungarian civilians, seeking to create a panic by which Romanian, Jews and Roma (Gypsies), would flee the province for "Old Romania". Thousands were expelled or fled, with Romanian authorities in return forcing Hungarians to flee into Northern Transylvania. By the time these events ended, over 100,000 people from both parts of Transylvania were forcibly re-located.

**According to a 1941 census** conducted by Hungarian authorities, approximately 50% of the population of Northern Transylvania was of Hungarian descent. Unsurprisingly, clashes between ethnic Hungarians and Romanians continued throughout the war, with ethnic Hungarians, supported by the authorities, pursuing actions of discrimination, harassment, and physical violence against ethnic Romanians.

By the end of 1943, some 220,000 ethnic Romanians were expelled from Northern Transylvania. Fearing Hungarian rule, many fled their villages and become "internal" refugees within the province. Discrimination against ethnic Romanians in the province forced the closure of most Romanian schools, with even churches being desecrated and destroyed. Nonetheless, as elsewhere in German-occupied Europe, some people helped others, even of different ethnicities or religion. One example of a Hungarian helping ethnic Romanians is that of Joseph Gall, who in the village of Trăzneu saved many Romanian families from a sure death at the hands of their Hungarian persecutors.

The persecution of ethnic Romanians ended only in August 1944, when Romania left its alliance with the Axis powers -- Germany, Italy and Japan -- and joined its army with the Soviet Red Army, part of the Allied Powers -- the Soviet Union, Great Britain and the United States.



On September 8, 1940, a few days after the Second Vienna Award, Hungarian Army troops enter Zalău.

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However, following Romania's turn-about, Hungarian forces continued to commit atrocities against the remaining ethnic Romanian population of Northern Transylvania as long as they could. One specific example of Hungarian troops persecution and violence against ethnic Romanians, which exemplifies many other instances of violence, can be seen in the events that took place in the village of Moisei, in Maramures County. 31 Romanian peasants were captured and forced into a house where most were brutally murdered. The only two survivors were accused of "high treason", and sent to a labour camp. Following this, the Hungarians burnt the village to the ground.

**In late spring 1944**, the Hungarian gendarmerie, ordered by their own antisemitic government to closely assist SS deportation "expert" Adolf Eichmann's "special commando", organized and conducted the deportation of tens of thousands of Jews from Northern Transylvania, directly to the gas chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau, in south-west Poland. The vast majority were murdered immediately upon arrival, along with hundreds of thousands of other Hungarian Jews deported from throughout Hungary. One of the few survivors of these indescribably brutal round-up and deportation of Northern Transylvanian Jews was Elie Weisel, later to become a Nobel Prize winner for literature. Some of his most significant stories are based upon his experiences as a Jew in Northern Transylvania during the Holocaust.

As noted, the Hungarian occupation of Northern Transylvania ended in autumn 1944 with the switch by Romania to the Allies, with the Soviet Red Army ending Hungarian rule of the region. Hungarian troops fled backwards into Hungary proper, and Northern Transylvania returned to Romania, where it remains to this day.

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