Until 1941, Bessarabia was part of the Russian Empire/Soviet Union. The murder of 49 Jews during the Kishinev Pogrom of 1903 had led to protest demonstrations in London, Paris and New York, and a letter of rebuke from Theodore Roosevelt to the tsar. In 1918, the region became part of Romania but remained strongly anti-Semitic. The city of Kishinev was a focal point of Jewish culture and political life, while Jewish agricultural communities thrived throughout the province.