

Operațiunea Sud Chișinău. Culegere de documente

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„*Operațiunea Sud Chișinău. Culegere de documente*”, edited by Gheorghe Cojocaru and published by the Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences of Moldova is not a traditional history book. Instead of offering analysis or commentary, it presents a deeply unsettling collection of original documents related to one of the darkest episodes in Moldova’s Soviet-era history: the mass deportations of July 6, 1949. These documents, official letters, secret orders, name lists, internal memos, and post-operation reports give an unfiltered view into the machinery of political repression. In doing so, the book becomes something more than a historical record; it is a mirror reflecting the quiet, calculated brutality of the totalitarian system that ruled Moldova at the time.

The events described in this volume took place in the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, then under tight control by the USSR. As part of the Soviet plan to eliminate opposition and fully implement collectivization in agriculture, entire families accused of being “chiaburi” (wealthier peasants), anti-Soviet elements, or simply undesirable were identified and forcibly removed from their homes. They were deported to remote parts of Siberia and Kazakhstan, often with only a few hours’ notice, no formal charges, and no chance to resist. Their land, homes, and possessions were confiscated. Children, the elderly, and pregnant women were not spared. The goal was to reshape Moldovan society through fear and forced loyalty.

What makes this book particularly impactful is the way it delivers the truth without emotions. The documents speak for themselves, and that is more powerful than any historian’s interpretation could be. Reading a report that calmly discusses how many wagons are needed to transport thousands of people, or how many soldiers are required to surround a village at dawn, brings a chill that is hard to describe. The cold, calculated tone used by the Soviet authorities strips the human aspect from the victims, referring to them

as “elements” or “targets.” Yet for the reader, the human side becomes even more present exactly because of this detachment as it forces us to imagine the lives behind each of those names.

The structure of the book is chronological and regional. It follows the planning and execution of the operation across southern Moldova, offering insight into how detailed and organized the process was. You see how high-level Soviet decisions filtered down into small towns and villages, and how local officials followed strict instructions. The deportations weren’t chaotic or spontaneous, instead, they were carefully planned, scheduled, and carried out with military precision. It is this organization, this sense of routine cruelty, that gives the book its most terrifying quality.

Each page adds to the growing picture of an oppressed society under pressure, where fear and silence ruled. The names listed in deportation orders come with ages and professions: teachers, farmers, homemakers, children. Some are marked for deportation simply because they were related to someone previously arrested or because they once expressed criticism of the Soviet system. The verdict, in most cases, is political, fabricated, or inherited. And yet the consequences were all too real.

What also stands out is the complete lack of compassion in the execution of the operation. There are no signs of doubt or hesitation in the orders. No one questions whether these people deserve to be taken away. The only concerns expressed by officials relate to logistics: making sure enough guards are assigned, that wagons are sealed, that property is properly confiscated. Even after the operation, reports focus on whether the operation met its numerical targets rather than what happened to the people involved.

Despite the dry nature of the material, the emotional weight of the book is immense. As a reader, it becomes increasingly difficult to move from one page to the next without feeling a growing sense of dread. The repetition of cold,

impersonal instructions describing the forced uprooting of human beings becomes horrific. You begin to sense the scale of the tragedy, not through dramatic storytelling, but through the very formality of the language used to describe it.

However, the book also presents certain challenges, especially for readers who are not deeply familiar with either Soviet history or Moldovan political context. Terms like “chiabur” or “Anti-Soviet element” are used without explanation, and the documents themselves often assume a level of bureaucratic knowledge from the reader. There is no introduction or commentary to guide the reader through the historical background. For someone new to the subject, it may be helpful to read a general history of Soviet Moldova alongside this volume. That said, the lack of commentary is also what gives the book its unique “power”, it does not tell the reader what to think, instead it simply presents the recorded facts.

What makes *„Operațiunea Sud Chișinău”* more than just a historical source is its moral and emotional impact. In reading this book, one is reminded of how fragile freedom is, and how easily citizens can become victims when governments treat people as problems to be solved rather than lives to be protected. The documents in this book show how ordinary tools such as trains, lists or soldiers can be used to carry out extraordinary

cruelty when controlled by an authoritarian regime. It is a warning from the past that remains relevant today.

Though emotionally exhausting, the book serves as a written memorial. By naming the people, listing the dates, and preserving the orders, it keeps alive the memory of those who were silenced. It also gives voice, in a strange way, to those who could not speak at the time. By making this information public, Cojocaru and the team behind this book have performed an act of historical justice for those robbed of their basic human rights. These pages make it impossible to deny or forget what happened.

In the end, *„Operațiunea Sud Chișinău”* is not a book you read for entertainment or even for knowledge alone. It is a book you read because you must. Understanding the past is necessary if we want to prevent similar injustices in the future. It demands patience, will, and empathy from its readers. But it rewards them with something very rare in historical writing: truth in its rawest form.

This book is a painful but essential contribution to the history of Moldova and the broader history of Soviet repression in Eastern Europe. In a world where history can easily be rewritten, ignored, or manipulated, *„Operațiunea Sud Chișinău”* stands as a firm and unshakable record of what really happened—and that, in itself, is priceless.