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THE NATION'S PARTY UNDER THE  
DICTATORSHIP OF KING CAROL II

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**Abstract:** The article aims to answer why anti-Semitism is maintained even today, on social media. The following article aims to analyze the anti-Semitic decree-laws during the royal dictatorship of the Romanian King Carol the 2nd, in particular the moment when the National Renaissance Front becomes the Nation's Party, a unique and totalitarian organization in Romania. Using the concept of a unique party, the study will show the anti-Semitic decree-laws that resulted in the exclusion of Jews from Romanian political, economic, and social life. Citizenship was dependent on ethnicity, the principle of *numerus clausus* was enforced, and the anti-Semitic legislation was enforced as decree-laws. The ideology of the Nation's Party differed from that of the National Renaissance Party in that it focused primarily on nationalist, racist, and anti-Semitic theses and was strongly influenced by Italian fascist rituals and German Nazism. Since the position of state secretary was linked to that of party member, Jews were permanently excluded from all state institutions, regardless of their role in them. The militarization of the Party stemmed from the fact that superior power within the unique organization was exercised by the General Secretary, who was subordinate to the Party's Chief of Staff. Finally, when King Carol II abdicated, the Nation's Party also disappeared, but it remained as the first unique and totalitarian organization in the Romanian political history.

**Key words:** King Carol II, Romania, anti-Semitism, Jews, militarization, ideology, political religion, fascism, The Nation's Party.

## **1. Contextualizing current anti-Semitism in the online environment and social media**

Why is anti-Semitism still perpetuated today, including online, in social networks? On social media, hatred against Jews is high, and the opinions of users online, without any study or documentation, become judgments. Anti-Semitism has not been eradicated by education, and prejudices and stereotypes against Jews persist to this day. On the Internet, hatred of Jews is found in the mindset and rhetoric that views the Jew as an enemy (Schwarz-Friesel, Reinharz 2022, 116).

The dissemination of and access to information in the online environment has grown exponentially in recent years. The absence of rules or sanction mechanisms has encouraged the spread of fake news, conspiracy theories, stereotypes and hate speech. Awareness of the risks posed by the promotion of such rhetoric and of the role played by the online environment in the dissemination of information has led to a rethinking of strategies regarding the rules of communication on certain social networks and to the need to monitor the spread of extremist messages. (Monitoring report, "Anti-Semitism in times of pandemic, Anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial in the Online environment", National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania: <https://www.inshr-ew.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Raport-monitorizare-2022.pdf>).

The Jew was perceived as an outsider and was stigmatized, and these stereotypes were passed down from generation to generation. Jews were used politically, ideologically, but also religiously, and these prejudices built a system of hatred against Jews that was twisted with words and became a true way of thinking (Schwarz-Friesel, Reinharz, 2022, 118).

The AVANGARDE Behavioural Studies Group conducted an opinion poll for the Elie Wiesel Institute among Romanian Jews to measure perceptions of anti-Semitism. According to the survey, 71% believe that anti-Semitism exists in Romania, 23% believe that it exists to a great extent, and between 38% and 68% believe that anti-Semitism is a problem in political life, in social networks, and in the media (Press release: results of the research report on perceptions of the Jewish minority on Romanian society – INSHR (inshr-ew.ro)).

## **2. The anti-Semitic legislation adopted during the authoritarian regime of King Carol II in Romania**

The aim of this article is to present and analyze the anti-Semitic legislation enacted during the harsh Carlist regime, after June 22, 1940, when the National Renaissance Front was transformed into the Nation's

Party, which was proclaimed as an exclusive and totalitarian political organization within the Romanian state. To this end, it will draw on primary sources – archival documents, interwar Romanian newspapers and academic publications – to explore the anti-Semitic character of the legislation initiated and promoted by the authoritarian monarchy led by King Carol II. The discriminatory decree-laws enacted under the royal dictatorship excluded Jewish citizens from the Nation's Party and prohibited them from holding public office, acquiring landed property, becoming teachers, and pursuing military careers in Romania. In the following, therefore, I will analyze the way in which the regime's doctrinaires attempted to explain the new type of organization characteristic of the totalitarian party.

Thus, the article deals with how the artisans of the regime tried to explain the new type of organization characteristic of the totalitarian party. The question is how did the theorists think about the regime and how did the members of the Party of the Nation act?

During the last months of its existence in 1940 Romania, “the authoritarian monarchy was considerably influenced by the rhetoric of the propagandistic arsenal of the totalitarian regimes (especially that of the German Reich)” (Stanomir 2001, 367). The regime and the Nation's Party, through their nationalist rhetoric and the legislation in place, implemented anti-Semitic principles in the form of decree-laws, suspending the civic rights and freedoms characteristic of a modern liberal society. The first single party in interwar Romania, the National Renaissance Front, had been established by Carol II on the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1938 based on the structure of the former political parties, abolished by the decree-law of 30 March 1938. According to the official discourse of the royal dictatorship, the political parties dissolved by royal decree were criminalized of “corruption, politicking, and inefficiency, so the single parties will ensure a new national impetus where the old parties were exhausted” (Monitorul Oficial 1938, 6).

The international events that from the year 1940 led to the transformation of the monarchy from an authoritarian regime – where the National Renaissance Front was the single party – to a totalitarian one – following the transformation of the former into the Nation's Party, a new, totalitarian party established through the decree-law of the 21<sup>st</sup> of June 1940 (Fund FRN, File 848/1940, 14).

In a sense, the Nation's Party was nothing but a continuation of the National Renaissance Front, the main distinction between the two organizations being the fact that the new totalitarian party “in its exterior aspect and linguistic ritual was a complete imitation of fascism and national socialism” (Heinen, 2006, 395). Fascisms also wanted to be political religions. “Fascists often compared the party to a church or a religious military order”; consequently, “fascism did not hide the fact that

its totalitarian policies were intended to create within the political sphere a type of organisation similar to the Catholic Church” (Gentile 1990, 239).

The new single party, as the previous National Renaissance Front, enacted anti-Semitic legislation that led to the exclusion of Jews from the totalitarian state organization. Thus, the beginning of the Jews' exclusion from Romanian political life is related to the transformation of the National Renaissance Front into the Nation's Party, a self-proclaimed “single and totalitarian party placed under the supreme leadership of His Majesty, King Carol II” (International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania 2004, 196; Blasen 2022, 36-65; Benjamin 1993, XX; Ancel 2001; Grecu 2012, 132-133; Maner, 2004, 184, Manolachi 2023, 189).

In August 1940, Carol II signed racial decree-laws referring to the Jews' status in Romania and banning marriages between Jews and Romanians. The process of eliminating Jews from Romanian public life had started in August 1939, when the Jewish industrialist Max Auschnitt was arrested and others (I. Blumefeld, Alexander Braunstein) were forced to leave the country, even if they were part of the royal camarilla (Alexandrescu, 126). On the other hand, the decisions taken regarding decreeing the legal norms anti-Semitic and the arbitrary exclusion in part of Jews from the political and social life of authoritarian Romania show that “both the National Renaissance Front and especially the Nation's Party were intended to make Mussolini and Hitler believe that Romania had the same type of social and political regime as their countries, which meant that Carol II's decree-laws were meant to have the same purpose” (Alexandrescu, 126). Under the rule of Carol II, Romania did not adopt a fascist system of government, but rather a corporatist form of organizing politics, the legislature, and the trade unions. Through corporatism, Romania had tried to emulate the Italian fascist formula of corporations, while an alignment with the political system of the German Reich was undertaken only at the end of regime. Following the visits to Germany Ion Gigurtu, the single party, Nation's Party was organized in accordance with the NSDAP's principles.

### **3. Dictatorial governance under Romania's single party**

A series of decrees preceded the establishment of the Nation's Party. On the same day that the single totalitarian party was founded, June 21, 1940, the Decree for the Defense of the Political and Totalitarian Order of the Romanian State was issued. This decree established the criteria for appointment to public office, which was conditioned by membership of the Nation's Party; incompatibility with it meant the impossibility of applying for any position within the Romanian state. According to the decree, all civil servants were forced to become members of the Nation's Party, with the exception of those under the age of 21, who were forced to

join the single party when they reached that age. (Fund FRN, File 850/1940, 24). The obligation to enroll in the PN also applied to members of the boards of directors of public and private companies, who lost their jobs if they could not prove that they were party members. On the other hand, enrollment in the new single party was mostly formal, as civil servants understandably feared losing their jobs if they refused to become party members.

Dismissal was a direct consequence of refusal to join the totalitarian organization. Legal entities and corporations were in the same position: a) if their management conducted business that was considered to be against the interests of the PN; b) if their funds were used for propaganda against the party. The Decree for the Defense of the Political and Totalitarian Order in Romania also provided for prison sentences ranging from one month to one year for those who damaged official symbols or publications of the Nation's Party. The law also stipulated that the property of all those found guilty of such charges would be confiscated by the government during the period of their imprisonment (Fund FRN, File 850/1940, 24).

The totalitarian nature of the new party, according to the decree presented above, was derived also from the sanctions imposed against "those who schemed", who were seen as using propaganda in order to change the existing political order. The nationalist rhetoric employed by the Romanian state had its roots in the fundamental law. Article 7 of the 1938 Constitution explicitly forbid promoting concepts whose purpose was changing the political regime of the state, while Article 9 from the fundamental law sanctioned with the loss of citizenship any Romanian who entered the service of a foreign state or joined any foreign occupation. The decree for defending the political and totalitarian order of Romania thus sentenced those who engaged in underground or illegal forms of politics and spread ideas directed against the Nation's Party and the new form of organization of the Romanian state. Since all political activity outside the remit of PN was deemed illegal, the sanctions further recommended prison terms ranging between 3 and 5 years, along with fines and correctional prison between 1 and 5 years for the following actions the government perceived as crimes: subversive propaganda against the single party or political activity in the service of other organizations; the establishment of branches of parties or political groups functioning in secret; or any other actions against the Nation's Party (Bruja 2000, 210).

#### **4. Anti-Semitic legislation and nationalist doctrine**

The interests of the Nation's Party were considered superior and above individual interests, since individual actions could potentially be directed against the totalitarian single party. The existing anti-Semitic

legislation was reinforced during this period by not allowing Jews to become members of the Nation's Party and by prohibiting them from holding public office. Through the decree-laws promulgated by Carol II, Romania became increasingly influenced by the Italian and German fascist regimes. Applications for membership in the party had to be made in person, accompanied by an identity document; minorities were recorded in separate registers, while Jews were completely excluded from applying (Bruja 2000, 221).

The anti-Semitic legislation promoted by Ion Gigurtu's government was racist, in line with the trend in European politics at the time, also promoted by Carol II. The Decree-Law of August 31, 1940, determining the situation of Jews in all levels of education, was in practice an obstacle to the freedom to practice Judaism. In a decree of August 8, 1940, the status of Judaism was formulated as follows: the State guarantees to all [religious] cults the same freedom and protection, since their practice does not affect public order, good morals and the security of the State. According to this decree, which has been incorporated into the Constitution, the spiritual life of the Jews is not able to integrate itself into the Romanian community, but it has the duty to respect the Romanian community, taking into account the fact that its own freedom is recognized by it.

Another anti-Semitic measure was recorded on the 8<sup>th</sup> of August 1940, by the law on the status of Jews in the territory of the Kingdom. This decree, "the first decree-law through which the juridical status of the Jews in Romania was consecrated in the spirit of integral nationalism and Nazi political racism", (Bruja 2000, 209) was signed by the Minister of Justice I.V. Gruia, also a Professor at the Law Faculty of Bucharest.

According to I.V. Gruia, on the one hand, after the fundamental law was promulgated, "we find ourselves within the bounds of the Romanian authoritarian state. On the other hand, the Romanian state is not a totalitarian state or a dictatorial state, incompatible with the Law and the principles of liberty and legality. In the dictatorial state there is no juridical law, no matter its root, to legislate the rights and obligations of the state entities in relation to the individual and those of the individual in relation to the state." (Gruia 1939, 10). Furthermore, I.V. Gruia tried to provide arguments to support the theory that: "the authoritarian state is all about absolutism. The authoritarian state is based on law, equality, the monitoring of legal documents within the bounds of legality, on the consecration and guarantee of individual rights and freedoms, on an authentic individual liberty, conditioned on fulfilling one's fundamental duties toward the state. The authoritarian state has an organization based on the limits of the state's rights and duties" (Gruia 1939, 10).

Elements of anti-Semitic legal doctrine were even incorporated into the new constitution of 1938. Here, the idea of the nation was supplemented by that of ethnic origin, in order to accommodate the "fact"

that Romanians were the majority and had founded the state. Article 3 of the Constitution stated that “the Romanian territory cannot be colonized with foreign populations; such colonizations could compromise the national structure” (Monitorul Oficial, No. 48, 1938, 1). Exceeding both his professorial and constitutional responsibilities, Paul Negulescu even proposed solutions meant to achieve a Romanian ethnic supremacy. His opinion was the following: “Today, the massive crowding of unassimilable foreign people, in many of the country’s regions, is an issue of extreme gravity. It would be a great Romanian achievement if Macedonian Romanian people were brought and settled in our cities and small towns that are full of foreigners. They could, with some small support granted by the state, become that bourgeois element that is missing in our country, thus replacing the foreign merchants who make our small towns and cities appear so far removed from our Romanian character. With [the help of] the Macedonians and the Oltenians we could begin the Romanianization of our estranged cities” (Negulescu 1938, 391).

The solution to colonize some regions with Macedo-Romanians had the primary purpose of eliminating the Jews from those regions, especially Moldova, and also to exclude them from political, economic, and social life. Negulescu’s solution proved to be an absurd one, as the subsequent exclusion of Jews from public and private enterprises would eventually lead to bankruptcy, even as a special law, against usury, was particularly aimed at businesses run by Jews. The intention of such a project represents a clear testimony to the anti-Semitism and nationalism displayed by the elites associated with the regime.

The decree-law regarding the legal status of Jews in Romania defined the term ‘Jew’. According to the period of time they had lived in Romania, the decree of 8 August 1940 divided Jews into three categories:

The anti-Semitic legislation enacted by the single and totalitarian party was further characterized by the intrusion of the state even inside families. The decree-law of 8 August 1940 placed the descendants of a Christian father and Jewish mother at an advantage to those who were born of a Jewish father and Romanian mother. This discriminatory legislation aimed against the Jews implemented the principle known as Romanian national supremacy, theorized by Negulescu and G.G. Mironescu.

This principle had first been introduced in the 1938 Constitution, with Negulescu stating that this was the first time that the Constitution proclaimed the primacy of the race, of Romanian ethnic origin. Thus, Article 27 Paragraph I of the Constitution specified that: “only Romanian citizens are eligible for public, civil, and military office, taking into account that Romanians are the majority and they created the State; only Romanians can acquire and own rural property in Romania, a fact which separates Romanians from those who are naturalized in the country” (Negulescu 1938, 199).

Referring to the principle of Romanian ethnic supremacy, G.G.

Mironescu argued that: “the legislator wanted to ensure the national primacy and to consolidate the pure Romanian population, as these tendencies are natural and justified, especially in the current general recrudescence toward nationalism. They involve nothing more than the legitimate desire to strengthen the Romanian nation, without any hostility toward other nations and without contesting the rights of the other co-inhabiting nationalities.” (Mironescu 1939, 24).

This ‘law of blood’ was justified by its proponents by the notion that the Romanian nation was the one that created the state. Consequently, it had full rights and it was the only nation that could take advantage of the rights ensuing from this law. In the Romanian legislators’ vision, “The Nation (...) became less of a legal community or a political collective and more of a spiritual and organic community based on the ‘law of blood’, from which a hierarchy of political rights ensues. In the law of blood are comprised all the possibilities regarding the soul, the spirit, and ethics. The ‘blood criterion’ thus referred mostly to an ethical and spiritual content rather than a biological one. Thus, defending ‘Romanian blood’ constituted the moral guarantee of recognizing the supreme political rights.” (*Final Report*, 182). Relations between Romanian and Jewish citizens were prohibited, their legal status no longer recognized on Romanian territory and sanctioned with imprisonment.

## 5. The Nation's Party: an instrument of anti-Semitism

The right of minorities to become members of the Nation's Party was controlled by a special memorandum, which stipulated that Jewish citizens should be entered in a separate register. Jews were the only minority excluded from party membership. Implicitly, since being a civil servant was a prerequisite for party membership, Jews were excluded from all state institutions, regardless of the position they had previously held.

The anti-Semitic legislation was implemented and coordinated by the Nation's Party itself, through the General Secretariat, led by Victor Moldovan, and “according to a report written for the Presidency of the Council of Ministers regarding the political and juridical regime of minorities in Romania in the summer of the year 1940” (*Final Report*, 182). The memorandum number 7, which transmitted the instructions to the territorial branches of the Nation's Party was focused and methodical. It was signed by the head of the PN General Staff, the engineer Ion. I. Gigurtu. The exclusion of the Jews from the totalitarian organization was based on the ways in which the offices where party enlistment took place were organized. The anti-Semitic legislation also had a propagandistic character, in that it was meant to demonstrate the ideological orientation of Carol II's regime toward the Axis.



The method employed by the General Secretariat of the Nation's Party to 'take action' against Jewish citizens was based on criminal procedure. According to the aforementioned anti-Semitic memorandum, these measures were taken because there were "a lot of complaints that were made to the Secretariats and to prevent the discontent about the functioning of the offices where enlistment in the Nation's Party took place" (Fund FRN, File 8/1940, 23). The norms mentioned above consisted of: "the display, in the respective precinct, of the list with all the citizens who made an application [for party membership], in order to be verified". This requirement was justified by the fact that "among those who applied were also Jews who had been baptized with pure Romanian names, and who, according to the decisions taken by the Party's leadership, should not have applied" (Fund FRN, File 8/1940, 23). The members of the single party, acting also in their capacity as civil servants, "handled the applications and, according to the recommendations, had to be as thorough and meticulous as they could be in attending to this duty, asking for identification documents, and thus there was no chance for them to be misled by the pleasant and flattering sound of a Romanian name being worn by a Jew" (Fund FRN, File 8/1940, 23). The control of identification documents in order to establish an applicant's ethnic origin was carried out rigorously, at the time of the application. The memorandum specified that "in the case of *questionable people*, they also asked them to show authentic documents, of birth and baptism, through which the religion of their parents could be proven. The Jews, even if they were baptized or if they had Romanian names, and the Christian wives [*sic*] of Jewish women married to Romanians, even if they were baptized, could not apply for membership under any circumstances." (Fund FRN, File 8/1940, 23). The anti-Semitic legislation of Carol II's regime was advertised both in the press and in front of the offices where the application process took place. The memorandum reminded people that "the place where the applications took place has to be brought to everyone's attention, in the newspapers and on billboards" (Fund FRN, File 8/1940, 23).

The implementation of the anti-Semitic decrees that aroused hatred among the population was arbitrarily legitimated by the regime of the royal dictatorship on the principle of Romanian ethnic supremacy, Article 4 of the 1938 Constitution, whose effect was the "consecration of racism, in particular of anti-Semitism", (Stanomir 2001, 370) and which remove the inclusion of Jewish citizens from the country's territory to civil and political functions.

## 6. Organization propaganda inside Nation's Party

For as long as civil servants owed their position in the state administration exclusively to the party, the Nation's Party could not

identify itself with the state apparatus or the latter could not become a bureaucratic expression of the party. The single party populated with its people the entire system of public administration. "Party affiliation could not hide the formalism of the new political creation, which, in reality, was a copy of FRN [The National Renaissance Front], nor could it substitute the already consecrated ways of moving up the ladder in different bureaucratic departments, which had their own selection methods" (Müller, 2005, 268). Assigning civil servants to a specific public office was possible only if they were affiliated with the single party, and not being affiliated with it or refusing to become affiliated automatically led to exclusion from the totalitarian organization and to the loss of one's job.

The supreme leadership was exercised through the General Staff of the Nation's Party, via the General Secretariat, subordinated to the Head of the General Staff (Fund FRN, File 848/1940, 15). The Secretariat was responsible for verifying that members wore their uniforms and complied with the regulations, and the General Staff was assigned the task of verifying the regulations in question. Ernest Urdăreanu, the Minister of the Royal House, was appointed by the king as Head of the General Staff, and Victor Moldovan as General Secretary of the Nation's Party (Fund FRN, File 848/1940, 16). Subsequently, "there was a change in personnel at the level of the leadership of the party" (Müller 272). Urdăreanu joined the ranks of "the soldiers of the Party" and Ion Gigurtu was named the Head of the General Staff (Fund FRN, File 848/1940, 19). According to the decree of 22 June 1940, the cadres of the National Renaissance Front had the obligation to take over the organizations of the counties and towns until The Nation's Party was able to organize itself based on new foundations (Fund FRN, File 848/1940, p. 15). Another decree mentioned that those who served the king and the nation were considered to be "soldiers of The Nation's Party" (Fund FRN, File 848/1940, 18).

The propagandistic activity of the National Guard and the ideological one of local elites led to the crystallization of a spiritual union by presenting King Carol II as a real saviour of the nation. The principle of royal paternalism promoted by the new regime among the ruling elites led to the mobilization of the national spirit, through the National Guard. We can safely say that the regime's ideology was promoted via its official press, which was tasked with shaping the mentalities necessary for the new political, economic, and social order prevalent in Romania during the years 1938-1940. FRN was the source of this propaganda, while one of its main duties was to also conduct an anti-propagandistic activity against the other ideological orientations of the time, especially against the communist movement.

The new single parties, first the FRN and then the Nation's Party, did not offer any ideological platform, but "merely fragments of any right-wing programme from the 1930s" (Alexandrescu 129). The nationalist rhetoric of the authoritarian monarchy was taken over and adapted from

the Iron Guard's discourse, which was subsequently expanded by the Nation's Party. It was the Minister of Propaganda, Nichifor Crainic, who tried to develop an ideology specific to the Nation's Party (Alexandru, Bărbulescu, 2022, 157-180). He argued in the pages of the official journal of the regime, *România*, that: "By embracing the doctrine of an integral and totalitarian nationalism, The Nation's Party is the political instrument that will lead to moral purification and to its the nation's rise to the peaks of glory" (Bruja 225). The main elements of the nationalist ideology of the Nation's Party rested on many of the recurrent tropes specific to that time period, such as "the nation must be lead to its destiny, which it feels"; "our will is a pledge that stems from our feeling of being Romanian, which implies devotion to the Throne and relentless sacrifice for our country, with that feeling of abnegation, purity, and worship toward the King, inculcated from our very pride of having been born Romanian" (Bruja 225-226).

## 7. Conclusions

The Nation's Party was nothing more than a continuation of the FRN, the difference between the two single parties being that the new totalitarian party, through its radical rhetoric, borrowed heavily from the fascist and national socialist rituals prevalent at the time. On the other hand, the Nation's Party, through its nationalist rhetoric and the legislation it enforced. The ideology of the Nation's Party differed from that of the National Renaissance Party in that it focused primarily on nationalist, racist, and anti-Semitic theses, and was strongly influenced by the Italian fascist ritual and German Nazism. The Nation's Party, like the National Renaissance Front, was merely a political instrument used to concentrate the nation's will on a unity represented by the king. The wooden language used by the regime was in keeping with the spirit of the times. The ideology of the Nation's Party differed from that of the FRN in that it focused more on nationalist, racist, and anti-Semitic ideas.

The first anti-Semitic laws were signed, which had an impact on industry, finance and society, because many Jews were qualified and Romanians could not take their place. The same ideas about Jews occupying important positions in politics, industry and society are still answered today, especially through social networks and anti-Semitic and xenophobic websites.

And today, even in post-Nazi Germany, anti-Semitic opinions about the State of Israel are based on hatred perpetuated by the extreme right, disseminated online but also through the mass media. Contemporary anti-Semitism is visible in the online environment, but also in the political environment, as well as in the discourse of extremists and fundamentalists.

Anti-Semitism has become almost commonplace in public communication through expressions and rhetoric. Anti-Semitism in Germany does not have its origins in the sad history of the interwar period, but it is not limited to remote segments of society either. (Schwarz-Friesel, Reinharz 2022, 114-115).

Incitement to hatred, racial discrimination, anti-Semitic laws were the foundation of the Romanian state between June and September 1940, until 1944. Unfortunately, today anti-Semitism is promoted with the help of social networks, and it seems that fascinating ideologies and right-wing radicalism have reignited in the Romanian cultural and political space, but also in Europe and even globally, where hatred against Jews.

As in the interwar period, as well as in the period of the Romanian royal dictatorship, the origins of anti-Semitism are much older, but nowadays the same recipe is applied, but through fast communication in the electronic environment, especially since hatred against Israel is widespread, and the Internet and mass media help to develop and maintain this hatred against the Jews.

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