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THE NEW REALITY OF THE ROMANIA-HUNGARY GEOPOLITICAL DYAD. THE ACTIVE/ABSENT DYAD, DRIVEN BY A SINGLE WILL

Radu Baltasiu[1]

ABSTRACT

I will try to identify some of the directions of the new Hungarian geopolitics in Transylvania, with the formal closure of the Orban regime. Is Transylvania still a field of neocolonial action[2] *under the umbrella of the so-called "velvet" irredentism? Or will the new Prime Minister Peter Magyar simply change the oligarchy through which Orban suburbanized Transylvania? Two essential indicators, educational policy, including the attitude of the local Hungarian baronate towards Romanians, as well as cross-border business on obscure channels seem unchanged, which shows us that there will be no change in substance in Romanian-Hungarian relations in Transylvania, at least not in this direction. It is possible that different accents may emerge as a result of the new administration's reorientation towards the European Commission and therefore, the elimination of Hungary's so-called "independence" from "Europe". At the same time, I analyzed the efficiency of "orbaneconmics" and the impact of the former administration's expenses "with Transylvania" on the stability of Hungary. At the same time, we sought to point out the fact that Hungary and Romania are in a binomial that the administrations of the two states do not seem to be making the most of in favor of their peoples.*

Keywords: Irredentism, Transylvania, orbaneconomics, absent state, ethnic supremacy, Romania, Hungary.

1. HUNGARY AND ROMANIA: A NECESSARY PARTNERSHIP?

Not necessarily. However, they are part of the same objective geopolitical complex defined by the Carpathian frontage facing the Tisza.

Are Hungary and Romania part of a geopolitical complex? Indeed, part of a geopolitical binomial?

In light of Simion Mehedinți's theory of geopolitical "facades", we are inclined to believe that yes, Hungary and Romania share a geopolitical complex. This is because these facades are not matters of choice; they are givens of geography and of a people's very existence. Thus, from a geographical standpoint, the facades[3] of the Romanian

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[2] See Romeo Couți, *Lebăda neagră de pe Balaton [The black swan on Lake Balaton]*, Brașov, Creator Publishing Mouse, 2023.

[3] From Mehedinți's work we understand that "facades" are openings of geopolitical significance and essential geographical infrastructure for internal political coherence and strategic communication with

people are the Mountain, the Forest, the Danube, and the Sea[4]. The Carpathians feature multiple openings – such as the Transylvanian basin, which concentrates and unifies the uplands of the plateau lying between the Eastern and Western Carpathians[5] – yet they also "spill" into the Tisza, facing toward the Danube.

The geopolitical binomial refers to a geopolitical configuration (of power) formed by two states/nations that, with or without common interests, are part of an organic geopolitical complex, with common openings of force. In our case, we share with Hungary the Carpathian facade towards the Tisza, with Serbia and Bulgaria the Danube facade of the Carpathians, respectively the Sea. In the Middle Ages, the Romanian Countries functioned together with the Serbian and Bulgarian voivodates, through cross-border matrimonial alliances, they had common religious elites and chancellery language, evidenced by the string of Romanian monasteries south of the Danube and the flow of agricultural population on both sides.

Romania is, therefore, part of a broader, regional binomial series, undervalued for reasons related to the historical legacy of the modern era, collective psychology, and poor preparation of the elites, ideologized by a weak nationalism or, on the contrary, by being included in the progressive anti-national movement.

2. THE SITUATION ON THE GROUND

The geopolitical binomial has several levels: one political and the other social. The social one involves coexistence. Coexistence is the everyday state of relations that are established between different communities but also within them. What is its situation?

At first glance, from the data collected in June in five localities in Mureș County (two each with a predominant Romanian and Hungarian population, and in Târgu-Mureș), we have a situation that denotes the framework for a possible change for the better in coexistence, although the background of the problem remains relatively tense.

What do we find?

Regarding the **potential for healing/tension** – if we take the moment of Târgu-Mureș 1990[6] as a reference point in the analysis of collective psychology trends[7], we observe the following:

other spaces, cultures, and civilizations; without them, a society cannot develop "naturally", nor can it move toward the horizons to which a people naturally aspires. See Simion Mehedinți, *Opere Complete. Volumul I. Geographica [Complete Works. Volume I. Geographica]*, Second Part, Bucharest, The Encyclopaedic Library, the Royal Foundation for Literature and the Arts, 1943.

[4] *Ibidem*, p. 150.

[5] *Ibidem*, p. 148.

[6] The events in Târgu-Mureș in March 1990 were a moment of collective violence between Romanians and Hungarians, resulting in casualties on both sides. If they had escalated, they would probably have led to the Yugoslavization of Romania.

[7] Analysis by colors attached during research conducted in Mureș County in June 2026. The research aimed to determine the state of the community, the degree of integration as a whole, and for each ethnic group (Romanians and Hungarians) and was carried out through the application of questionnaires, interviews and group discussions, as well as projective techniques such as mind maps and graphic scales.

– To the extent that the two populations have opportunities to work together[8], we can say that the collective psychological tendency is towards healing, but the background is one of some fear and withdrawal. For 27% of the population, from both communities, Romanian and Hungarian, there is a desire for "healing", followed at some distance by that of fear and withdrawal (21.6%)[9].

– At the level of the Romanian community, the dominant attitude is one of healing (30.2%)[10], followed by that of withdrawal/fear (28%)[11]. A significant share of the investigated population still manifests an attitude of "historical" dissatisfaction (15.1%)[12]. So the dominant attitude is that of healing memory, but this is closely competed with fear and withdrawal. The highest level of tension is present, at the level of both communities, in the age category 26–39 years (25% red), but here we also find the greatest desire to heal memory, four times more expressed (50% green). Young people (18–25 years) almost do not care anymore (45.5% perceive the respective historical phenomenon in gray).

– At the level of the Hungarian community, the dominant attitude is that of "putting aside" the moment of Târgu-Mureș in March 1990, but not of "getting over it", of "healing". Unlike the Romanians investigated, 25% of the Hungarians in the sample are still not willing to make historical reconciliation, even if they have gotten over it (25%, black). It is true, the attitude of healing is also present here, at some distance (20%, green).

Table 1.

Cross-tabulation: the ethnic origin of respondents and the colour associated with the events in Târgu-Mureș in March 1990.

The respondent's ethnicity * What colour springs to mind when you hear about the events in Târgu-Mureș? Crosstabulation

	What colour springs to mind when you hear about the events in Târgu-Mureș?							Total
	Grey	Blue	Red	Black	Green	White	NS/NR	
% within Romanian	28.3%	1.9%	15.1%	13.2%	30.2%	7.5%	3.8%	100.0%
% within Magyar	5.0%	10.0%	20.0%	25.0%	20.0%	10.0%	10.0%	100.0%
% within Gypsy/Roma	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
% within Total by ethnicity	21.6%	5.4%	16.2%	16.2%	27.0%	8.1%	5.4%	100.0%

[8] The statement may seem unusual, but discussions and interviews revealed that the two communities are in a velvet segregation, one that is not formally instituted but is as functional as possible and recognized by both sides, practiced by institutions to a large extent.

[9] The dominant color across both communities is green (27%), followed by gray (21.6%). The methodology is still at the hypothesis stage. However, the associations were confirmed by interviews and focus groups.

[10] Green.

[11] Gray.

[12] This is expressed by the choice of the color red.

Regarding **community coherence**, determined by the mental map method (coherence of the graphic recollection of one's own settlement), we recorded the following, at the level of both communities:

– *Community coherence*[13] is present in 37% of the investigated localities, through the presence of symbolic axiality,

– Romanian communities are "gathered" in a share of 41%, while,

– Hungarian ones are considered gathered in a share of 16%.

We can say that, in Mureș County, collective memory is in the process of healing, but the tensions of memory are still strong. Paradoxically, although Hungarians are much more coherently represented politically, many of them seem to be less attached to their own locality, which denotes ethnic/community fatigue induced, perhaps, by the excess of ideological historicization. This is an aspect that absolutely requires in-depth study.

3. THE SITUATION OF THE ROMANIA-HUNGARY BINOMIAL

The relationship with Hungary is more special, due to the fact that it has a political will that often exceeds the framework of its borders, and acts right in the heart of Romanianness, in the Carpathian center, on an axis that tends to reach the Danube Mouths. The two states/nations constitute, more precisely, a geopolitical binomial. Binomial, meaning two actors who share the same framework and who move for both of them depending on the force and direction applied by each of them. The binomial also functions with a single factor of will, just like a bicycle with two pairs of pedals. As for the direction, it can only be negotiated when it is not simply given by the *interested party*.

Thus, for 35 years, we have been part of a binomial with Hungary thanks to the latter which, unlike the Romanian state, has historical initiative and therefore manifests itself as an actor with its own will. In this way, Hungary managed to activate *its part* of the Carpathian facade from the Tisza, but, due to Romanian absenteeism, it does so from its perspective, which at least during Viktor Orban's time was marked by the toxic energy of irredentism of a construct that historically never existed: Greater Hungary.

In this way, as the file of the relationship between the two states shows, it came to the point that, in Transylvania, at least during the period when Viktor Orban was prime minister (2010–2026), Romania moved to an alert process of de-sovereignization and de-statization, while Hungary built a true parallel infrastatity, including co-opting Romanian institutions, supported by the Romanian taxpayer. The co-opting consisted in the lack of reaction of the institutions in the face of the Hungarian offensive, covering up its advance or even agreeing to the demonization of Romanian patriotism

[13] These are the indicators that represent the "gathered community" *vs* "scattered", depending on the existence and typology of symbolic/functional centrality in personal cartographic representations of their own communities.

while the irredentism from Hungary was ignored or even supported with Romanian public funds. In this way, entire communities were de facto segregated in Transylvania, with Romanians ending up, even where they have numerical parity, underrepresented in the administration, being transformed into a *local minority*[14].

The main political expression of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) has been transformed into a channel of regional influence for Hungary, whose monopoly is now being questioned[15] – which is an excellent opportunity for Bucharest to rethink its role.

4. THE COSTS OF HUNGARIAN GEOPOLITICAL OVEREXTENSION (ORBAN GOVERNMENT 2010–2026)

Being a geopolitical binomial with a single actor, the Romania-Hungary relationship has been deeply unbalanced and there are no signs that it will be otherwise, for the simple reason that the *state apparatus in Romania* does not understand how to assume a role regarding Romania's interests. Consequently, the only active actor of the binomial given by the Carpathian facade remained Hungary.

Indeed, the activism of the Hungarian state, Orban's nationalism, revealed once again the validity of Iorga's thesis regarding the failure of any state policy that overbids and ultimately tires the vitality of its own people. *Vitality* is not an "accumulation of forces", Iorga showed[16], but "the capacity of a people, [which] even without a leader and organization, is able to achieve something", being "a permanent state", through which it achieves "things that are at an exceptional level"[17]. The will of the leader does not overlap with national vitality, on the contrary, it wastes it if it directs the potential of a people in a direction that is not appropriate for it. The direction appropriate for the Hungarian people is coexistence with the Romanians within the Carpathian facade, not the transformation of the latter into a second-rate population through fabulous investments in ethnic supremacism.

Let's see the data.

Between 2017 and 2021, Hungary invested in Transylvania amounts that exceeded 1% of the state budget. The goal? The establishment of a supremacist nation in Transylvania through culture, education and a parallel economy, but deeply dependent on Budapest, through an oligarchic network of local barons.

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[14] Radu Baltasiu (coord.), *Situația actuală a frontierei de nord-vest a României la 100 de ani de la Tratatul de la Versailles. Raport de cercetare [The Current Status of the North-Western Romanian border 100 years after the Treaty of Versailles, Research Report]*, Bucharest, Ethnological Publishing House, 2022, p. 53.

[15] Sabina Fati, „Analiză: Peter Magyar și noua politică a Ungariei în Ardeal" ["Analysis: Peter Magyar and Hungary's new policy in Transylvania"], in *DW*, April 13, 2026, Available at: https://www.dw.com/ro/analiz%C4%83-peter-magyar-%C8%99i-noua-politic%C4%83-a-ungariei-%C3%AEn-ardeal/a-76760622, Accessed on September 10, 2026.

[16] Nicolae Iorga, *Hotare și spații naționale. Afirmarea vitalității românești [Borders and national areas. Affirming Romanian vitality]*, Introductory study by Mihai Ungheanu, Afterword by Sever Ardelean, Galați, Porto Franco Publishing House, 1996, p. 221.

[17] *Ibidem*, p. 223.

More precisely, the Orban Government has injected into Transylvania during the 15 years of governance (2011–2026) about 1.5–2 billion euros[18], if not 3 billion[19]:

[18] Compiled info from:

1. Ada Constanda, „INVESTIGAȚIE. 18 milioane de euro au fost dați de către guvernul Viktor Orbán pentru 16 companii din Transilvania, multe conectate politic. Banii trec printr-o fundație la care s-a referit și un actual consilier al președintelui Nicușor Dan" ["INVESTIGATION. The Viktor Orbán government has allocated 18 million euros to 16 companies in Transylvania, many of which have political links. The money is channelled through a foundation that was also mentioned by a current adviser to President Nicușor Dan"], in *Hot News*, October 22, 2025, Available at: https://hotnews.ro/investigatie18milioane deâeuroaufostdatidecatreguvernulviktororbanpentru16companiidintransilvaniamulteconectatepoliticbaniitre cprintrofundatie-la-care-s-a-referit-si-un-2092077, Accessed on September 10, 2026.

2. The G4Media Editorial Team, „Snoop.ro: Guvernul Viktor Orbán distribuie aproape 18 milioane de euro în Transilvania, o parte din bani au ajuns la firmele politicienilor UDMR" ["Snoop.ro: Viktor Orbán's government is distributing nearly 18 million euros in Transylvania; some of the money has gone to companies owned by UDMR politicians"], in *G4media*, October 23, 2025, Available at: https://www.g4media.ro/guvernulviktororbandistribuieaproape-18milioanedeeurointransilvania-o-parte-din-bani-au-ajuns-la-firmele-politicienilor-udmr.html, Accessed on September 10, 2026.

3. Teodora Stroe, „Guvernul lui Viktor Orban a finanțat cu 5 milioane de euro presa de limbă maghiară din Transilvania înainte de alegerile din aprilie 2026/Banii au ajuns în România prin intermediul Asociației pentru Spațiul Media Transilvan" ["Viktor Orban's government provided 5 million euros in funding to the Hungarian-language media in Transylvania ahead of the April 2026 elections/The money reached Romania through the Association for the Transylvanian Media Space"], in *G4Media*, June 29, 2026, Available at: https://www.g4media.ro/guvernulluiorbanafinantatcu 5milioanedeeuropresadelimbamaghiara-din-transilvania-inainte-de-alegerile-din-aprilie-2026-banii-au-ajuns-in-romania-prin-intermediulasociatieipentruspatiu.html, Accessed on September 15, 2026.

4. Mihai Roman, „Guvernul Ungariei investește 77 de milioane de euro în proiecte din Ținutul Secuiesc. Proiectele pot fi depuse doar în limba maghiară" ["The Hungarian Government is investing 77 million euros in projects in the Székely Land. Project proposals may only be submitted in Hungarian"], in *G4Media*, November 21, 2018, Available at: https://www.g4media.ro/guvernul-ungariei-investeste77demilioanedeeuroinproiecte-dintinutulsecuiescproiectelepotfidepusedoarinlimba maghiara.html, Accessed on September 10, 2026.

5. Oana Despa, „Imperiul media din Ardeal al lui Viktor Orbán se prăbușește. Câți bani a investit Budapesta în presa din România" ["Viktor Orbán's media empire in Transylvania is collapsing. How much money has Budapest invested in the Romanian press?"], in *Europa Liberă România*, Novembre 8, 2022, Available at: https://romania.europalibera.org/a/presamaghiar%C4%83-falit%C4%83/32120687.html, Accessed on September 9, 2026.

6. The G4Media Editorial Team, „Cum funcționează sistemul de subvenții al Ungariei în Transilvania de aproape 3 miliarde de euro: finanțări pentru structuri religioase, fundații apropiate de UDMR și presa loială lui Viktor Orban" ["How Hungary's subsidy scheme in Transylvania, worth nearly 3 billion euros, works: funding for religious organisations, foundations with close ties to the UDMR, and media outlets loyal to Viktor Orbán"], in *G4Media*, September 30, 2025, Available at: https://www.g4media.ro/cumfunctioneazasistemuldesubventiialungarieiintransilvania-de-aproape3miliarde deeurofinantaripentrustructurireligioase-fundatiiapropiatedeudmrsipresaloialaluiviktororban.html, Accessed on September 15, 2026.

7. Zoltán Sipos, "The Hungarian community in Transylvania, flooded with financial support from Hungary. These are the biggest winners", in *Átlátszó Erdély*, February 8, 2019, Available at: https://atlatszo.ro/en/english/thehungariancommunity-in-transylvania-flooded-with-financial-support-from-hungary-here-are-the-biggest-winners/, Accessed on September 8, 2026.

8. Zoltán Sipos, „Punguța cu doi bani: 5 milioane de euro pe an pentru trustul media maghiar din Transilvania" ["A pittance: 5 million euros a year for the Hungarian media group in Transylvania"], in

- through the *Bethlen Gabor Fund*, about 1.2 billion euros – amounts intended especially for the symbolic level of Hungarian suprematism[20], such as salaries for teachers, subsidies for the press and religions, repairs to kindergartens. Of these amounts, 70% reached Transylvania.
- Through the "Pro Economica" program, another 312 million euros, through direct financing of entrepreneurship in Mureș, Harghita, Covasna.
- The third pillar – Sports and Education infrastructure, about 250 million euros, through which the stadiums with too few spectators in Sfântu Gheorghe and Miercurea Ciuc, the ice rinks and the campuses of Sapientia University were built. Analysts of the phenomenon have categorized the phenomenon of "stadiums without spectators" as "sports [nationalist] megalomania"[21]. Their goal was to create networks of political loyalty through sports and cultivate national pride in a "tailor-made" architectural framework and through dependence on Budapest funds[22].

Átlátszó Erdély, July 28, 2021, Available at: https://atlatszo.ro/ro/romana/punguta-cu-doi-bani-5-milioane-de-euro-pe-an-pentru-trustul-media-maghiar-din-transilvania/, Accessed on September 15, 2026.

9. Irina Breilean, „Investigație RFE/RL: De ce finanțează Ungaria comunități din diaspora?" ["RFE/RL Investigation: Why is Hungary funding diaspora communities?"], in *Europa Liberă România,* July 9, 2021, Available at: https://romania.europalibera.org/a/investitie-ungaria-in-diaspora/31350553.html, Accessed on September 6, 2026.

10. The Afaceri News Editorial Team, "Daună totală: «tămâierea» presei maghiare din Ardeal cu banii Budapestei, un fiasco zgomotos" ["Total damage: the 'flattering' of the Hungarian press in Transylvania with money from Budapest – a resounding fiasco"], in *Afaceri News*, Decembre 30, 2024, Available at: https://www.afaceri.news/dauna-totalatamaiereapreseimaghiare-din-ardeal-cu-banii-budapestei-un-fiasco-zgomotos/, Accessed on September 7, 2026.

11. Átlátszó Erdély, "ÁTLÁTSZÓ ERDÉLY: UDMR vrea controlul trustului media finanțat de guvernul Orbán, trust care deține o parte covârșitoare a presei de limbă maghiară din Transilvania" ["ÁTLÁTSZÓ ERDÉLY: The UDMR wants control of the media group funded by the Orbán government, which owns the overwhelming majority of the Hungarian-language press in Transylvania"], in *Presshub*, July 29, 2026, Available at: https://www.presshub.ro/atlatszoerdelyudmrvreacontrolultrustuluimediafinantat-de-guvernul-orban-trust-care-detineopartecovarsitoare-a-presei-de-limba-maghiara-din-transilvania-413920/, Accessed on August 10, 2026.

[19] Ada Constanda, „Cum cumpără guvernul Viktor Orbán influență în România: 18 milioane de euro pentru companii din Transilvania" ["How Viktor Orbán's government is buying influence in Romania: €18 million for companies in Transylvania"], in *Snoop*, October 22, 2025, Available at: https://snoop.ro/cum-cumparaguvernulviktororbaninfluentainromania-18milioanedeeuropentrucompanii dintransilvania/, Accessed on September 10, 2026.

[20] Jerguš Ferko, *Maghiarii sub semnul (auto)amăgilor [Hungarians under the sign of (self) deceptions]*, Cluj-Napoca, Argonaut Publishing House, 2019.

[21] The optimal ratio between the population of a locality and the stadium that serves it is about 3–5% (stadium capacity of the locality's population). The Sepsi OSK stadium in Sfântu Gheorghe was built to accommodate 17% of the city's population, and the one in Miercurea Ciuc should accommodate 11%.

[22] See:

1. David Goldblatt and Daniel Nolan, "Viktor Orbán's reckless football obsession", in *The Guardian*, January 11, 2018, Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/jan/11/viktor-orban-hungary-prime-minister-reckless-football-obsession, Accessed on September 10, 2026.

All these amounts meant a huge opportunity cost for Hungary. Instead of transforming Transylvania into a productive economic actor, they accentuated the dependence of the Hungarian-speaking population on Budapest, generating the enrichment of a local oligarchy and too few effects of the relationship with the Hungarian economy. Orban invested too little in the future – in the local productive economy and education, and too much in the past – in the palaces of the counts. The investment in education was also in the past, through programs that inoculated medieval segregationist myths inspired by the *unio trio nationum*, from the time when Romanians had no political rights in Transylvania. So was the investment in the economy, as Orban tried to separate what could not be separated: local economic flows from those of the Romanian economy – the profits of Szekler companies depend largely on the Romanian economy.

All these investments were part of the economic nationalism of Orban's policy – the so-called "orbanomics", characterized by unorthodox economic nationalism founded on artificial pillars. What do they consist of?

We have seen the first one: the myth of ethnic supremacism through culture and sports.

The second consisted of a complex nationalist social economy – meant to support domestic demographic growth with special openings towards China. Specifically, the Orban regime imposed special taxes on Hungarian multinationals to finance subsidies granted to national companies run by elites loyal to the ruling party (FIDESZ) and to finance demographic policy. In parallel, it capped the prices of utilities, fuel and basic food, and subsidized housing credit, which led to the distortion of the economy and the suffocation of small producers, respectively the increase in housing prices. Because the currency needed external support to support the above policies, and through aggressive rhetoric he alienated EU funds, Orban turned to China, promoting a very broad opening towards it. Basically, Orban tried to replace the post-Covid European cohesion funds blocked by the European Commission, worth 17 billion euros, with Chinese investments and loans worth 16 billion euros[23]. However, the Chinese investments came with commercial credits, not preferential, with secret clauses, some of which were for short

2. Marian Pavalasc, "How Viktor Orban Is Using Sports To Expand Hungary's Influence Abroad", in *Radio Free Europe. Radio Liberty*, August 7, 2022, Available at: https://www.rferl.org/a/hungaryorbansportinfluenceromania/31977287.html, Accessed on September 10, 2026.

3. Babett Oroszi, "The Orban government spent billions on Hungarian football clubs in Serbia, Romania and Slovakia", in *Atlatszo*, November 28, 2022, Available at: https://english.atlatszo.hu/2018/12/11/the-orbangovernmentspentbillionsonhungarian-football-clubs-in-serbia-romania-and-slovakia/, Accessed on September 9, 2026.

4. Dan Udrea, „Ce ascund milioanele de euro ale lui Viktor Orban. Între 2022 și 2025, Ungaria a finanțat Sepsi și Csikszereda cu 50.000.000 euro. Ce așteaptă, la schimb, premierul maghiar" ["What lies behind Viktor Orbán's millions of euros? Between 2022 and 2025, Hungary provided Sepsi and Csikszereda with 50,000,000 euros in funding. What does the Hungarian Prime Minister expect in return?"], in *Golazo*, March 30, 2026, Available at: https://golazo.ro/sepsi-csikszereda-finantareviktor-orban-ungaria-169421, Accessed on September 15, 2026.

[23] Jordyn Dahl, "Xi Jinping uses cold hard cash to keep Viktor Orbán close China is Hungary's No. 1 foreign investor, and Budapest is powering ahead in EV production", in *Politico*, May 9, 2024, Available at: https://www.politico.eu/article/viktororbanxijinpinghungarychinapartnership-electric-vehicles-investments-cooperation/, Accessed on September 8, 2026.

periods of about 3 years. Moreover, in order to receive the 16 billion euros from the Chinese in the form of investments and loans, Orban offered facilities of 4.1 billion euros. Apparently, Orban made a master geopolitical move. But, in addition to the financial conditions that only in the short term responded to Hungary's needs, from an economic point of view they came with at least two additional burdens for Hungary: a huge pressure on utilities, especially in terms of energy consumption, and on the labor force – which is why the immigration rate has increased – a paradox of Orbanomics – in the name of economic nationalism brings workers from Southeast Asia. The social costs are still high, because Orbanomics has neglected the health system, education and other public services. Thus, the construction of huge Chinese battery factories will increase Hungary's energy consumption by 33% by 2030[24]. All this took place against the background of a structural budget deficit that collapsed in 2025, when the deficit reached 6.5% of GDP, at which point the Fidesz government had to completely freeze public spending[25]. The deficit reached 8.3% of GDP in 2026[26], at which point Peter Magyar took over the government, achieving an exceptional turnaround, with the help of European funds[27].

At the same time, **Orbanist nationalism has failed to stop Hungary's demographic decline**, practically the third major target of his policies besides the soft recovery of Transylvania and independence from Brussels.

Here, in brief, is the evolution of the main indicators of the two countries:

Hungary, in 2016, had a GDP per capita of 69% of the EU average, so that in 2026 it would reach 76.6%.

Romania, in 2016, had a GDP per capita of 59% of the EU average, so that in 2026 it would reach 78% of the EU average[28].

The natural population growth, practically the indicator that shows that a population is truly prosperous, has involuted in Hungary from –3.5 per thousand in 2016 to –4.3 per thousand in 2026. In Romania, the same indicator has involuted from –3.2% per thousand in 2016 to –4.8% per thousand, which shows that both populations are unhappy in relation to society and the state[29].

[24] Adam Magyar, "The Hungarians Saying 'No' to EV Battery Factories in Their Backyards Viktor Orban wants to use the EU's 'green transition' to make Hungary great again, but his embrace of a dirty industry has sparked grassroots resistance", in *Balkansight*, December 18, 2025, Available at: https://balkaninsight.com/2025/12/18/the-hungarians-saying-notoevbatteryfactoriesintheirbackyards/fellowship/, Accessed on September 15, 2026.

[25] Alexandra Pele, „Ungaria îngheață unele cheltuieli după ce deficitul bugetar ajunge la 8 mld. dolari" ["Hungary freezes certain expenditure after the budget deficit reaches $8 billion"], in *Curs de Guvernare*, May 13, 2025, Available at: https://cursdeguvernare.ro/ungaria-ingheata-unele-cheltuieli-dupa-ce-deficitul-bugetar-ajunge-la-8-mld-dolari.html, Accessed on September 8, 2026.

[26] European Commission, "Economic forecast for Hungary. The latest macroeconomic forecast for Hungary", in *European Commission*, May 21, 2026, Available at: https://economyfinance.ec.europa.eu/economicsurveillanceeumemberstates/countrypagesincludingcountryreports/hungary/economic-forecast hungary_en, Accessed on September 5, 2026.

[27] *Ibidem*.

[28] Eurostat, "Purchasing power parities and GDP per capita – preliminary estimate", in *Eurostat*, March 25, 2026, Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statisticsexplained/index.php?title=Purchasing_power_parities_and_GDP_per_capita_–_preliminary_estimate, Accessed on September 4, 2026.

[29] Eurostat, "Interactive publications, Demography of Europe – 2026 edition", in *Eurostat*, Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/interactive-publications/demography-2026, Accessed on September 13, 2026.

Despite a government without a Country project, Romania has managed to recover more of the gaps with the EU. It remains to be seen what factors have facilitated this: a larger economy, a society less tired than the Hungarian one (with more "vitality"), a better relation with the European Commission etc.

It also remains to be seen what happens to the parallel economy established by the Orban regime in Romania. It will probably continue to expand, acquiring/developing critical logistics and production structures, maintaining its objectives, given that Romanian statehood is almost absent in the area. The hypothesis is that the Fidesz oligarchy has built a real economic bastion in Transylvania[30].

5. REFERRENCES

At the moment, Hungary, as a result of Orbanist economic nationalism, which centered on the "recovery of Transylvania" through decoupling from Brussels and with the help of Chinese loans and investments, is in the midst of a reassessment by the Magyar government.

However, the new Peter Magyar government, although it has abandoned the "culture war" rhetoric with Brussels, is positioned on a "critically pro-European" paradigm and, as far as we are concerned, seems focused on making politics in Transylvania more efficient financially rather than abandoning it.

It remains to be seen to what extent the new government will abandon the "soft irredentism" of the Orban government. For example, **the parallel economic**

[30] The *Agrofert* case is telling: „Date comerciale analizate de RISE arată că firme din grupul Agrofert, fondat de premierul ceh Andrej Babiš, au cumpărat direct și indirect cereale provenite din Ucraina de zeci de milioane de dolari, în pofida discursului lor public critic la adresa Ucrainei și a poziționării de partea fermierilor afectați. Fluxurile au ajuns în România prin traderi regionali și alte verigi comerciale, inclusiv companii care au importat masiv cereale din Ucraina de la firme investigate de autoritățile de la Kiev pentru ample operațiuni de evaziune fiscală. Afacerile lui Babiš și investitorii din cercul-zero al fostului premier Orbán se întâlnesc astăzi în același lanț agroindustrial: de la comerțul cu cereale ucrainene până la o fabrică de furaje din județul Mureș, inaugurată de același Viktor Orbán în 2019. Și Péter Magyar, actualul prim-ministru al Ungariei, a fost până anul trecut în conducerea grupului maghiar apropiat de Orban, rivalul său la recentele alegeri parlamentare de la Budapesta". ["Trade data analyzed by RISE shows that companies in the Agrofert group, founded by Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, directly and indirectly bought tens of millions of dollars worth of grain from Ukraine, despite their public critical discourse on Ukraine and their stance on the side of affected farmers. The flows reached Romania through regional traders and other commercial links, including companies that massively imported grain from Ukraine from companies investigated by the Kiev authorities for extensive tax evasion operations. Babiš's businesses and the investors from former Prime Minister Orbán's circle-zero meet today in the same agro-industrial chain: from the trade in Ukrainian grain to a feed factory in Mureș County, inaugurated by the same Viktor Orbán in 2019. Péter Magyar, the current Prime Minister of Hungary, was also at the helm of the Hungarian group close to Orbán, his rival in the recent parliamentary elections in Budapest"], in Romana Puiuleț, „PROFIT DE PE URMA RĂZBOIULUI: apropiații premierilor Orbán și Babiš, comerț în România cu cereale din Ucraina" ["PROFITING FROM THE WAR: associates of Prime Ministers Orbán and Babiš trade in Ukrainian grain in Romania"], in *Rise Project*, June 16, 2026, Available at: https://www.riseproject.ro/investigations/uncategorized/profitdepeurmarazbouluiapropiatii-premierilor-orban-si-babis-comert-in-romania-cu-cereale-din-ukraina/, Accessed on September 15, 2026.

network created by Orban seems to be expanding in Transylvania (see the case of Agrofert, which, through people around the former prime minister, bought Romanian logistics chains and runs complex grain businesses in Romania)[31]. Given the inertia of the Romanian side, huge profits are redirected to Budapest, Romania, Transylvania in particular, being a zone of neocolonial surplus value extraction.

Although the new government of Peter Magyar announced an audit and a revaluation of public spending, subsidies in education continue, even if, apparently, new constructions seem to have stopped.

It remains to be seen to what extent Hungary will become an efficient bureaucratic and economic state in relation to its irredentist stake in Transylvania. It is certain, however, that these consume substantial funds that can contribute to the imbalance of the Hungarian state and society, not only through unproductive expenses, but also through the development of oligarchies that, in principle, are resource consumers. It would be a huge achievement for Hungary to summarize its sovereignist discourse only on its irredentist dimension in relation to the only state that allows it, Romania, while with Brussels, from which it needs money, it will change its paradigm towards a softer sovereignty, somehow integrated into the Brussels discourse. Without Brussels' money, Hungary will no longer be able to support economic expansion in Transylvania. On the other hand, Romania still has one more layer to manage: that of the oligarchy created by the Orbanist parallel economy, which acts according to colonial criteria in Transylvania, dealing with the collection of revenues and sending them to Budapest, which in turn has a new source of income for other projects, including Transylvania.

6. CONCLUSIONS

We have no data to prove that the attitude of the parallel state structure has changed its fundamental attitude towards Romanian-Hungarian coexistence. We have two indicators: the network of *Agrofert*-type mega-businesses that continues unhindered and the situation of the Romanian high school "Mihai Viteazu" in Sfântu Gheorghe. If the first, which we have already referred to above, involves a group of officials or former officials who have acquired strategic logistical and cereal resources in the relationship with Ukraine and Romania (in Transylvania and beyond), the second concerns the openly discriminatory attitude of Romanians, through the concept of ethnic supremacy promoted by the Hungarian elites tolerated by Bucharest: I will conclude this material with the excellent synthesis related to this last topic by the investigative journalist Romeo Couți:

> "I insist on this topic not out of hostility towards the Hungarian community nor against the Szekler heritage. On the contrary, I believe that every community has the right to protect its history and identity.

[31] *Ibidem.*

I insist because I am a journalist and I consider it my obligation to ask why, in a county where millions are found for the restoration of castles and mansions, the students of the 'Mihai Viteazul' National College in Sfântu Gheorghe end up starting another school year in containers.

I will not accept that a criticism addressed to the UDMR administration is artificially transformed into a Romanian-Hungarian conflict. I criticize an administration and its priorities, not an ethnicity.

I will insist until someone offers not explanations, but solutions. Because these children have the right to normal educational conditions now, not sometime.

The Covasna County Council announces with satisfaction the completion, this month, of the restoration of Mikó Castle in Olteni. The investment: 20 million lei, financed through the PNRR, with the County Council's own contribution of 11.7 million lei.

In the same county, in another place, however, there are already six years of construction, of postponed promises, of dust and impatience. Six years in which over a thousand children – Romanians from Sfântu Gheorghe, from Covasna – learned to do their homework on makeshift benches, to keep their clothes in bags, to wait for their break on a sports field transformed into a container yard.

Mayor Antal Árpád says it's 'normal'. That it shouldn't be viewed through an ethnic lens.

It's not a dispute with a builder. It's a firm message from Kelemen Hunor and the UDMR. A worrying message to which the response is the silence of Bucharest and the national press"[32].

So the aforementioned geopolitical binomial works according to the active/absent principle, in which one of the actors exhausts its ethnic community by ideologizing history and the other by abandoning statehood. The result? Communities alienated from themselves – either through the phenomenon called

[32] „Insist asupra acestui subiect nu din ostilitate față de comunitatea maghiară și nici împotriva patrimoniului secuiesc. Dimpotrivă, cred că fiecare comunitate are dreptul să-și protejeze istoria și identitatea.

Insist pentru că sunt jurnalist și consider că este obligația mea să întreb de ce, într-un județ în care se găsesc milioane pentru restaurarea castelelor și conacelor, elevii Colegiului Național «Mihai Viteazul» din Sfântu Gheorghe ajung să înceapă încă un an școlar în containere.

Nu voi accepta ca o critică adresată administrației UDMR să fie transformată artificial într-un conflict româno-maghiar. Critic o administrație și prioritățile ei, nu o etnie.

Voi insista până când cineva va oferi nu explicații, ci soluții. Pentru că acești copii au dreptul la condiții normale de educație acum, nu cândva.

Consiliul Județean Covasna anunță cu satisfacție finalizarea, în această lună, a restaurării Castelului Mikó din Olteni. Investiția: 20 de milioane de lei, finanțată prin PNRR, cu o contribuție proprie a Consiliului Județean de 11,7 milioane de lei.

În același județ, în alt loc însă, sunt deja șase ani de șantier, de promisiuni amânate, de praf și de nerăbdare. Șase ani în care peste o mie de copii – români din Sfântu Gheorghe, din Covasna – au învățat să-și facă temele pe bănci improvizate, să-și țină hainele în saci, să-și aștepte pauza pe un teren de sport transformat în curte de container.

Primarul Antal Árpád spune că e «normal». Că nu trebuie privit prin cheie etnică. Nu e un litigiu cu un constructor. E un mesaj ferm din partea lui Kelemen Hunor și a UDMR-ul. Un mesaj îngrijorător la care riposta e tăcerea Bucureștiului și a presei naționale", in Romeo Couți, „Viziunea UDMR: milioane pentru trecut, containere pentru viitor" ["The UDMR's vision: millions for the past, containers for the future"], in *Romeo Couți/Lebăda Neagră*, August 10, 2026, Available at: https://romeocouti.substack.com/p/viziunea-udmr-milioane-pentru-trecut, Accessed on September 6, 2026.

"invented community", through the overrepresentation of the past, and another is dissolved through self-stigmatization, as we have shown following our field studies. The result? We fear that this oligarchic colonialism founded by the Orban regime will continue in Transylvania. Based on "soft" ethnic supremacism, no matter how rationalized from a cost perspective, it will remain just as socially inefficient, and the two communities will be just as exposed to the serious challenges of history.

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REPRESENTATION WITHOUT POWER: THE ACCESS OF ETHNIC ROMANIAN MINORITIES TO LOCAL EXECUTIVE POSITIONS IN COVASNA, HARGHITA, AND MUREȘ

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ABSTRACT

This study represents the first part of a broader research project regarding the relationship between demographic weight, electoral representation, and the access of numerically minoritised communities to local executive positions. This project will eventually be extended to the seven Romanian counties with the largest Hungarian populations. The current analysis focuses on the counties of Covasna, Harghita, and Mureș, covering the electoral cycles from 1992–2024. Data were collected primarily through requests based on Law no. 544/2001, addressed to county councils, town halls, and prefectures. The centralisation of these data includes the leadership of county councils, mayors, deputy mayors, and the composition of local councils in municipalities and towns where the numerical minority accounts for approximately 10% or more of the population. The findings indicate an "asymmetry" in the conversion of deliberative representation into executive access. In Miercurea-Ciuc and Sfântu Gheorghe, Romanian representation within local councils has not translated into comparable access to the position of deputy mayor. Throughout the analysed period, all deputy mayor positions in Miercurea-Ciuc and Sfântu Gheorghe have been held by the UDMR. In Târgu-Mureș, every mandate following the 1992–1996 period has included at least one UDMR deputy mayor, even after the demographic balance shifted in favour of the Romanian population; between 2000 and 2008, the deputy mayors were drawn exclusively from UDMR.

Keywords: political representation, numerical minority, local administration, ethnic vote.

1. RESEARCH PROBLEM

In sociological research, the relationship between the majority and the minority is more complex than a simple comparison of a group to the total population of a state. A national majority may become a numerical minority at a regional or local level, whereas a national minority may occupy the position of a demographic, electoral, and institutional majority within a specific territory. In Romania, Covasna and Harghita represent the most evident cases of this local reversal of the "majority-

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minority relationship", while Mureș offers a particularly useful case for comparison precisely because its demographic and political structure is more balanced. The 2021 census confirms the distinct ethnic character of these areas, and the National Institute of Statistics publishes data regarding ethnicity; Mureș County has a population composed of 54.4% Romanians and 35.6% Hungarians, in Covasna County the population consists of 23% Romanians and 71.8% Hungarians, and in Harghita County there are 13% Romanians and 85.7% Hungarians[35].

This research stems from the distinction between representation and access to power. In classical terminology, representation may be formal, descriptive, symbolic, or substantive; the fact that a group "is present" within a deliberative body does not, in itself, indicate its capacity to participate effectively in the exercise of executive authority – or, indeed, in the realization of one's political objectives[36]. Furthermore, descriptive representation can acquire additional importance under conditions of mistrust between groups, insufficiently articulated interests, or a historical experience of "political subordination"[37].

This distinction is essential because the deputy mayor is not directly elected by the citizens. Under current regulations, this individual is elected by secret ballot, with an absolute majority, from among the members of the local council, following a proposal made by either the mayor or the councillors; they are subordinate to the mayor, serve as the mayor's legal replacement in situations provided for by law, and may be assigned "delegated duties"[38]. Similarly, the positions of vice-presidents of county councils result from an indirect vote within the council. The local election law explicitly specifies the indirect nature of the election for both deputy mayors and vice-presidents. Therefore, occupying these roles constitutes a particularly relevant indicator of a political group's capacity to transform its deliberative mandates into access to "executive power", or "the executive branch".

The paper does not proceed from the hypothesis of a legal obligation that the positions of deputy mayor or deputy president must be shared proportionally between ethnic groups. No such rule exists in Romanian law. The focus of this

[35] National Institute of Statistics, „Tabelul 2.02. Populația rezidentă după etnie" ["Table 2.02. Resident population by ethnicity"], in *Recensământul Populației și Locuințelor, runda 2021. Rezultate definitive. Caracteristici etno-culturale demografice [Population and Housing Census, 2021 round. Definitive results. "Ethno-cultural demographic characteristics"]*, June 2023, Available at: https://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultaterpl2021/rezultatedefinitivecaracteristicietnoculturaledemografice/, Accessed on September 12, 2026.

[36] Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation*, Berkeley-Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1967.

[37] Jane Mansbridge, „Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent 'Yes'", in *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 61, No. 3/1999, pp. 628–657.

[38] The Government of Romania, „Art. 152, cu modificările și completările ulterioare" ["Art. 152, with subsequent amendments and additions"], in *Ordonanța de urgență nr. 57 din 3 iulie 2019 privind Codul administrativ [Emergency Ordinance no. 57 of 3 July 2019 regarding the "Administrative Code", as it is formally known]*, Availableat: https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/ 215925, Accessed on September 8, 2026.

research is different: if, over a period of more than three decades, persistent and distinct patterns emerge regarding the conversion of electoral weight into access to executive power, then these become sociologically relevant even in the absence of a legal violation.

This clarification is all the more important as international standards regarding minorities refer to "effective participation in public life", but they do not establish an automatic right for every community to the position of deputy mayor. The Lund Recommendations of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities describe the "effective participation of minorities" as an important component of a peaceful and democratic society and explicitly address "representation at the national, regional and local level", "consultation" and "self-governance"[39]. The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, in turn, requires the promotion of the participation of persons belonging to minorities in public life and acknowledges that the realisation of this objective may require measures adapted to the national and local "context"[40].

Furthermore, the report presented by Jean-Pierre Worms to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on 19 January 1993 introduces a relevant benchmark for the analysis of relationships between national majorities and regional minorities. Article 11 of the draft additional protocol stipulates that

> "in regions where they are in the majority, persons belonging to a national minority should be able to benefit from appropriate local or autonomous authorities or a special status, corresponding to the historical and territorial situation and in accordance with the internal legislation of the state"[41].

The explanatory memorandum specifies that these arrangements are designed with respect for the integrity of the state – and may only be established in accordance with national legislation[42]. The formulation was incorporated into the draft protocol included in "Recommendation 1201 (1993)" of the Parliamentary Assembly[43].

This information is relevant to the situation of Romanians who are in a numerical minority, as Article 11 must be read in conjunction with Article 13, which

[39] OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, *The Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life*, The Hague, OSCE, 1999.

[40] In particular, Article 15 and the thematic documents regarding the "effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in public life", in Council of Europe, *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*.

[41] „în regiunile în care sunt majoritare, persoanele aparținând unei minorități naționale ar trebui să poată beneficia de autorități locale sau autonome adecvate ori de un statut special, corespunzător situației istorice și teritoriale și conform legislației interne a statului", in Jean-Pierre Worms, "Report on an additional protocol on the rights of minorities to the European Convention on Human Rights", in Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Doc. 6742, January 19, 1993, draft protocol, Articles 11 and 13, and the explanatory memorandum, along with the comments on Articles 10–11 and 13.

[42] *Ibidem.*

[43] Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Recommendation 1201 (1993): Additional protocol on the rights of minorities to the European Convention on Human Rights, February 1, 1993, draft protocol, Articles 11 and 13.

explicitly extends the exercise of the rights and freedoms provided in the proposal to persons belonging to the state-wide majority, but who find themselves in a minority in one or more regions of that state. The relevance to the Romanian case does not arise solely from a subsequent interpretation; ***in the commentary on Article 13, the rapporteur expressly provides the example of regions in Romania where Hungarians are the majority and specifies that Romanians who are in a numerical minority in these regions must benefit from the protection of the proposed provisions***. The text does not establish ethnic quotas for deputy mayors or deputy presidents, but it supports the relevance of the question regarding the consistency of applying the principle of inclusion when the local "majority–minority" relationship is reversed.

Within this framework, the central question arises: *is the principle of effective participation applied in practice, in a reciprocal manner, when a national minority becomes a local majority and the national majority becomes a numerical minority*?

Existing literature offers consistent, albeit fragmentary, contributions; in the past, the representation of minorities in local councils has been evaluated, primarily based on the elections of 2004 and 2008 and the effects of electoral legislation[44]. Consequently, the competition between the UDMR and its rival Hungarian political organisations was examined by considering the relationship between local demographics, "ethnic enclaves", and the "fragmentation of the vote" – a process that provides valuable insight into how electoral dynamics function within specific communities[45]. Another avenue of research concerns the mechanisms of electoral participation and "bloc voting" among Transylvanian Hungarians, examining how the community's electoral mobilization is formed – and subsequently maintained[46]. These approaches are complemented by an analysis of the organization of the Hungarian political field, the strategies of the elites, and the relationship between political discourse, institutional structures, and the implementation of "assumed objectives" – as well as the broader framework of "political strategy"[47].

Following the bibliographic research conducted for this paper, no study was identified that systematically reconstructs – for the counties of Covasna, Harghita, and Mureș – the simultaneous composition of local councils and the holders of the offices of mayor, deputy mayor, and president or vice-president of the county council across all electoral cycles from 1992 through to the post-2024 elections, in order to

[44] István Gergő Székely, "The Representation of National Minorities in the Local Councils – An Evaluation of Romanian Electoral Legislation in Light of the Results of the 2004 and 2008 Local Elections", in *ISPMN Working Papers in Romanian Minority Studies. Institute for the Study of National Minority Issues*, Cluj-Napoca, No. 11, 2008.

[45] Sherrill Stroschein, "Demography in Ethnic Party Fragmentation: Hungarian Local Voting in Romania", in *Party Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 2/2011, pp. 189–204.

[46] Tamás Kiss, István Gergő Székely and Gergő Barna, "Factors Affecting Turnout among Ethnic Minority Voters: The Case of Hungarians in Transylvania", in *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 4/2017, pp. 87–119.

[47] Tibor Toró, "Hungarian Minority Politics in Post-Socialist Romania: Interests, Strategies, and Discourses", in *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, European and Regional Studies*, Vol. 10/2016, pp. 79–106.

analyse the "conversion of representation into executive access". The current study is, at the same time, merely the first stage. The broader project aims to apply the same methodology across the seven Romanian counties that host the largest Hungarian communities. This extended comparative analysis, which will allow for the verification of the hypotheses formulated here across a greater number of demographic contexts, will be the subject of subsequent research.

2. DATA, CASE SELECTION AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The empirical basis of this research was constructed not by relying on journalistic accounts or the memories of political actors, but rather on administrative documents requested from public institutions. The initial stage consisted of submitting requests grounded in Law no. 544/2001 regarding "free access to information of public interest". Article 1 of this law establishes the "free access to information of public interest", and "public information" is defined in relation to the activity of public authorities and institutions[48]. The requests covered each mandate since 1992: the names of the executive officeholders; their political affiliation; any changes that occurred during the term; the political composition of local and county councils; as well as the exact period during which the respective individuals held office. The administrative files for Harghita, Covasna, and Mureș contain both the requests and the institutions' responses and annexes, resulting in a total of nearly 200 pages of annexes, scanned documents, and local council resolutions that had to be centralized and analysed.

The collection process also highlighted a methodological difficulty, which is significant in its own right: local administration archives are not uniformly centralized for the entire post-communist period. The response regarding Covasna County, for instance, illustrates the limitations of a complete synthesis available at the level of a single institution and the necessity of addressing the administrative-territorial units directly. Certain gaps were filled through additional requests, individual responses from these units, and separate syntheses.

In Mureș, the request included the County Council and a broader range of municipalities and towns with mixed populations, including Târgu-Mureș, Reghin, Sighișoara, Târnăveni, Iernut, Luduș, Sovata, and Sângeorgiu de Pădure. The selection criterion was the presence of a community of approximately 10% or more belonging to the "other" primary ethnicity. The chosen formula is deliberately symmetrical. In a municipality with a Hungarian majority, the political access of the Romanian community is monitored; in a town with a Romanian majority, such as Toplița or Bălan, the access of Hungarian representation is also tracked. This choice

[48] The Romanian Parliament, Law no. 544 of October 12, 2001, on Free Access to Information of Public Interest, published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, no. 663 of October 23, 2001, as subsequently amended and supplemented.

transforms the research from a simple inventory of the situation of Romanians in two counties into a comparative model, capable of testing whether the observed mechanism functions in both directions.

The unit of analysis is not the individual, but the political mandate and the institutional distribution of offices. For each cycle, three variables are monitored:

a) demographic weight, which is the proportion of the respective community within the population of the administrative-territorial unit;

b) political weight, resulting from the mandates of relevant parties in the local or county council;

c) executive weight, measured through access to the position of deputy mayor or vice-president and, complementarily, to that of mayor or president of the county council.

This model can be described as an analysis of a representation conversion rate: to what extent does an electoral presence translate into an executive position? Its importance derives from the indirect nature of the election of deputy mayors and vice-presidents, as the result is not produced directly by the electorate, but by the internal political negotiation of the council. A terminological clarification is also necessary, as the current political discourse often uses the phrase "Romanian parties" for PSD, PNL, the former PUNR, PDSR, PD/PDL, etc., in opposition to the UDMR. From a scientific perspective, the equivalence between party and ethnicity is problematic. PSD, PNL, and other national parties are not ethnic organizations and may have members or candidates belonging to any ethnicity. In this work, where data does not contain self-identified ethnicity, we will use terms such as national/"mainstream"/Romanian parties only as a convention and not as a fixed trait.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS: FROM ELECTORAL FIGURES TO EFFECTIVE POWER

The most compelling finding from this longitudinal database emerges when comparing Miercurea-Ciuc, Sfântu Gheorghe, and Târgu-Mureș.

Both Miercurea-Ciuc and Sfântu Gheorghe serve as "eloquent examples". In Miercurea-Ciuc, centralized administrative records indicate that during the 1992–1996 term, Erdei István served as the UDMR deputy mayor; from 1996–2000, the positions were held by Erdei István and Bíró Albin, both from the UDMR; during 2000–2004, Papp Előd and Erdei István represented the UDMR; for 2004–2008, Antal Attila and Szőke Domokos were appointed from the same party. The subsequent cycles followed the same pattern, and during the 2020–2024 and 2024–present terms, the positions have been held by Bors Béla and Sógor Enikő, also representing the UDMR.

In other words, throughout the 1992–2024/present series, there has not been a single deputy mayor from Romanian national parties. This result is more

significant than a snapshot of a single term because it encompasses the entire duration of the analyzed "post-communist democratic administration".

This absence cannot be explained solely by the lack of opposition within the council. During the 1992–1996 term, besides the UDMR, there were two representatives from FSN+PUNR and other councilors unaffiliated with the UDMR; between 1996–2000, PDSR, PL '93, USD, and the Democratic Convention were present; in 2004–2008, the PSD and PNL collectively held four out of nineteen seats; from 2012–2016, there were two USL councilors; in 2016–2020, two PNL and one PSD representative appeared; and in 2024, there is a PSD councilor, while two seats belong to another Hungarian formation. Alternative representation has varied – sometimes modest, other times sufficient to form a visible group – but it has never transitioned into the role of deputy mayor.

At the Harghita County Council level, the pattern is equally robust. Administrative files record successive UDMR vice-presidents throughout all analyzed cycles: Minier Gábor and Kolumbán Gábor in the first legislature, followed by Minier Gábor and Zsombori Vilhelm, Dézsi Iosif Zoltán and Bunta Levente-Zoltán, Borboly Csaba and Petres Sándor, Petres Sándor and Sófalvi László, and subsequently Birtalan József, Petres Sándor, Barti Tihamér, Biró Barna-Botond and, in the most recent legislatures, once again UDMR officeholders. This "persistence" is more relevant than the nominal identity of the individuals. Throughout this period, there were also representatives of PSD, PNL, or other parties in the council, yet the vice-presidential positions were not allocated and did not function as an instrument for the inclusion of a party representing the Romanian electorate. This remains one of the major differences compared to Mureș.

In Sfântu Gheorghe, centralized records indicate consistent UDMR leadership at the mayoral level, held by Albert Álmos from 1992 to 2008 and Antal Árpád-András since 2008. Available administrative data identifies Vargha Fruzsina and Tóth-Birtan Csaba as UDMR deputy mayors for the 2020–2024 term, followed by Sztakics Éva Judit and Tóth-Birtan Csaba – also from UDMR – for the term beginning in 2024. For the purpose of this study, the observed pattern may be defined as follows: *a significant Romanian demographic presence that, due to fragmented political representation, remains unable to secure positions such as deputy mayor or vice-president.*

A significant counterpoint is found in Târgu-Mureș, where every recorded legislature since 1996 has included at least one UDMR deputy mayor. Furthermore, during the 2000–2004 and 2004–2008 terms, these positions were held exclusively by UDMR representatives. The composition of the Târgu-Mureș Local Council partially explains this continuity. UDMR secured 14 of 25 seats in 1992, 13 of 25 in 1996, 13 of 25 in 2000, 12 of 23 in 2004, 10 of 23 in 2008, 10 of 23 in 2012, 10 of 23 in 2016, 11 of 23 in 2020, and 10 of 23 following the 2024 elections.

This data series is likely the most vital indicator for explaining the phenomenon. Even during periods when the Romanian population becomes the

demographic majority, the Romanian vote remains divided among multiple parties, while UDMR remains a unified political bloc holding approximately 40–50% of the council. In the legislature resulting from the 2024 elections, for example, UDMR holds 10 of 23 seats – roughly 43.5% of the council – with the remaining 13 seats divided between PSD, PNL, AUR, and POL.

The Mureș County Council offers a similar perspective on the practice of power-sharing. During the 1993–1996 period, the county leadership included one UDMR vice-president and one from the PUNR; from 1996 to 2000, it included a UDMR vice-president and one from the USD/PDSR coalition. In the 2000–2004 term, when the council president was from the UDMR, the vice-presidents were drawn from the PDSR. Subsequent cycles have seen alternating "UDMR-PNL" or "UDMR-PSD" formulas, or, in periods where the president was from UDMR, two PSD vice-presidents. After 2020, we once again observe mixed "UDMR-PNL" and "UDMR-PSD" arrangements.

Compared to Harghita, the difference is clear: in Mureș, the position of vice-president is repeatedly used as an instrument for inter-party – and indirectly, inter-community – coalition building, whereas in Harghita and Covasna, the record is dominated entirely by UDMR.

The cases of Toplița and Bălan provide a highly useful and relevant inverse test. In both localities, Romanians form the majority, while the Hungarian population constitutes a local minority of 17% and 30% of the total citizenry, respectively. Available records indicate that Toplița had a UDMR deputy mayor during both the 2020–2024 term and the term following the 2024 elections, despite UDMR holding only two council seats in the 2020 legislature and three in 2024. In Bălan, the position of deputy mayor has been held by UDMR during several periods, including 1992–1996, 2020–2024, and the term that began in 2024.

This analysis demonstrates that, across the nine electoral cycles **from 1992-2024, *no deputy mayor in Miercurea-Ciuc or Sfântu Gheorghe has originated from the political factions identified in this study as representing the Romanian community***. This is not a matter of an isolated term or occasionally reduced executive participation, but rather a total absence over the course of more than three decades. ***At the Harghita County Council, the same continuity characterises the positions of deputy president, which have been occupied exclusively by UDMR representatives throughout the documented period***. At the Covasna County Council, the only recorded exception is the presence of a PNL representative during the 1992–1996 and 1996–2000 terms***; subsequently, these deputy president roles have reverted exclusively to the UDMR.***

Within these parameters, the findings highlight a persistent separation between presence in deliberative councils and access to executive leadership. The succession of elections and the changing of incumbents have not, in the cases analysed, produced an alternation of participation between these two political spheres. While explanations regarding electoral majorities, party fragmentation, and coalition

negotiations remain necessary, they do not alter the observed outcome. *The issue is not merely the extent to which Romanians are poorly represented in the executive; rather, it is why their deliberative representation has failed, for over thirty years, to translate into the occupation of the analysed positions, with the limited exception previously noted.*

4. COHESION, FRAGMENTATION, AND THE NEGOTIATION OF POSITIONS

The phenomenon that the data renders visible can be explained more convincingly by incorporating multiple factors rather than a single cause. The first factor may be identified in the organizational consolidation of the Hungarian vote. UDMR was established rapidly after 1989 and became the primary institutional vehicle for representing Hungarians in Romania. Numerous authors demonstrate that this position did not eliminate internal conflicts, yet it allowed the organization to structure the political field of the minority and occupy the central position in its relationship with the Romanian state and Hungary[49].

It is also observed that Transylvanian Hungarians have overwhelmingly supported UDMR since the change of regime, and this stability is explained by a combination of macro-political processes and micro-social mechanisms, such as networks, community integration, electoral habits, and identity-based motivations. In Târgu-Mureș, for example, even though the Hungarian population has become a numerical minority, UDMR remains the largest individual political group in the council. Parties predominantly voted for by Romanians may hold a majority together, but "together" is a political operation, not a demographic fact. PSD, PNL, AUR, POL, and other entities do not automatically form a Romanian bloc; they compete for the mayoralty, resources, positions, and the electorate. UDMR, holding ten or eleven councilors out of 23, can be far more coherent in negotiations.

The issue that must be analysed from a sociological perspective is that Romanians in Miercurea-Ciuc and Sfântu Gheorghe vote within the general structure of the Romanian political system[50]. Depending on the era, they have had to choose between FSN/PDSR/PSD, PNL, PUNR, PD/PDL, CDR, USL, and other political entities. The resulting fragmentation may generate a demographically significant sum of votes, yet it often fails to produce groups of councillors large enough to compel negotiations for the executive position. Furthermore, during the recent 2024 local elections, this fragmentation of the vote resulted in a situation in Sfântu

[49] Tibor Toró, *op. cit.*

[50] Maria Cobianu-Băcanu, „Românii minoritari din Covasna și Harghita. Despre o posibilă strategie a păstrării propriei lor identități naționale" ["The ethnic Romanian minority in Covasna and Harghita. Regarding a potential strategy for the preservation of their national identity"], in *Revista Română de Sociologie [Romanian Journal of Sociology]*, Bucharest, New Series, Year X, No. 3–4/1999, p. 315.

Gheorghe where no representative from the national political parties gained a seat on the Local Council – an unprecedented occurrence in the last century[51].

In localities firmly dominated by the UDMR, the incentive differs; furthermore, if the Hungarian party holds an outright majority or can form a majority alongside another Hungarian party, the electoral cost of excluding a Romanian party from the position of deputy mayor is minimal. The theory of coalitions specifically predicts that actors do not necessarily expand a coalition beyond the size required for the control of "functions"[52]. This mechanism may elucidate the reason for the discrepancy between the normative discourse regarding "minority participation" at a national level and the reality of "local practice".

The organization advocates for inclusion when it finds itself in structural opposition, yet it lacks the same incentive to share positions of power where it holds an outright majority. Furthermore, it demonstrates a duplicity in public discourse; the group demands inclusion and openness for Hungarian minority representatives, but it fails to offer the same treatment to Romanians who find themselves in a "numerical minority" status.

5. INSTITUTIONAL RECIPROCITY AND CONCLUSIONS

An analysis of the nine electoral cycles from 1992–2024 highlights more than an imbalanced representation; it reveals the permanence of an executive absence. In Miercurea-Ciuc, the positions of deputy mayor have belonged exclusively to the UDMR; for Sfântu Gheorghe, the centralization of research identifies no deputy mayors originating from political formations associated with Romanian political representation. At the Harghita County Council, the vice-presidents have remained entirely within the UDMR. The exception recorded at the Covasna County Council, with PNL representation during the 1992–1996 and 1996–2000 mandates, remains relevant, yet its subsequent disappearance indicates a narrowing, rather than a consolidation, of executive openness. We are, therefore, not discussing a temporary electoral defeat, but the prolonged reproduction of a restrictive distribution of power.

The contrast with Târgu-Mureș is firm, however, when we analyse the fact that starting with the 1996–2000 mandate, every legislature analysed includes at least one UDMR deputy mayor; between 2000 and 2008, all these positions belonged to the Hungarian organization. At the county level, Mureș repeatedly records mixed

[51] Oana Mălina Negrea, „Covasna: Niciun român în Consiliul Local Sfântu Gheorghe; primarul UDMR propune un consiliu consultativ" ["Covasna: No Romanians on the Sfântu Gheorghe City Council; UDMR Mayor Proposes an Advisory Council"], in *AGERPRES*, June 10, 2024, Available at: https://agerpres.ro/politic/2024/06/10/covasnaniciunromaninconsiliullocalsfantugheorghe-primaruludmr-propune-unconsiliuconsultati-1310674, Accessed on September 4, 2026.

[52] See William H. Riker, *The Theory of Political Coalitions*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1962.

leaderships. Toplița and Bălan additionally show that executive access for the Hungarian minority is possible even in localities with a Romanian majority in Harghita and with a much smaller percentage of Hungarians. The uncomfortable question cannot be avoided: *why does executive participation reproduce in one direction, while in the county seats and county leaderships of Harghita and Covasna, the reverse direction remains blocked for over three decades?*

The cohesion of the UDMR and the fragmentation of national parties explain a significant part of the difference. Demonstrating that the inclusion of a partner becomes electorally useless does not mean that their permanent exclusion expresses an "inclusive democracy". When positions are shared only where the balance of power dictates it, the participation of minority members functions as a result of political constraint, not as an accepted rule of reciprocity.

The proposed distinction between "local minority" and "dominant minority" allows us to look beyond demographic arithmetic[53]. A minority is defined by its political influence and effective means of expression, rather than exclusively by the number of its members. In this perspective, the fact that Romanians belong to the national majority does not automatically compensate for their local institutional weakness. A citizen does not participate in the governance of their municipality simply by belonging to the country's majority population. The confusion between these two scales can transform the invocation of the national majority into an argument for ignoring local vulnerability.

In the sociology of borders, one examines the creation of "interior borders" – through the restriction of contact and cooperation between communities, without altering geographical boundaries[54]. For the cases under investigation, this perspective shifts the focus towards the inner workings of institutions: identical electoral procedures may coexist with a persistent separation between the population's actual community and the representation admitted to leadership. The relevant frontier here is not the state border, but the threshold of access to administrative leadership. When this threshold remains uncrossed by a community's representation throughout electoral cycles, we encounter an indicator of "executive closure", rather than merely a statistical difference between parties. The significant change may consist of the restriction of participation, rather than the formal disappearance of the institution.

In the case studied, the concept allows for a critical formulation of a "double standard", as inclusion is claimed against majority domination, yet it is not

[53] Radu Baltasiu (coord.), *Situația actuală a frontierei de nord-vest a României la 100 de ani de la Tratatul de la Versailles. Raport de cercetare [The current status of the North West Romanian border 100 years after The Treaty of Versailles. Research report]*, Bucharest, Ethnological Publishing House, 2022, pp. 11–12.

[54] Ilie Bădescu, „Spiritualizarea frontierelor și partidele etnice" ["The spiritualisation of borders and ethnic parties"], in Ilie Bădescu, Dan Dungaciu and Radu Baltasiu, *Sociologia și geopolitica frontierei [The sociology and geopolitics of the "frontier"]*, Vol. I, Bucharest, Floarea Albastră Publishing House, 1995, pp. 313–314.

generalised when the national minority organisation becomes the local majority. Reciprocity cannot be reduced to the goodwill of the powerful; it is precisely where the majority is not arithmetically compelled to share power that the sincerity of its public commitment to democratic inclusion is tested.

The conclusion does not call for "compensatory ethnic privileges", but for democratic consistency and political accountability. The rights of Hungarians are not diminished by examining the marginalisation of numerically minoritised Romanians. Instead, the credibility of an inclusive discourse is diminished when participation is defended for oneself while treated as dispensable for others. No organisation can transform the defence of minorities into an immunity from the evaluation of its own governance. After more than thirty years, this "executive absence" can no longer be presented as an administrative detail. It is a persistent political outcome, and its normalisation transforms proclaimed equality into a promise without reciprocity.

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THE SOCIETAL SECURITY OF ROMANIANS IN HARGHITA AND COVASNA COUNTIES

Samira Cîrlig[55]

ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes Romanian Hungarian dynamics in Covasna and Harghita counties from the perspective of societal security, based on Barry Buzan's vision. The research question I am starting from concerns the main identity challenges faced by Romanians in the two counties. The aim of the research is to discuss the societal security of Romanians in this area, in a context marked by complex intercultural dynamics. The theoretical approach is based on the concept of societal security, but also on other subsidiary concepts such as local minority, security, securization. From a methodological point of view, the research is based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods and techniques. I am referring to statistical data analysis, secondary press analysis and space file. The main ideas focus on interethnic dynamics, which outline the main challenges faced by the Romanian community in the studied area. I believe that this topic is of interest and public utility because the ethnic profile of the two counties is unique in the country, and inter-ethnic dynamics are constantly changing. For this reason, an analysis of societal security may be useful in studying the evolution of this phenomenon. The paper emphasizes the need to reconsider public policies to promote real integration based on mutual respect and direct contact between groups, so that both groups are assured of societal security.

Keywords: societal security, identity, interethnic cohabitation, Covasna, Harghita.

1. INTRODUCTION

In his work *People, States, and Fear*, Barry Buzan rethinks the issue of security by redefining the concept of threat and linking it to that of vulnerabilities. Barry Buzan argues that

> "(...) the security of human communities is affected by various factors across five major sectors: military, political, economic, societal, and environmental. Military security concerns the two-level interplay of states' offensive and defensive capabilities. Political security concerns the organizational stability of states, systems of governance, and the ideologies that confer legitimacy upon them. Economic security concerns access to the resources, markets, and capital necessary to sustain acceptable levels of state welfare and power. Societal security concerns the sustainability, under acceptable conditions of evolution, of traditional patterns of language, culture, and religion, as well as customs and national identity. Environmental security concerns the

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> preservation of the local and global biosphere as the essential foundation upon which all other human activities depend. These five sectors do not operate separately from one another. Each defines a focal aspect of the security issue and a way of prioritizing, but all are linked together by a strong network of connections"[56].

Even though he has clearly demarcated the sectors of security, for Buzan, the state remains, for now, the central element in the security equation:

> "Buzan identifies the 'international system', 'states', and 'individuals' as 'objects of reference' and the military, political, economic, societal, and environmental spheres as potential sources of threat to those 'objects of reference'"[57].

However, for Buzan, at least in this work, the primary object of reference for any security analysis must remain the state[58]. Security is of interest to us because it concerns the state itself and has direct implications for its survival and development.

The multidimensional nature of security is increasingly well-defined in the 1998 work by Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Japp De Wilde, titled *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, in which security is analyzed in military, societal, economic, environmental, and political terms. This school of thought has remained a benchmark due to the way in which, despite considerable criticism at the time, it had a tangible impact even on the most powerful military alliance of all time:

> "In 1991, at the Rome summit, NATO declared – in language strikingly reminiscent of that of the Copenhagen School – that security now has five dimensions: military, societal, economic, political, and environmental. This is the most enduring and concrete achievement of this perspective: it has left its mark at the highest level of global politics. Even more reason to embrace it in its true scope"[59].

In other words, societal security is an area of interest because it ensures the preservation of national identity.

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[56] Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear – An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, (2nd ed.), London, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991, pp. 19–20.

[57] „Buzan delimitează «sistemul internațional», «statele» și «indivizii» ca «obiecte de referință» și spectrul militar, politic, economic, societal și de mediu ca surse potențiale de amenințare la respectivele «obiecte de referință»", in Dan Dungaciu, „Securitate, relații internaționale și studii de Securitate" ["Security, international relations, and security studies"], in *the Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, Vol. IX, No. 4/2012, Bucharest, p. 11, Available at: https://79dd720e4b654316bb39526d8ea1c51d.filesusr.com/ugd/d1cf60_bdfcc1538b884d459c8f37c780cead35.pdf, Accessed on February 20, 2026.

[58] *Ibidem*.

[59] „În 1991, la summit-ul de la Roma, NATO decreta – într-un limbaj care amintește izbitor de cel al Școlii de la Copenhaga – că securitatea are acum cinci dimensiuni: militară, societală, economică, politică și de mediu. Este performanța cea mai durabilă și concretă a acestei perspective: și-a imprimat pecetea la cel mai înalt nivel al politicii mondiale. Un motiv în plus pentru a fi asumată la adevărata sa dimensiune", in *Ibidem*, p. 12.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK. UNDERSTANDING THE TERMS WE USE

2.1. Security

Security is

"(...) the movement that takes politics beyond the rules of the game and the scope of the issue, whether as a special kind of politics or as something that transcends politics"[60].

It should be noted that the definition of the concept of security provided by Buzan, Waever, and Japp is situated within the context of international relations. The traditional understanding of the term "security" is defined with reference to the military-political dimensions of security. In this case, the objects of reference are the state, governance, territory, and society. When we speak of threats in this context, we refer to the use of "extreme measures" adopted by a state representative, such as declaring a state of emergency. In this case, the government assumes the right to use whatever means are necessary to prevent the escalation of threats[61]. Barry Buzan, on the other hand, believes that security lies at the intersection of peace and power, encompassing both[62].

In the context of the extended security agenda, threats are perceived in relation to the reference object of each security sector. For the military sector, the state is typically the reference object. Another example of a reference object for this sector could be potential threats to the "survival of the armed forces". While in traditional security studies military issues are always security issues, for many advanced states, national defense is one of the many functions of the armed forces, and peacekeeping or maintaining order are not considered existential threats to the state. For the political sector, existential threats are traditionally defined in terms of the state's constitutive principle – sovereignty, but sometimes also ideology. When sovereignty is threatened, it means that the state's recognition, legitimacy, or governmental authority is being called into question. In the economic sector, reference points and threats are concepts that involve a certain degree of abstraction and unpredictability, making them difficult to define. An example of this is companies, which are often threatened either by bankruptcy or by legislative changes that can affect their operations. What must be noted in this case is that if the survival of the population is not threatened, economic fluctuations cannot be considered security threats. In the

[60] „(...) mișcarea care trece politica dincolo de regulile jocului și de cadrul problemei, fie ca un tip special de politică, fie deasupra politicii", in Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Wilde De Japp, *Securitatea – un nou cadru de analiză [Security: A new Framework for Analysis]*, (trans.) George Jiglău, CA Publishing, 2010, p. 44.

[61] *Ibidem*, pp. 41-42.

[62] Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear – The National Security Problem in International Relations*, Great Britain, Thomson Press, 1983, p. 2.

societal sector, collective identities are the primary focus. Threats to this sector of security cannot be clearly defined. Generally, changes that may affect the national identity of individuals are considered threats. An example of this is the ability to maintain or reproduce a language. This can be viewed in terms of survival. Finally, is the environmental sector. This sector encompasses a wide range of threats, from concrete issues such as tigers or whales to various types of habitats, such as lakes or tropical forests, to more ambiguous issues, such as maintaining normal parameters of the biosphere or the climate[63].

2.2. Securitization

Securitization can be seen as an "extreme form of politicization"[64]. An issue is considered a security issue when

> "it can be argued that the issue in question is more important than others and should be given absolute priority. This is why we associate the issue with what appears to be a mandatory criterion: that the issue be presented as an existential threat"[65].

Buzan, Waever, and Wilde define securitization as

> "(...) the process that takes politics beyond the rules of the game and the scope of the issue, either as a special type of politics or as something that transcends politics"[66].

In other words, the concept of securitization involves an intersubjective determination of what constitutes a threat. When we engage in securitization, we have in mind an issue that could set a precedent; for this reason, even if it is not currently a cause for concern, the issue must be securitized so that it does not become one in the future:

> "The distinctive feature of securitization is a specific rhetorical trait (survival, the priority of action, 'because if the problem is not addressed now, it will be too late, and we will no longer exist to correct our mistake')"[67].

In other words, security is a concept that takes various forms and involves survival in the face of existential threats, though these existential threats vary from sector to sector. For the societal sector, the threat takes the form of the possibility of no longer being able to be yourself.

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[63] Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Wilde De Japp, *op. cit.*, 2010, pp. 42–44.

[64] Barry Buzan, *op. cit.*, 1983, p. 2.

[65] „se poate afirma că problema în cauză este mai importantă decât altele și ar trebui să aibă prioritate absolută. Acesta este motivul pentru care asociem problema cu ceea ce pare un criteriu obligatoriu: ca problema să fie prezentată ca o amenințare existențială", in Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Wilde De Japp, *op. cit.*, 2010, p. 45.

[66] „(...) mișcarea care trece politica dincolo de regulile jocului și de cadrul problemei, fie ca un tip special de politică, fie deasupra politicii" in *Ibidem*, p. 44.

[67] „Trăsătura distinctivă a securizării este o trăsătură retorică specifică (supraviețuirea, prioritatea acțiunii, «deoarece dacă problema nu este tratată acum, va fi prea târziu și noi nu vom mai exista pentru a ne îndrepta greșeala»)", in *Ibidem*, p. 47.

According to Arnold Wolfers[68], security can be approached either from an objective perspective – when we are talking about a real threat – or from a subjective perspective – when we are talking about a threat perceived by the individuals concerned. However, Buzan, Waever, and Wilde argue that for a proper approach to securitization, we must adopt an intersubjective perspective:

> "We argue that securitization, like politicization, must be understood as an essentially intersubjective process. Even if a more objective approach were desired, it is unclear how this could be achieved except in cases where the threat is clear and immediate"[69].

The issue of securitisation is a sensitive and complex one because perceptions of security vary, and this determines how actors within the system will respond to a potential security claim:

> "What may appear to be legitimate securitisation within a particular political community may seem like a paranoid gesture to those outside it"[70].

We will conclude by saying that securitization means understanding the answers to the following questions: Who is securitizing? What issues are being securitized (threats)? For whom is it being securitized – that is, what are the objects of reference? Why? And finally, how is it being securitized? Under what conditions?[71]. Furthermore, we will also note that by "reference object" we mean "things that are considered to be under an existential threat and that have a legitimate claim to survival"; by "securitizing actors" we mean "actors who securitize issues by declaring a thing – a reference object – to be under an existential threat", and by "functional actors" we mean "actors who influence the dynamics of a sector"[72].

2.3. Societal security

Societal security is an umbrella term that encompasses the state's efforts to address new threats. This term refers equally to social cohesion as a source of social instability, and thus, implicitly, of insecurity[73]. Societal security is a society's ability to preserve the identity of its individuals, despite potential threats or social changes. In other words, societal insecurity arises when society perceives a threat in terms that

[68] *Ibidem*, p. 52.

[69] „Noi susținem că securizarea, ca și politizarea, trebuie înțeleasă ca un proces esențial intersubiectiv. Chiar dacă s-ar dori o abordare mai obiectivă, nu este clar cum ar putea fi realizată aceasta cu excepția cazurilor în care amenințarea este clară și imediată", in *Ibidem*, p. 52.

[70] „Ceea ce poate părea o securizare legitimă într-o anumită comunitate politică poate părea un gest paranoic celor din afara ei", in *Ibidem*.

[71] *Ibidem*, p. 54.

[72] *Ibidem*, p. 60.

[73] Iulian Chifu, "Societal security: an agenda for the Eastern Europe", 2009, p. 3, Available at: https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/ccd3/03c3c4a1a58c43a202cf80fe71ea0f4d3b83.pdf?_ga=2.67681942.629087231.1590414801201723705 2.1583793890, Accessed on February 20, 2026.

relate to its identity[74]. The term "societal security" was first used by Barry Buzan in his 1991 book *People, States, and Fear* and was intended to bridge the gap between state security and human security[75].

The organizing concept in the societal sector is that of identity. When we speak of societal insecurity, we are referring to the way in which different types of communities define the threats they perceive as endangering their survival as a community. We will thus define societal security as referring to

> "(...) large, self-sustaining identity groups; their empirical content varies both over time and across space. In contemporary Europe, these groups are primarily national, but in other regions religious or racial groups are more relevant. The concept could also be understood as 'identity security'"[76].

Societal security focuses on the identity of individuals, which makes the process of ensuring security a difficult one because:

> "Given the unique nature of this focus, it is extremely difficult to draw clear boundaries between existential threats and less serious ones"[77].

The security agenda encompasses various threats, but the most common ones are migration, lateral competition, and horizontal competition. In this paper, we will focus primarily on the latter two. By horizontal competition, we mean that

> "although there are still x people living there, they will change due to the cultural and linguistic influence generated by the expansion of neighboring culture y", and by vertical competition we mean that

> "people will cease to see themselves as x, either because there is an integration project or because there is a secessionist project, which leads them to orient themselves toward broader or narrower identities"[78].

Integration projects, whatever their nature – whether imperialist or democratic – when they attempt to "level" identities to "harmonize" them with the state, will in some cases control them partially, and in others almost entirely, the institutions that guarantee the mechanism of cultural reproduction – namely schools, churches, and linguistic rights. Nor are cases excluded in which a situation may arise where

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[74] Ole Waever, Barry Buzan, Morten Kelstrup and Pierre Lemaitre, *Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe*, London, Pinter, 1993, p. 23.

[75] Iulian Chifu, "Societal security: an agenda for the Eastern Europe", 2009, p. 3, Available at: https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/ccd3/03c3c4a1a58c43a202cf80fe71ea0f4d3b83.pdf?_ga=2.67681942.629087231.1590414801201723705 2.1583793890, Accessed on February 20, 2026.

[76] „(...) grupuri identitare mari care se auto-susțin; conținutul empiric al acestora, variază atât în timp cât și în spațiu. În Europa contemporană, aceste grupuri sunt în principal naționale, însă în alte regiuni grupurile religioase sau rasiale au mai multă relevanță. Conceptul ar putea fi înțeles și «ca securitate a identității»", in Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Wilde De Japp, *op. cit.*, 2010, p. 172.

[77] „Având în vedere natura particulară a acestui tip de obiect de referință, sunt extrem de dificil de stabilit granițe clare între amenințările existențiale și cele mai puțin grave", in *Ibidem*, p. 43.

[78] „deși încă există x oameni care trăiesc acolo, aceștia se vor schimba din cauza influenței culturale și lingvistice generate de extinderea culturii vecine y", iar prin competiție verticală înțelegem că „oamenii vor înceta să se vadă pe ei înșiși ca x, fie pentru că există un proiect de integrare, fie pentru că există un proiect secesionist, care îi determină să se orienteze înspre identități mai largi sau mai înguste" in *Ibidem*, p. 174.

minorities lose their ability to reproduce their culture due to the fact that the state encourages the structuring of the educational system, the media, and others in such a way as to favor the culture of the majority[79].

In this paper, we will use the term "minority" as follows:

> "(...) we will refer to the national minority that holds a quasi-monopoly on political and administrative power at the local level as the 'dominant minority', and to the population that constitutes a majority at the national level but a minority at the local level as the 'local minority'"[80].

In the analysis we will conduct, we will attempt to assess the capacity for coexistence between the two ethnic groups by examining the attitude adopted by the dominant minority – in our case, the Hungarian community. This attitude can be classified into one of three categories:

> "Generally, minorities strive for one of three basic options: to dominate the incumbent government (such as the Tutsi or whites under apartheid), to form their own government (the Slovenes, the Zionists), or to be left in peace (traditionally, the Jews of Europe)"[81].

In the societal sector, the point of reference is our sense of "us". In other words, the idea of "us" is threatened when the identity of a group of individuals is threatened. The most important reference points in the current world system, for the societal sector, are tribes, clans, nations (and ethnic units like nations, called minorities), civilizations, religions, and race[82]. This analysis aims to capture, through the media, how the stakeholders involved perceive this threat. We turned to the media because "it is a key player that contributes significantly to shaping situations"[83].

2.4. A necessary clarification

Throughout this paper, we will take care not to confuse societal security with social security, nor with the concept of society. Societal security differs from social security in that social security refers to individuals and pertains primarily to the economic sphere, whereas societal security refers to communities and their identities. On the other hand, when it comes to the concept of society, it is used to denote, in a broader and at the same

[79] *Ibidem*, p. 175.

[80] „(...) vom denumi minoritatea naţională care deţine cvasi-monopolul politic şi administrativ în plan local cu termenul de minoritate dominantă, iar populaţia care este majoritară în plan naţional, dar minoritară în plan local, «minoritate locală»", in Radu Baltasiu, Gabriel Săpunaru and Ovidiana Bulumac, *Slăbirea comunităţii româneşti din Harghita-Covasna – raport de cercetare [The weakening of the Romanian community in Harghita-Covasna – research report]*, Bucharest, Ethnological Publishing House, Collection of Sociological Studies, 2013, p. 137.

[81] „În general minorităţile se luptă pentru una dintre cele trei opţiuni de bază: să domine guvernul în exerciţiu (precum Tutsi sau albii în Apartheid), să îşi formeze propriul guvern (slovenii, sioniştii), sau să fie lăsaţi în pace (în mod tradiţional, evreii din Europa)", in *Ibidem*, p. 176.

[82] *Ibidem*, p. 177.

[83] *Ibidem*, p. 178.

time more ambiguous sense, the population of a state; what is worth noting here is that the group in question is not always a bearer of identity[84].

Another point we believe is important to highlight is that of the nation. Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde argued that in Europe, societal security primarily concerns nations – or, more precisely, nations as ethnic groups or minorities[85]. From a terminological standpoint, this term is also shrouded in conceptual ambiguity:

> "(...) some define the nation in terms of people living in a state to which they are loyal, while others define it as an ethnic, organic community bound by language, blood, and culture"[86].

We will highlight here the conceptual similarity to the notion of the "imagined community". This concept is based on Benedict Anderson's idea of the "invented community" and that of "lateral ethnicity", a concept found in Smith:

> "the imagined community forms the basis of the nation-state". In other words, the state is founded on a false community in which, as Anderson shows, tradition is nothing more than an ideological construct. Being ideological, lateral constructs, such communities are easily regimented through the vectors of secular or ecclesiastical authority, those that define the political nation. It is true, for Anderson, that all nations are invented, as he does not distinguish between political nations and organic nations. Anderson omits what Anthony Smith calls vertical ethnicities. Unlike lateral ethnicities, created from the top down through political command, vertical ethnicities are demotic, organic, with an ancient foundation of shared traditions"[87].

3. WHY HARGHITA AND COVASNA? TRANSYLVANIA AS A GEOSTRATEGIC REGION

Geopolitics is "a science of connections, rifts, and political and geographical pressures generated by statesmen out of their own fears"[88]. In other words, geopolitics is the science of the distribution of power across a given territory. We will therefore say that geopolitics is

[84] *Ibidem*, p. 172.

[85] Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Wilde De Japp, *Security: A new Framework for Analysis*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 1998, p. 123.

[86] „(...) unii definesc națiunea în termeni de oameni care trăiesc într-un stat căruia îi sunt loiali, alții o definesc ca pe o comunitate etnică, organică, de limbă, de sânge și cultură", in *Ibidem*, p. 173.

[87] „comunitatea imaginată reprezintă baza statului naţional. Cu alte cuvinte, statul se întemeiază pe o falsă comunitate în care, arată Anderson, tradiţia nu ar fi altceva decât un imaginar ideologic. Fiind constructe ideologice, laterale, astfel de comunităţi sunt uşor de înregimentat prin vectorii autorităţii laice sau bisericeşti, cele care definesc naţiunea politică. Este adevărat, pentru Anderson, toate naţiunile sunt inventate, el neavând acces la distincţia dintre naţiuni politice şi naţiuni organice. Anderson omite ceea ce Anthony Smith numeşte etnii verticale. Spre deosebire de etniile laterale, create de sus în jos, prin comandă politică, etniile verticale sunt demotice, organice, cu o bază străveche de tradiţii comune", in Radu Baltasiu, Gabriel Săpunaru and Ovidiana Bulumac, *op. cit.*, 2013, p. 15.

[88] Gheorghe Văduva, *GEOPOLITICS: Theories. Areas. Fault lines. Confluences – geopolitical excursion*, Bucharest, The Military Writers Society, 2013, p. 2.

> "a projection of politics onto geographical coordinates, obviously in the interest of state policy and not of geography. A possible definition, simplified to the utmost, might sound something like this: geopolitics represents a way of studying the geographical determinants that intervene in the state's domestic and foreign policy and, above all, their possible effects"[89].

Anton Golopenția considers that geopolitics represents a new science of reality. For him, geopolitics is a tool at the service of the state. In fact, he agrees almost entirely with Ladis Kristof, who asserts that the essence of geopolitics is politics and not geography[90].

On the other hand, Simion Mehedinți, one of the founding fathers of Romanian geopolitics, believes that the geopolitics of the Romanian state must encompass its inner circle, consisting of four major geographical landmarks: the Pontic-Baltic isthmus, the straits, the Danube, and the Carpathians[91]. The Carpathians hold particular importance for Ion Conea, in whose view they are "the backbone of the Romanian land and people"[92]. For Ion Conea, geopolitics becomes a science of relations between states, or more precisely, of the pressure between states. In fact, Conea applies to Romania a concept established by Ratzel in geopolitics, that of the Mittelpunkt. The Romanian geopolitician identifies Transylvania as the heart of Romania. This way of looking at things is not unique. It was also addressed by Mihai Eminescu, who was the pioneer in this regard[93]. We know that, in the case of the countries we will be analyzing – Romania and Hungary – the concept of friendship is a sensitive one. Transylvania has been a point of interest for the neighboring country, an area that naturally includes the region we will be analyzing, Harghita-Covasna. Kjellen states in this regard that every state seeks to encompass a geographical region in its entirety. According to Conea, the Middle Danube Basin is such a region for Hungary; however, this region cannot be claimed by our Hungarian neighbors, because Transylvania is for Greater Romania "the heart of the country" and not a marginal part as it would have been in a Greater Hungary[94].

This region served as a meeting point for two distinct geopolitical perspectives: the Romanian and Hungarian geopolitics of the Carpathian Basin. We will address here the issue of Hungarian geopolitics in the Carpathian Basin, as it may be related to what we call the security complex. According to Brătianu, the security space is

[89] „o proiecție a politicii în coordonate geografice, evident în interesul politicii statului și nu al geografiei. O posibilă definiție, simplificată la maximum, ar putea suna cam așa: geopolitica reprezintă o modalitate de studiere a determinărilor geografice care intervin în politica internă și externă a statului și mai ales a posibilelor efecte", in *Ibidem*, p. 17.

[90] Călin Cotoi, *Primordialism cultural și geopolitică românească – lecturi în oglindă [Cultural primordialism and Romanian geopolitics – mirror lectures]*, Bucharest, Little Wallachia Publishing House, 2011, pp. 155–156.

[91] Ilie Bădescu, Dan Dungaciu, Sandra Cristea, Claudiu Degeratu and Radu Baltasiu, *Sociologia și geopolitica frontierei [The Sociology and Geopolitics of the Border]*, Vol. I, Bucharest, The Blue Flower Publishing House, 1995, p. 78.

[92] *Ibidem*, p. 84.

[93] *Ibidem*, p. 82.

[94] *Ibidem*.

that space without which a nation cannot sustain its existence, and for the Romanians, as I mentioned, it comprises four fundamental elements: the straits, the Carpathians, the Danube, and the Pontic-Baltic isthmus. On the other hand, Hungarian plans for domination were also present in the area in question. Thus, various "projects" emerged to repopulate the Carpathian Basin exclusively on ethnic grounds, meaning only with Hungarians: Hungarian plans regarding Transylvania unfolded on three levels: the first called for every family to have six children, the second aimed at the assimilation of other nationalities, and the third consisted of bringing in Mongolian tribes believed to be related to the Hungarians from the Caucasus and the Urals[95].

Nicolae Iorga stated regarding the Hungarian question in Romania that:

> "Our relations with the Hungarians are relations with the Hungarian people – and that makes one – and relations with the Hungarian monarchy – and that makes two; they are also relations with the Hungarian feudal class – which makes three; and finally, relations with the dominant Hungarian political class of the modern era, and this makes four"[96].

From a practical standpoint, the dynamics of Romanian Hungarian relations are shaped by the debate over primacy in Transylvania.

In Popa-Vereș's view, geopolitics has two components: one objective and one subjective. The former claims to be scientific in nature and is relatively impartial, while the latter component is where the sphere of operation of the nation-state lies. According to the above-mentioned theorist, only in this sense does geopolitics become a science of the nation, or in other words

> "a scientific expression of political ideals, conceived within a specific geographical framework, within which the nation moves or toward which it is carried to fulfill its historical destiny"[97].

It should be noted, moreover, that Popa-Vereș, along with the entire Romanian school of geopolitics, understood geopolitics as the science of the nation. By "nation" we mean

> "a delimited population occupying a historical territory, possessing shared myths and historical memory, a common culture, a shared economy, and common rights and duties for all members"[98].

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[95] *Ibidem*, p. 96.

[96] „Relaţiile noastre cu ungurii sunt relaţii cu poporul unguresc – şi aceasta înseamnă una – şi sunt relaţii cu regalitatea ungurească – şi aceasta înseamnă două; sunt apoi relaţii cu feudalitatea ungurească, – ceea ce înseamnă trei; şi în sfârşit relaţii cu clasa dominantă politică ungurească din epoca mai nouă, şi aceasta înseamnă patru", in Nicolae Iorga, *Români şi Slavi. Români şi Unguri. Două conferinţe ale Institutului pentru Studiul Europei Sud-Orientale [Romanians and Slavs. Romanians and Hungarians. Two conferences of the Institute for the Study of Southeast Europe]*, Bucharest, The Southeast European Institute Publishing House, 1922, p. 14.

[97] „o expresie științifică a unor idealuri politice, zămislite într-o anumită albie geografică, în care se mișcă sau spre care este purtată națiunea pentru îndeplinirea destinului ei istoric", in *Ibidem*, p. 117.

[98] „o populație delimitată ce ocupă un teritoriu istoric, având mituri comune și memorie istorică, cultură populară, o economie comună și drepturi și îndatoriri comune pentru toți membrii", in Smith Anthony, *National identity*, Penguin Books, 1991, p. 14.

We will also distinguish between lateral and vertical ethnic groups:
"Unlike lateral ethnic groups, created from the top down by political decree, vertical ethnic groups are grassroots, organic, with an ancient foundation of shared traditions. The historical experience of Romanians in Transylvania is that of an organic nation in the face of the advance of a political nation"[99].

4. THREATS TO IDENTITY: THREATS TO A COMMUNITY'S MYTHS, RITUALS, AND SYMBOLS

The focal point of the societal sector is collective identity. This focal point is unique, which is why drawing clear distinctions between existential threats and less serious ones can be a real challenge. Collective identities have their own dynamics and a conservative nature, which means that threats to this sector are perceived as threats to our identity – that is, we are in danger of ceasing to be ourselves[100].

Threats to societal security are mainly related, as I mentioned, to migration, vertical competition, and horizontal competition. Vertical competition arises particularly where there are projects of political integration or secessionist projects, while horizontal competition can arise at any level. Many local conflicts are linked to vertical competition between nation-states and nation-minorities and have as their trigger, or as the subject of contention, an element that refers to the idea of a minority[101].

To understand the concept of "us", we must first define society. Society is thus defined as a group united by a collective identity. Applying the concept of security to this definition, we see that societal security aims to preserve the identity and social cohesion of the group in question[102]. Thus, the main risks and threats to societal security are those related to language, religion, traditions, symbols, and collective memory – components that constitute the sense of belonging to a specific community. In Buzan's view, these threats to identity stem more from within the state in question than from outside it. However, threats from outside are not ruled out either[103].

The states within a system are interconnected and interdependent when it comes to their security. For this reason, the concept of the security complex can be invoked, by which we mean

[99] „Spre deosebire de etniile laterale, create de sus în jos, prin comandă politică, etniile verticale sunt demotice, organice, cu o bază străveche de tradiţii comune. Experienţa istorică a românilor în Transilvania este aceea a unei naţiuni organice în faţa înaintării unei naţiuni politice", in Radu Baltasiu, Gabriel Săpunaru and Ovidiana Bulumac, *op. cit.*, 2013, p. 15.

[100] Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Wilde De Japp, *op. cit.*, 2010, p. 173.

[101] *Ibidem*, p. 189.

[102] Iulian Chifu, "Societal security: an agenda for the Eastern Europe", 2009, p. 4, Available at: https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/ccd3/03c3c4a1a58c43a202cf80fe71ea0f4d3b83.pdf?_ga=2.67681942.629087231.1590414801201723705 2.1583793890, Accessed on February 20, 2026.

[103] Barry Buzan, *op. cit.*, 1991, p. 123.

"a group of states whose major security perceptions and concerns are so interconnected that their international security issues cannot be analyzed or resolved independently"[104].

What is worth noting in this regard is that the concept of insecurity is linked to the concept of proximity, since

"most political and military threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones; insecurity is often associated with proximity. Most states fear their neighbors more than more distant powers"[105].

What matters in this case is the reference space – that is, a specific region – in which the powers involved simultaneously demonstrate an interest:

"Because they are composed of local groups of states, classical security complexes not only play a central role in relations among their members; they also crucially determine, where applicable, how external powers penetrate the region"[106].

The dynamics of security complexes are determined by the friendly or hostile relations between the states in question. These dynamics can unfold in three directions:

"At the negative end of the spectrum lies the emergence of conflicts, in which interdependence arises from fear, rivalry, and mutual perceptions of threat. In the middle lie security regimes, in which states treat each other as potential enemies but have concluded security agreements aimed at reducing the security dilemma between them. At the positive end of the spectrum lies a pluralist security community, in which states no longer expect or prepare for the use of force in their relations with one another"[107].

Therefore, security complexes are

"self-contained subsystems – miniature anarchies – and, by analogy with full-fledged systems, they have their own structure"[108].

They consist of three key components:

"(1) the arrangement of units and the differences between them (the same applies to the international system as a whole and is thus not a significant variable at the regional level), (2) patterns of friendship and enmity, and (3) the distribution of power among the main units"[109].

[104] „un grup de state ale căror percepții și preocupări majore de securitate sunt atât de interconectate încât problemele lor de securitate internațională, nu pot fi analizate sau rezolvate independent", in Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Wilde De Japp, *op. cit.*, 2010, p. 27.

[105] „majoritatea amenințărilor politice și militare se deplasează mai ușor pe distanțe scurte decât pe distanțe lungi; insecuritatea este deseori asociată cu proximitatea. Majorității statelor le e frică mai degrabă de vecinii lor, decât de puterile mai îndepărtate", in *Ibidem*.

[106] „Deoarece sunt formate din grupări locale de state, complexele clasice de securitate, nu au numai un rol central în relațiile dintre membrii lor; ele condiționează crucial, dacă este cazul, modul în care puterile externe penetrează regiunea", in *Ibidem*, pp. 27–28.

[107] „La polul negativ se află formarea conflictelor, în care interdependența se naște din frică, rivalitate și percepții reciproce de amenințare. La mijloc se situează regimurile de securitate, în care statele se tratează reciproc ca potențiali dușmani, dar au încheiat acorduri de asigurare cu scopul de a reduce dilema de securitate dintre ele. La polul pozitiv al spectrului se află o comunitate pluralistă de securitate, în care statele nu mai așteaptă și nu se mai pregătesc de utilizarea forței în relațiile dintre ele", in *Ibidem*, p. 28.

[108] „subsisteme – anarhii în miniatură – de sine stătătoare, și în analogie cu sistemele pline, ele au propria lor structură", in *Ibidem*.

[109] „(1) aranjarea unităților și diferențelor dintre ele (același lucru este valabil și pentru sistemul internațional ca întreg, nefiind astfel o variabilă semnificativă la nivel regional), (2) tiparele de amiciție și inamiciție și (3) distribuirea puterii între principalele unități", in *Ibidem*, p. 28.

Threats to a community's myths, rituals, and symbols can weaken collective identity and lead to the loss of cultural cohesion, which gives people a sense of belonging to the community. These threats have direct implications for our sense of security and, unless measures are taken to safeguard them, contribute to the undermining of national security.

5. METHODOLOGY

From a methodological standpoint, this research is based on a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methods and techniques. Specifically, I have analyzed statistical data, conducted a secondary analysis of online news articles, and examined spatial data.

I conducted a secondary analysis of online print media to track the repercussions of the recorded dynamics. Furthermore, using data provided by the National Institute of Statistics, I aim to understand the statistical dimension of the phenomenon under study.

Finally, we utilized the "space file", which is a research tool conceptualized by Prof. Radu Baltasiu, Ph.D., director of the European Center for Ethnic Studies at the Romanian Academy and is intended to serve the public interest. According to him, the "space file" has three purposes: first, it focuses on understanding the nature of neighboring states; second, it seeks to understand Romanian communities outside the country's borders, namely the diaspora and historical communities; and third, it involves mapping the internal components that enable the country's development[110]. The space file represents

> "a description of a space along its defining dimensions in relation to the interests of truth-seeking and governance. It is the primary tool for the rigorous collection of data and the concise presentation of a large volume of information in a form accessible to policymakers. It is a product situated at the intersection of academic research, intelligence, and public administration. The space file should constitute the informed basis of political action, and thus of a country's administration. It represents the level of maturity of applied academic research and, depending on its use, the degree of seriousness of governance"[111].

[110] Radu Baltasiu, "The sociological political-space case-file – scientific instrument and institution for the relationship between the Romanian state and Romanians abroad", in *Etnosfera Journal*, No. 1/2025, Year XVII, Vol. 45, p. 5, https://doi.org/10.59277/Etnosfera.2025.01.01, Available at: https://www.etnosfera.ro/wpcontent/uploads/2025/12/ETNOSFERA-1-2025-5-16.pdf, Accessed on February 4, 2026.

[111] „descrierea unui spațiu pe direcțiile lui definitorii în raport cu interesul cunoașterii adevărului și al guvernării. Este principalul instrument de culegere riguroasă a datelor și de prezentare succintă a unei mase mari de informații într-o formă accesibilă factorului politic. Este un produs care se află la încheietura dintre cercetarea academică, intelligence și administrația publică. Dosarul de spațiu ar trebui să constituie baza informată a actului politic, deci a administrației unei țări. Reprezintă nivelul de maturitate al cercetării academice aplicate și, funcție de utilizarea sa, gradul de seriozitate al guvernării", in *Ibidem*.

6. ANALYSIS

This analysis focuses on the societal threats faced by Romanians in Covasna and Harghita counties, which affect their sense of belonging and undermine their national identity. We will analyze the following: education – in terms of the possibility of learning in their mother tongue, the language they speak, religious challenges, as well as potential symbolic issues.

6.1. Education

Based on a survey of educational institutions conducted by Ioan Lăcătușu and Ioan Solomon and published in 2007, we find that there were 74 educational institutions in Covasna. Of these, 56 were elementary and middle schools, and 18 were high schools. In 35 educational institutions, teaching was in Hungarian, in 10 in Romanian, and in 29 in both Romanian and Hungarian. In 28 schools, teaching was in Hungarian at the elementary and middle school levels, in 7 in Romanian, and in 21 in both Romanian and Hungarian. In 7 high schools, teaching was in Hungarian, in 3 in Romanian, and in 8 in both Romanian and Hungarian. We note that in 2007, in Covasna, the comparative data showed the following: the number of schools teaching in Romanian was 3.5 times smaller than that of schools teaching in Hungarian and 2.9 times smaller than that of schools teaching in both Romanian and Hungarian. The number of elementary and middle schools teaching in Romanian is 4 times smaller than that of schools teaching in Hungarian and 3 times smaller than that of schools teaching in both Romanian and Hungarian. The number of high schools teaching in Romanian is 4 times smaller than that of schools teaching in Hungarian[112].

On the other hand, there were 153 educational institutions in Harghita. Of these, 111 were elementary and middle schools, and 42 were high schools. In 117 educational institutions, teaching was in Hungarian, in 13 in Romanian, and in 23 in both Romanian and Hungarian. In 87 schools, teaching was in Hungarian at the primary and lower secondary levels, in 6 in Romanian, and in 18 in both Romanian and Hungarian. In 30 high schools, teaching was in Hungarian, in 7 in Romanian, and in 5 in both Romanian and Hungarian. We note that as of 2007, in Harghita, comparative data showed that the number of institutions teaching in Romanian was 9 times smaller than that of institutions teaching in Hungarian and 1.8 times smaller than that of institutions teaching in both Romanian and Hungarian. The number of elementary and middle schools teaching in Romanian was 14.5 times smaller than that of schools teaching in Hungarian and 3 times smaller than that of schools teaching in both Romanian and Hungarian. The number of high schools teaching in Romanian was 4.2 times smaller than that of schools teaching in Hungarian[113].

[112] Ioan Lăcătușu and Ioan Solomon, *Un fals „referendum" pentru impunerea unei autonomii anacronice deja existențe [A false "referendum" to impose an anachronistic autonomy that already exists]*, Sfântu Gheorghe, Eurocarpatica Publishing House, 2007, pp: 87–99.
[113] *Ibidem*.

In total, as of 2007, there were 227 primary, middle, and high schools in the two counties. Of these, 167 were primary and middle schools, while the remaining 60 were high schools. In 152 institutions, teaching was in Hungarian, in 23 in Romanian, and in 52 in both Romanian and Hungarian. In 115 schools, teaching was in Hungarian at the elementary and middle school levels (grades 1–8), in 13 it was in Romanian, and in 39 it was in both Romanian and Hungarian. At the high school level, 37 institutions taught in Hungarian, 10 in Romanian, and 13 taught in both Romanian and Hungarian. We note that as of 2007, comparative data for Covasna and Harghita counties showed that the number of Romanian-language schools was 6.6 times lower than that of Hungarian-language schools and 2.3 times lower than the number of schools teaching in both Romanian and Hungarian. The number of elementary and middle schools teaching in Romanian was 8.8 times lower than that of schools teaching in Hungarian and 3 times lower than that of schools teaching in both Romanian and Hungarian. Finally, the number of high schools teaching in Romanian was 3.7 times smaller than that of high schools teaching in Hungarian[114].

The data above show that, at least as of 2007, there was an institutional underrepresentation of schools offering instruction in Romanian, a situation that raises serious questions regarding the level of social security felt by the Romanian community in the two counties. In this regard, there is concern that students who chose to be educated exclusively in Romanian have fewer options than those who chose mixed-language education, and even fewer than those who chose Hungarian-language education. From this perspective, there is a significant challenge in terms of identity, in that the restriction of mother-tongue education for Romanian students directly affects their sense of belonging.

Nearly 20 years later, by the 2023–2024 school year, the state of Romanian-language education in the two counties had not improved. In Covasna County, during the 2023–2024 school year, there were 40 educational institutions offering teaching exclusively in Hungarian, comprising a total of 741 classes and 13,739 students. In total, the county had 32,149 students, of whom 21,846 (68%) were enrolled in classes taught in Hungarian, and 10,303 (32%) in classes taught in Romanian. It is interesting to note that although Romanians accounted for approximately 23% of the county's population, the percentage of those studying in schools with instruction exclusively in Romanian was about half that, or 16% of the total number of students[115].

In Harghita County, the predominance of Hungarian-language schools was even more evident, with 2,258 classes and 43,021 enrolled students, representing 85.6% of the county's total student population. In contrast, there were only 418 classes taught in Romanian, with 7,235 students, or 14.4% of the total[116]. Given the predominantly Hungarian population, schools that teach in Hungarian receive

[114] *Ibidem*.
[115] Covasna County School Inspectorate, *Address no. 12 R.S./June 28*, 2024.
[116] Harghita County School Inspectorate, *Address no. 2925/June 7*, 2024.

higher funding and benefit from better facilities, while mixed schools and those teaching in Romanian are becoming increasingly scarce and poorly equipped. This disparity reflects an educational policy that has led to the creation of an ethnically divided education system, undermining social cohesion in the county[117]. Data provided by the school inspectorates in the two counties show the following situation regarding classes taught in Romanian and Hungarian, respectively, for the 2023–2024 school year: in Covasna and Harghita counties, the number of students enrolled in classes taught in Romanian is two or even three times lower than that in classes taught in Hungarian: Covasna 32% *vs*. 68%[118], and Harghita 14% *vs*. 85%[119].

By the end of May 2025, Romanians in Covasna had taken to the streets to demand their rights: "You're making a mockery of us, Romanians come second", "Mourning for education in Covasna", "The brave do not give in", were just a few of the messages from students at the only high school in Sfântu Gheorghe offering instruction in Romanian, who protested on May 23, 2025, in front of City Hall, because for five years they have been forced to study at other schools, as renovation work has been delayed by local authorities[120]. Following the protest, the Sfântu Gheorghe City Hall, led by ethnic Hungarian Antal Arpad, announced that the 1,000 Romanian students at the "Mihai Viteazul" National College would receive containers[121].

The Hungarian community, however, benefits – compared to the Romanian community – from a double support: from the Romanian state, but also from the Hungarian state, which is present in the area as a factor ensuring the security of the Hungarian ethnic group. A concrete example illustrating the above is the following situation: between 2021 and 2024, Harghita County ranked among the counties with the lowest high school graduation rates[122]. Arguing that the situation stems from the

[117] The Edupedu Editorial Team, „Școlile maghiare din Transilvania sunt mai puțin aglomerate și mai bine dotate decât media din România – MTI" ["Hungarian schools in Transylvania are less crowded and better equipped than the average in Romania – MTI"], in *Edupedu*, 2021, Avai lable at: https://www.edupedu.ro/mtiscolilemaghiaredintransilvaniasuntmai-putin-aglomerate-si-maibinedotate decatmediadinromania/, Accessed on February 20, 2026.

[118] Covasna County School Inspectorate, *Address no. 12 R.S./June 28*, 2024.

[119] Harghita County School Inspectorate, *Address no. 2925/June 7*, 2024.

[120] Oana Mădălina Negrea, „REPORTAJ Covasna: Protest al părinților, elevilor și dascălilor de la singurul liceu de limbă română din Sfântu Gheorghe" ["REPORT: Covasna: Protest by parents, students, and teachers at the only Romanian language high school in Sfântu Gheorghe"], in *Agerpres*, May 23, 2025, Available at: https://agerpres.ro/2025/05/23/reportaj-covasna-protestalparintilorelevilor-si-dascalilor-de-la-singurul-liceu-de-limba-romana-d--1452628, Accessed on February 20, 2026.

[121] The Carei Newspaper Editorial Team, „România vândută! Containere pentru elevii români, săli de clasă pentru elevii maghiari la Sfântu- Gheorghe" ["Romania's been sold out! Containers for Romanian students, classrooms for Hungarian students in Sfântu-Gheorghe"], in *Buletin de Carei*, 2025, Available at: https://www.buletindecarei.ro/2025/05/romaniavandutacontainerepentrueleviiromanisalideclasapentruelevii maghiarilasfantugheorghe.html, Accessed on February 25, 2026.

[122] See:

1. The Pro TV News Editorial Team, „Rezultate BAC 2021. În ce județe avem cea mai mare și cea mai mica rată de promovare?" ["2021 High School Graduation Exam Results: Which Counties Have the Highest and Lowest Pass Rates?"], in *PRO TV*, 2021, Available at: https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/actualitate/ rezultatebac2021incejudeteavemceamaimaresiceamaimicaratadepromovare.html, Accessed on February 25, 2026.

poor results obtained on the Romanian language and literature exam, the president of the Harghita County Council has sued the Ministry of Education for emotional distress on behalf of the Hungarian students who failed to pass this exam in 2024[123]. As a result, starting in 2025 – for the first time since the fall of communism – students enrolled in Hungarian-language classes will be given separate exam questions for the Romanian language and literature section of the high school graduation exam[124]. Another concrete measure, supporting the argument that Budapest provides support to Hungarians in the two counties, is the fact that in 2023 the Hungarian state allocated approximately 263 million euros to mother-tongue education for approximately 300,000 ethnic Hungarians in the so-called "Carpathian Basin" (which includes Romania), funding 50 high schools and boarding schools, 8 institutions of higher education, and approximately 900 kindergartens and daycare centers[125]. By 2023, the Hungarian government had built approximately 900 educational institutions in the so-called "Carpathian Basin", most of which were

2. Raluca Juncu, „Rezultate BAC 2022. Care sunt județele cu cea mai mare rată de promovare" ["2022 High School Graduation Exam Results: Which Counties Have the Highest Pass Rates?"], in *Wall Street*, 2022, Available at: https://www.wallstreet.ro/articol/Educatie/287147/rezultate-bac-2022-care-sunt-judetele-cucea-mai-mare-rata-de-promovare.html, Accessed on February 20, 2026.

3. The Edupedu Editorial Team, „Județele cu cea mai mare rată de promovare la Bacalaureat 2023: Cluj, Brăila și Iași. Ilfov – în coada clasamentului/Scădere generalizată față de 2022" ["The counties with the highest pass rates on the 2023 Baccalaureate: Cluj, Brăila, and Iași. Ilfov at the bottom of the rankings/A general decline compared to 2022"], in *Edupedu*, 2023, Available at: https://www.edupedu.ro/judetelecuceamaimareratadepromovarelabacalaureat2023brailaclujsiiasiilfovincoadaclasamentului/#:~:text=Cluj%2C%20Br%C4%83ila%20%C8%99i%20Ia%C8%99i%20sunt,curent%C4%83)%2C%20potrivit%20datelor%20f%C4%83cute%20publice, Accessed on February 10, 2026.

4. The Edupedu Editorial Team, „Topul județelor la Bacalaureat 2024: Cea mai mare rată de promovare este în județele Cluj, Galați și Bacău. Ilfov – în coada clasamentului, pentru al cincilea an consecutiv" ["2024 High School Graduation Exam Rankings by County: The highest pass rates are in Cluj, Galați, and Bacău counties. Ilfov ranks last for the fifth consecutive year"], in *Edupedu*, 2024, Available at: https://www.edupedu.ro/topul-judetelor-la-bacalaureat2024ceamaimareratadepromovare-este-in-judetele-clujgalati-si-bacau-ilfov-in-coadaclasamentului-pentru-al-cincilea-an-consecutiv/, Accessed on February 10, 2026.

[123] Andrei Popo, „Elevi maghiari dau în judecată Ministerul Educației și cer subiecte diferite la Bac, la examenul de Limba română, pentru minoritatea maghiară" ["Hungarian students are suing the Ministry of Education and demanding different exam questions for the Romanian language section of the Baccalaureate exam for the Hungarian minority"], in *Edupedu*, October 16, 2024, Available at: https://www.edupedu.ro/elevimaghiaridauinjudecataministeruleducatieisicersubiectediferitelabaclaexamenuldelimbaromanapentruminoritatea-maghiara/, Accessed on February 20, 2026.

[124] Ramona Florean, „Bacalaureat 2025. Doar elevii maghiari care au învățat după noua programă de examen la Limba și literatura română vor avea subiecte diferențiate" ["2025 High School Graduation Exam. Only Hungarian students who have studied under the new exam curriculum for Romanian Language and Literature will receive different exam questions"], in *Edupedu*, February 19, 2025, Available at: https://www.edupedu.ro/bacalaureat2025doareleviimaghiaricareauinvatatdupanouaprogramadeexamenlalimbasiliteraturaromanavoraveasubiectediferentiate/, Accessed on February 20, 2026.

[125] MTI, „Secretar de stat ungar la Oradea: Școala este a doua cea mai puternică verigă în unitatea națiunii" ["Hungarian State Secretary in Oradea: School is the second strongest link in the unity of the nation"], in *Hirado*, 2023, Available at: https://hirado.hu/romana/cikk/2023/11/27/secretar-de-statungarlaoradea-scoala-este-adouaceamaiputernicaverigainunitatea-natiunii, Accessed on February 20, 2026.

intended for ethnic Hungarians in Romania[126]. According to data provided by Hungarian officials, because of investments from Budapest, a comprehensive Hungarian-language education system has been established for Hungarians in Transylvania (from preschool through university), a rare achievement, especially when comparing this case to the situation of other ethnic minorities in the country[127].

6.2. Spoken language

Regarding the language spoken by Romanians in the study area, we note that, according to the 2021 census, in Covasna approximately 25% of the population reported Romanian as their native language, while in Harghita the percentage was around 11%[128]. This percentage does not fully correspond to the demographic profile of the two counties, given that in Covasna, approximately 21% of the population identified as Romanian in the 2021 census (42,752 people out of the county's total registered population of 200,042), and in Harghita, the percentage of those who identified as Romanian in the 2021 census was approximately 11.5% (33,634 Romanians out of the county's 291,950 inhabitants)[129]. We note that educational segregation is particularly evident in Covasna County, where the percentage of Romanian speakers is approximately 4% lower than that of those who identified as Romanian. In the long term, this gap may accelerate the erosion of the Romanian community's sense of belonging, as language is one of the fundamental factors of national identity. As the number of Romanians declines, the likelihood that this area will become ethnically homogeneous grows. The number of Romanians in Covasna, just like in Harghita, is on a downward trend; as evidence, while in the 1992 census

[126] MTI, „Creşă maghiară renovate cu sprijinul statului ungar, inaugurate la Cluj Napoca" ["H ungarian nursery renovated with support from the Hungarian government opens in Cluj Napoca"], in *Hirado*, 2023a, Available at: https://hirado.hu/romana/cikk/2023/11/18/cresamaghiararenovatacuspriji nulstatuluiungarinauguratalaclujnapoca, Accessed on February 20, 2026.

[127] Radu Ursan, „Secretar de Stat al Guvernului Orban: În Transilvania a fost creată o structură completă de învățământ în limba maghiară" ["State Secretary of the Orban Government: A comprehensive Hungarian-language education system has been established in Transylvania"], in *R3media*, 2022, Available at: https://r3media.ro/secretardestatalguvernuluiorbanintransilvaniaafostcre ataostructuracompletadeinvatamantinlimbamaghiara/, Accessed on February 11, 2026.

[128] National Institute of Statistics, „2.3.1 Populatia rezidenta dupa limba materna, pe macroregiuni, regiuni de dezvoltare si judete, la 1 decembrie 2021" ["2.3.1 Resident population by native language, by macroregions, development regions, and counties, as of December 1, 2021"], 2021, Available at: https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.recensamantromania.ro%2Fwpcontent%2Fuploads%2F2023%2F06%2FTabel2.03.1siTabel2.03.2.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK, Accessed on February 20, 2026.

[129] National Institute of Statistics, „2.1. Populatia dupa etnie la recensamintele din perioada 1930/2021, pe județe" ["2.1. Population by ethnicity in censuses from 1930 to 2021, by county"], 2021a, Available at: https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.recensamantromania.ro%2Fwpcontent%2Fuploads%2F2023%2F06%2FTabel-2.01.xls&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK, Accessed on February 20, 2026.

approximately 23% of Covasna County's population was Romanian, by the 2021 census that percentage had dropped to approximately 21%. On the other hand, in Harghita County, the number of Romanians fell from 14% in 1992 to approximately 11% in 2021[130]. From this perspective, it can be argued that to the extent that ethnic Hungarians control the institutions that ensure the cultural reproduction of Romanians – such as schools – the likelihood that Romanian speakers will maintain their national identity is diminishing, while the possibility that this community will become increasingly weakened in terms of its identity is growing.

6.3. Religion

Religious statistics may represent another point of interest regarding the societal security of Romanians in the two counties, since, alongside language, religion is another fundamental element of our national identity. Local statistics compiled by Romanian Orthodox priests show that the Romanian population in Covasna and Harghita is declining at an accelerated rate. In this regard, we find the statistics presented by His Eminence Andrei, Bishop of Harghita and Covasna, to be highly relevant. He states that in the Harghita-Covasna region, over a relatively short period, what is likely the country's largest demographic collapse has occurred: "a decrease in the number of Romanians by 30,000 (from 81,000 to 50,000, or 37% in just 4 years – the period 2015–2019)[131]. The decline in the number of Romanians in these two counties is more significant given that they are already in the position of a local minority. To the extent that security actors fail to give due importance to the 0 for a quarter of the county's population; the neglect of Romanian symbols (most UDMR mayors do not wear the tricolor scarfs at events required by law – see the case of the mayor of Sf. Gheorghe on National Day 2007); their absence in public spaces (the meeting hall of the municipality of Sf. Gheorghe)[132]; the approval of street names and names of public institutions, while omitting or disregarding Romanian figures[133]; the rejection by the Sfântu Gheorghe City Council of proposals by representatives of Romanian civil society and Romanian councilors to award the "Pro Urbe" distinction to Romanian citizens of Sfântu Gheorghe; failure to comply with legal provisions regarding the use of

[130] *Ibidem*.

[131] Iulia Drăghici-Taraș, „Exodul românilor din Covasna și Harghita provoacă îngrijorare" ["The exodus of Romanians from Covasna and Harghita is causing concern"], in *Covasna Media*, January 28, 2019, Available at: https://covasnamedia.ro/stireazilei/exodulromanilor-din-covasna-si-harghita-provoacaingrijorare, Accessed on February 20, 2026.

[132] Ioan Lăcătușu, *Argumente împotriva autonomiei teritoriale pe criterii etnice ale așa-zisului „Ținut Secuiesc" [Arguments against the ethnic-based territorial autonomy of the so-called "Szeklerland"],* Sfântu Gheorghe, Eurocarpatica Publishing House, 2008, p. 58.

[133] *Ibidem*, pp. 58–59.

the Romanian language in public institutions – specifically, the Rules of Procedure of the Sfântu Gheorghe City Council and other similar regulations[134].

On the other hand, in the cultural sphere, the Romanian community has faced several challenges over time, including: the transformation of community museums into Szekler ethnic museums (as in the case of the Sfântu Gheorghe County Museum, which became the Szekler National Museum after 1990. Romanian curators were forced to leave their jobs, and Romanian heritage was sent to storage)[135]; the transformation of professional folk ensembles into "Szekler ensembles"; the dissolution of the professional folkloric ensemble "Ciobănaşul"; the transformation of the "Andrei Mureșan" Theater in Sfântu Gheorghe into a "hosting theater," which effectively meant the dissolution of the institution; efforts made by some UDMR leaders (Marko Bela, Kelemen Hunor, etc.) to abolish the National Museum of the Eastern Carpathians; overfunding of Hungarian cultural events and underfunding of Romanian ones; the exclusion of Romanian-language performances from publicly funded events such as: "Local Days" – Miercurea Ciuc, Odorheiu Secuiesc, Târgu Secuiesc, Sf. Gheorghe (with great difficulty), or Harghita County Days; the lack of Romanian specialists and Romanian cultural events at most municipal and town cultural centers; the tolerance of the profanation of Romanian monuments and symbols, etc.[136]. While significant differences can be observed at the central level regarding budget allocations for cultural events in the two communities, the Romanian community also faces challenges from local authorities. A relevant example in this regard is the fact that the mayor of Sfântu Gheorghe refuses to approve the placement of a bust of Mihai Eminescu on public property in the city, even though this procedure was carried out without difficulty for the Hungarian national poet, Petofi Sándor. Furthermore, the mayor is making approval conditional on the withdrawal of the lawsuits that Romanian organizations have filed in court. The lawsuits arose because of the discrimination to which Romanians are repeatedly subjected, but the mayor considers that they "harm the city's interests"[137].

As for the underfunding of Romanian cultural events, official data show that between 2011 and 2014, the Ministry of Culture allocated only 112,600 lei for the restoration of Romanian monuments in Harghita and Covasna, while 25.2 million lei

[134] *Ibidem*, p. 59.

[135] Ana Grama and Ioan Lăcătușu, *Români din Arcul Carpatic și instituțiile lor identitare (sec. XVII-XX) [Romanians in the Carpathian Basin and Their Institutions of Identity (17th-20th Centuries)]*, Sfântu Gheorghe, Eurocarpatica Publishing House, 2023, p. 592.

[136] Ioan Lăcătușu, *op. cit.*, 2008, p. 55.

[137] Ioan Radu Gava, „Primarul din Sfântu Gheorghe condiționează eventuala ridicare a unei statui a lui Mihai Eminescu în oraș. Statuia lui Petőfi Sándor va fi inaugurată anul viitor" ["The mayor of Sfântu Gheorghe has set conditions for the possible installation of a statue of Mihai Eminescu in the city. The statue of Sándor Petőfi will be inaugurated next year"], in *DC News*, November 18, 2022, Available at: https://www.dcnews.ro/primaruldinsfantugheorgheconditioneazaeventuala-ridicare-a-unei-statui-a-lui-mihai-eminescu-in-orasstatuia-lui-pet-fi-s-ndor-va-fi-inaugurata-anul-viitor_895459.html, Accessed on February 20, 2026.

were allocated during the same period for the restoration of Hungarian monuments in Harghita and Covasna. Most of these funds were spent during the period when Kelemen Hunor, president of the UDMR, headed the ministry[138]. In other words, over the course of less than three years, the amounts received by the Romanian community in the two counties from the Romanian state were 22 times smaller than those received by the Hungarian community.

In the religious sphere as well, Romanians in Covasna and Harghita face situations that affect their national identity, such as: the obstruction of the establishment of the Orthodox Diocese of Covasna and Harghita; the reluctance of local public administration to return properties that belonged to Orthodox parishes and were expropriated by the communist regime; the total lack of support for Orthodox parishes from local public administration subordinate to the UDMR; the portrayal of the Orthodox Church in the two counties in the Hungarian-language media as an institution seeking to "conquer Szeklerland" (through onion-domed churches)[139].

From a symbolic perspective, it should be noted that certain Hungarian cultural events affect the Romanian community's sense of belonging in these two counties. One such event is the Pilgrimage to Șumuleu Ciuc. This is the largest Roman Catholic pilgrimage in Central and Eastern Europe[140], with attendance ranging from 100,000 in 2008[141] to 300,000 in 2023[142]. Most pilgrims come from Romania's

[138] Dan Tanasă, „EXCLUSIV. În patru ani, peste 14,3 milioane de lei de la Cultură pentru reno varea conacelor secuiești din Covasna și Harghita. VEZI ce sumă RIDICOLĂ au primit monumentele românești DOCUMENTE" [EXCLUSIVE. Over the past four years, more than 14.3 million lei from the Ministry of Culture have been allocated for the renovation of Szekler mansions in Covasn a and Harghita. SEE the RIDICULOUS amountRomanian monuments received DOCUMENTS"], in *Dan Tanasa Blog*, 2015, Available at: http://www.dantanasa.ro/exclusivinpatruanipeste143milioanede leidelaculturapentrurenovareaconacelorsecuiestidincovasnasiharghitavezicesumaridicolaauprimitmon umenteleromanesti-documente/, Accessed on February 25, 2026.

[139] Ioan Lăcătușu, *op. cit.*, 2008, p. 55.

[140] The G4Media Editorial Team, „Ziua Maghiarilor de Pretutindeni va fi marcată la Târgu Secuiesc sub genericul «Acum ori niciodată!»/Ziua Maghiarilor, care coincide la 15 martie cu i zbucnirea Revoluției pașoptiste în Ungaria, va fi marcată și în alte comunități maghiare" ["The Day of Hungarians Everywhere will be celebrated in Târgu Secuiesc under the slogan 'Now or Never!'/The Day of Hungarians, which falls on March 15 – the anniversary of the outbreak of the 1848 Revolution in Hungary – will also be celebrated in other Hungarian communities"], in *G4Media*, 2025, Available at: https://www.g4media.ro/ziuamaghiarilordepretutindenivafimarcatalatargusecuiescsubgenericulacu moriniciodataziuamaghiarilordepretutindenicarecoincidela15martiecuizbucnirearevolutieipasopti.html , Accessed on February 10, 2026.

[141] Lumina, „150.000 de credincioși romano- catolici, în pelerinaj la Șumuleu Ciuc" ["150,000 Roman Catholic faithful on pilgrimage to Șumuleu Ciuc"], in *Lumina*, May 11, 2008, Avai lable at: https://ziarullumina.ro/actualitate-religioasa/stiri/150-000-de-credinciosi-romano-catolici-in-pelerinaj-la-sumuleu-ciuc-58372.html, Accessed on February 11, 2026.

[142] Mihai Toma, „Președinta Ungariei, la pelerinajul de la Șumuleu Ciuc, unde sunt așteptați 300.000 de oameni" ["The President of Hungary at the pilgrimage in Șumuleu Ciuc, where 300,000 p eople are expected"], in *Libertatea*, 2023, Available at: https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/pelerinaj-sumuleu-ciuc-2023-4558452, Accessed on February 25, 2026.

Hungarian community; in the 2022 edition, only about two thousand people from Hungary participated[143]. Even though it is a religious event, and the organizers – namely the Franciscan Order – claim to keep it separate from political matters, we observe facts that contradict their assertions, such as: the display of secessionist symbols, including the flag of the so-called "Szeklerland"[144], the fact that through their public speeches, shared on social media or in the press, Hungarian political leaders promote the idea that the so-called "Szeklerland" is a territorial entity distinct from Romania[145], an aspect that flagrantly contravenes the Constitution, as well as the fact that until recently, namely 2022, the religious ceremony was conducted exclusively in Hungarian[146].

A significant portion of Hungarian cultural events are aimed at securing territorial autonomy for the so-called "Szeklerland". Of all the cultural events used to promote the autonomy of the so-called "Szekler Land", the most representative bears the evocative name "Szekler Freedom Day", The Szekler National Council has been organizing the event since 2012[147], primarily in the city of Târgu-Mureș, but also in other localities in Covasna and Harghita, in memory of Gálffy Mihály, Horváth Károly, and Török János, who are considered heroes after the Austrian authorities executed them on March 10, 1854, for coordinating acts of rebellion against the ruling power. Since 2014[148], as part of the events, a petition is adopted annually in which the Szekler National Council requests territorial autonomy for the so-called region from the Government and Parliament of Romania[149].

[143] Adrian Meitner, „Pelerinaj la Șumuleu-Ciuc. Cum arată locul unde ieri au fost peste 350.000 de pelerini" ["Pilgrimage to Șumuleu-Ciuc. A glimpse at the place where yesterday there were over 350,000 pilgrims"], in *Știrile Transilvaniei*, 2022, Available at: https://stiriletransilvaniei.ro/2022/06/05/pelerinaj-la-sumuleuciuccum-arata-locul-unde-ieriaufostpeste-350-000-de-pelerini/, Accessed on February 20, 2026.

[144] Magda Grădinaru, „Sute de mii de oameni la pelerinajul de la Șumuleu Ciuc. Unii au venit pe jos sute de kilometri (Foto&Video)" ["Hundreds of thousands of people at the pilgrimage in Șumuleu Ciuc. Some walked hundreds of kilometers to get there (Photos & Video)"], in *Spot Media*, June 6, 2022, Available at: https://spotmedia.ro/stiri/social/sute-de-mii-de-oameni-la-pelerinajul-de-la-sumuleu-ciuc-unii-au-venit-pe-jos-sute-dekilometri-fotovideo, Accessed on February 20, 2026.

[145] Mihai Toma, „Președinta Ungariei, la pelerinajul de la Șumuleu Ciuc, unde sunt așteptați 300.000 de oameni" ["The President of Hungary at the pilgrimage in Șumuleu Ciuc, where 300,000 people are expected"], in *Libertatea*, 2023, Available at: https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/pelerinaj-sumuleu-ciuc-2023-4558452, Accessed on February 25, 2026.

[146] Adrian Meitner, „Pelerinaj la Șumuleu-Ciuc. Cum arată locul unde ieri au fost peste 350.000 de pelerini" ["Pilgrimage to Șumuleu-Ciuc. A glimpse at the place where yesterday there were over 350,000 pilgrims"], in *Știrile Transilvaniei*, 2022, Available at: https://stiriletransilvaniei.ro/2022/06/05/pelerinaj-la-sumuleuciuccum-arata-locul-unde-ieriaufostpeste-350-000-de-pelerini/, Accessed on February 20, 2026.

[147] The Rador Editorial Team, „Ziua Libertăţii Secuieşti – o comemorare controversată" ["Szekler Freedom Day. A Controversial Commemoration"], in *Rador*, 2018, Available at: https://www.rador.ro/2018/03/07/ziua-libertatii-secuiesti-o-comemorare-controversata/, Accessed on February 10, 2026.

[148] Ciprian Plăiaşu, „Adevărul despre 10 Martie – Ziua Libertaţii Secuieşti" ["The Truth About March 10- Szekler Freedom Day"], in *Historia*, n.d., Available at: https://historia.ro/sectiune/general/adevarul despre10martieziualibertatii-572431.html, Accessed on February 20, 2026.

[149] Marcela German, „Ziua Libertății Secuilor, marcată la Târgu-Mureș" ["Szekler Freedom Day, Celebrated in Târgu-Mureș"], in *România Actualități*, 2024, Available at: https://www.romaniaactualitati.ro/stiri/romania/ziualibertatiisecuilormarcatalatargumuresid189943.html, Accessed on February 20, 2026.

Another Hungarian cultural event that directly affects the societal security of Romanians in Covasna and Harghita is the Băile Tușnad Summer University (the so-called "Balvanyos"). In 2025, the university reached its 34th edition. Valer Marian states that

> "over the course of three decades, Viktor Orbán and his lieutenants have, for the first time, delivered several inflammatory and provocative messages at the Tușnad Summer University, many with revisionist or irredentist overtones: ranging from the collective rights of national minorities, personal autonomy, cultural autonomy, and territorial autonomy for Hungarian members and communities in Romania, with the greatest emphasis placed on the territorial autonomy of the so-called Szeklerland, the granting of dual citizenship, specifically Hungarian citizenship, and so on"[150].

This event, which carries strong political implications, is organized with the direct support of the Hungarian government[151]. An example of an official statement that affects the societal security of Romanians in this region, as well as Romania's security in general, is the one made in 2025 by the Hungarian prime minister, who, before participating in the events and meeting with his Romanian counterpart, publicly suggested that the region of Transylvania was not Romanian territory: "I have arrived in Bucharest, on Romanian soil. Tonight, we're going to Transylvania!"[152]. At the 2025 edition, Viktor Orbán spoke explicitly about the "recovery" of Transylvania, stating that the essence of the Hungarian strategy lies in the restoration of the so-called "Greater Hungary":

> "First, regarding the great Hungarian strategy (…) What is the great Hungarian strategy? The essence of the great Hungarian strategy stems from the fact that we were defeated in 1920, and at that time our defeat was finalized or sanctioned by the powers of the day. At that time, our enemies decided our fate. Our enemies decided that

[150] „pe parcursul a trei decenii, Viktor Orban și locotenenții săi au lansat, în premieră, la Universitatea de vară de la Tușnad mai multe mesaje incitante și provocatoare, multe cu tentă revizionistă sau iredentistă: începând cu drepturile colective ale minorităților naționale, autonomia personală, autonomia culturală și autonomia teritorială a membrilor și comunităților maghiare din România, cel mai mult insistându-se pe autonomia teritorială a așa-zisului Ținut Secuiesc, acordarea dublei cetățenii, respectiv și a cetățeniei ungare, ș.a." in

1. Marian Valer, „Efectul Băilor Tușnad: românii umiliți, secuii nemulțumiți (I)" ["The Tușnad Baths Effect: Humiliated Romanians, Dissatisfied Székelys (I)"], in *Cotidianul*, 2023a, Available at: https://www.cotidianul.ro/efectulbailortusnadromaniiumilitisecuiinemultumiti-i/, Accessed on February 11, 2026.

2. Marian Valer, „Efectul Băilor Tușnad: românii umiliți, secuii nemulțumiți (II)" ["The Tușnad Baths Effect: Humiliated Romanians, Dissatisfied Székelys (II)"], in *Cotidianul*, 2023b, Available at: https://www.cotidianul.ro/efectul-bailor-tusnad-romanii-umiliti-secuii-nemultumiti-ii/, Accessed on February 11, 2026.

[151] Gina Ștefan, „Harghita: Universitatea de Vară Tusvanyos, de la Băile Tușnad, la a 34a ediție; Viktor Orban va ține obișnuitul discurs" ["Harghita: The Tusvanyos Summer University in Băile Tușnad, now in its 34th year; Viktor Orbán will deliver his regular speech"], in *Agerpres*, July 21, 2025, Available at: https://agerpres.ro/politic/2025/07/21/harghitauniversitateadevaratusvanyosdelabailetusnadlaa34aeditieviktororbanvatineob1470021, Accessed on February 25, 2026.

[152] Orban Viktor, the statement can be consulted by accessing: https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1301677057996556&set=a.347694613394810, Accessed on February 20, 2026.

> Hungary would be small and poor. That was our destiny. We are in politics, and the essence of our national strategy is to change that destiny so that Hungary may be great and rich. This is the core of the Hungarian national strategy"[153].

At the same event, Kalmár Ferenc, the government commissioner responsible for developing Hungary's neighborhood policy, argued that Hungarian should become an official language in regions where ethnic Hungarians are in the majority (Covasna and Harghita counties in particular)[154].

One of the most recent significant developments regarding the pursuit of territorial autonomy for the so-called "Szeklerland" took place in early 2026, when the media reported that

> "Viktor Orbán's government is officially and legally involved for the first time in securing autonomy for Szeklerland! (...) Hungary is joining the proceedings at the European Union level on the side of the Szekler National Council of Romania, challenging before the Court of Justice of the EU the European Commission's decision to reject the petition signed by over one million Hungarians, which calls for the legal recognition of territorial autonomy for three counties in Romania (Mureș, Harghita, Covasna)"[155].

On this subject, Mihai Tîrnoveanu states that:

> "This is an extremely serious matter, especially from a political standpoint, because for the first time, officially, Viktor Orbán's government is essentially demanding territorial autonomy within Romania. Until now, it has limited itself to statements and economic, political, cultural, and religious offensives, preparing the 'ground' through

[153] „În primul rând, despre marea strategie maghiară(…) Care este marea strategie maghiară? Esența marii strategii maghiare provine din faptul că am fost învinși în 1920, iar la acea vreme înfrângerea noastră a fost finalizată sau binecuvântată de puterile de atunci. La acea vreme, inamicii noștri au decis soarta noastră. Inamicii noștri au decis că Ungaria va fi mică și săracă. Acesta a fost destinul nostru. Suntem în politică, iar esența strategiei noastre naționale este să schimbăm acel destin astfel încât Ungaria să fie măreață și bogată. Acesta este nucleul strategiei naționale maghiare", in Bogdan Tiberiu Iacob, „Stupefiant: la Tușnad, Orban a vorbit explicit despre recuperarea Transilvaniei. Bucureștiul tace mîlc" ["Shocking: In Tușnad, Orban spoke explicitly about reclaiming Transylvania. Bucharest remains completely silent"], in *In Politics*, 2025, Available at: https://inpolitics.ro/stupefiantlatusnadorbanavorbitexplicitdesprerecuperareatransilvanieibucurestiul tacemilc_1860087783.html, Accessed on February 20, 2026.

[154] Adrian Zia, „Cum a explicat vicepremierul Ungariei susținerea lui Simion de către Viktor Orbán. «În câteva secunde a existat o așezare a subiectului la locul unde trebuie să fie»" ["How Hungary's Deputy Prime Minister explained Viktor Orbán's support for Simion. 'In a matter of seconds, the issue was put in its proper place'"], in *Ziare*, 2025, Available at: https://ziare.com/ungaria/cumexplicatvicepremierulungarieisustinere simionviktororban1955107?utm_source=Ziare.com&utm_medium=copypaste, Accessed on February 11.

[155] „Guvernul Viktor Orban se implică pentru prima dată oficial, din punct de vedere juridic, în obținerea autonomiei ținutului secuiesc! (...) Ungaria intră în proces la nivelul Uniunii Europene de partea Consiliului Național Secuiesc din România, în contestarea la Curtea de Justiție a UE a deciziei Comisiei Europene de respingere a proiectului semnat de peste un milion de maghiari, prin care se cere legiferarea autonomiei teritoriale a trei județe din România (Mureș, Harghita, Covasna)", in Mihai Tîrnoveanu „Atenție români! Ungaria se implică oficial în autonomia «Ținutului Secuiesc» 2026" ["Attention, Romanians! Hungary is officially getting involved in the autonomy of the 'Szeklerland' in 2026"], in *Active News*, February 16, 2026, Available at: https://www.activenews.ro/opinii/Mihai-Tirnoveanu-Atentie-romani-Ungaria-se-implicaoficialinautonomiainutului-Secuiesc-202904, Accessed on May 10, 2026.

the concept of co-sovereignty. Now it is openly embracing, from every perspective, this autonomist goal, which effectively means occupation"[156].

This analysis has highlighted the fact that Romanians in Covasna and Harghita face multiple challenges related to their identity. As a local minority, they perceive societal threats, the most significant of which target their language, religion, and symbols. From this perspective, security actors must pay increased attention to protecting identity and social cohesion in this region. One of the distinctive features of inter-ethnic dynamics is their dynamism, which is why the nature of the phenomenon under study is constantly changing. However, statistical data confirming the continuous and accelerated decline of the Romanian population in Covasna and Harghita show that these inter-ethnic dynamics are not favorable to the Romanian community, which risks disappearing from this region. The creation of a Hungarian ethnic enclave in the center of the country is problematic, even more so as Hungarian political leaders seek territorial autonomy for this area, which would effectively mean the creation of a state within a state – a situation that violates constitutional provisions.

Consequently, the societal security of Romanians in Covasna and Harghita is an issue that extends beyond the analyzed area because generated by the failure to address the identity-related threats they perceive. Given the geopolitical importance of Transylvania, we can say that what happens at the national level has repercussions throughout the entire country. Thus, the issue of the societal security of Romanians in these two counties is a matter of national interest that requires immediate and heightened attention. The interests of the Hungarian community are very well represented, which cannot be said of the interests of the Romanian community. In this context, the societal security of Romanians in Covasna and Harghita becomes a national imperative.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Societal security refers to a society's ability to preserve its traditional ways of life, identity, culture, language, and fundamental institutions in the face of changes and threats, whether internal or external. This analysis shows that the societal security of Romanians in Covasna and Harghita is under threat, with the main challenges arising in the areas of language, religion, and symbols. While it has been observed that the interests of the Hungarian community are very well represented by their political leaders, there is a notable lack of representation regarding the

[156] „Faptul este extrem de grav mai ales din punct de vedere politic, pentru că pentru prima oară, oficial, Guvernul Viktor Orban cere practic autonomie teritorială în România. Până acum s-a rezumat la declarații, ofensivă economică, politică, culturală, religioasă, a pregătit «terenul» prin conceptul de co-suveranitate. Acum își asumă fățis, din toate perspectivele acest deziderat autonomist care se traduce practic în ocupație", in *Ibidem*.

protection of the Romanian community's identity, which has a significant impact on the community, especially given that they are already a local minority. From this perspective, securing the identified threats is essential, since, in the long term, without such security measures, the Romanian community risks disappearing from this region. The two counties occupy an important geostrategic position, forming part of what geopoliticians have called the state centre. Given that what happens in the state center has repercussions throughout the entire country, it can be said that the issue of societal security for Romanians in Covasna and Harghita can be viewed as a national imperative.

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REPEASANTIZATION THROUGH MIGRATION. MEANINGS ATTRIBUTED TO "LIFE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE" ON THE FACEBOOK GROUP "MOVED TO THE COUNTRYSIDE – LIFE WITHOUT A CLOCK"

Narcis Rupe[157]

ABSTRACT

Over the last century, the Romanian peasantry has faced a series of challenges. Today, the nature of peasant life is as follows: many of the cultural "ties" to peasant life have been "weakened" or have "disappeared". In this context, the phenomenon of "re-peasantisation through migration" is emerging people who have spent enough time in urban areas to accumulate the resources necessary for migration are 'moving to the countryside' because the "countryside" lifestyle is perceived as being "better" than "city life". Some of them even return to a "peasant" way of life: they work the land and rear animals on their own smallholdings to provide for their families' needs and to live in harmony with God. Re-peasantisation through migration is a social action, that is to say, it depends on the meanings attributed to it by the individuals concerned. To understand the phenomenon, we therefore analysed the meanings attributed to the "countryside life" by people who posted on a social media group dedicated to "moving to the countryside". The "countryside life" is associated with a certain sense of well-being. A positive one, in contrast to that specific to urban life. This "sense of well-being" is rooted in the place where they live (direct contact with nature), in human connections, in childhood (whether they are reliving memories of their own childhood or ensuring their children have the kind of childhood they consider appropriate), in freedom (of movement or the fact that one is in the position of 'master') and in beauty ("a corner of heaven").

Keywords: re-peasantisation, "back to the countryside", peasantry, lifestyle migration, Romania.

1. INTRODUCTION: THEORY, QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

Over the last century, the peasantry has faced a series of challenges. As early as the interwar period, the ethnographer Ernest Bernea, a member of the Bucharest School of Sociology, noted that Romanian village civilisation was in crisis:

> "the old forms of organisation, their activities and meanings, and the entire social structure of the village have begun to disintegrate"[158].

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[158] „vechile forme organizatoare, activitățile și sensurile lor, întreaga structură socială a satului au intrat într-un proces de destrămare", in Ernest Bernea, *Civilizația română sătească [Romanian village civilization]*, Bucharest, The "Țără și neam" Collection, 1944, p. 117.

The violent installment of the communist regime in Romania only accelerated the process: in the first phase, forced collectivization (1949 and 1965) "suppressed the traditional peasant way of life"[159], and, second, the policies implemented by the state were aimed at replacing the peasant with the agricultural worker, the rural equivalent of the industrial worker[160]. The fall of the communist regime after 1989 did not improve the situation of the "peasantry".

Today's "peasant situation" can be illustrated by the following analogy: many of the ties of peasant culture have disappeared, while others have "weakened," but it is up to each generation of villagers to rebuild and make the most of them in their own way.

This study focuses on the issue of the remaining "knots of peasant ties". To understand whether, in Romania in 2026, these ties "are still being knitted", we turned our attention to Romanians who, after spending enough time in urban areas to accumulate the resources necessary for migration, "move to the countryside". We approached this phenomenon through the concept of "re-peasantisation through migration".

"Repeasantization is also a twofold process. It is about agriculture being made more peasant-like again [and] It is also about increases in the numbers of peasants"[161]. There are many "peasant models", which is why we based our approach on the Romanian peasantry of the interwar period, as studied by the Bucharest School of Sociology, characterized by:

1. At the heart of the farmer's entire range of activities lies the "connection to the land" (caring for – that is, "cultivating" – it and raising livestock);
2. The peasantry represents a social stratum defined by family-based management of the essential means of production required for cultivating land and raising livestock;
3. Management takes place within the family household;
4. The substantive rationality of peasant household activity lies in meeting family needs – achieving an optimal balance between income and requirements – and in a traditional "anchoring in eternity", where work is frequently an integral part of symbolism and ritual.

When examined in the context of migration, repeasantisation takes on the following meaning: it refers to individuals who undergo a process of returning to a peasant-like lifestyle – where their daily existence becomes "tethered to the land" to

[159] "Collectivization, the process that has crumbled the national identity by abolishing the peasantry's traditional way of life, ended in April 1962, although the fencing endeavour of private property continues between 1962 and 1965", in Radu Baltasiu and Ovidiana Bulumac (coord.), *Fractured modernities. Elites, Romania and the "Europe"*, Bucharest, University of Bucharest Publishing House, 2014, p. 39.

[160] Ilie Bădescu, *Satul contemporan și evoluția lui istorică [The Contemporary Village and Its Historical Evolution]*, Bucharest, Scientific and Encyclopedic Publishing House, 1981, pp. 32–33.

[161] Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, *The new peasantries. Rural development in times of globalization*, Second Edition, New York, Routledge, 2018, p. 25.

secure familial needs and foster integration into cosmic Christianity – following a migration from urban to rural areas. In this context, we are not concerned with a simple relocation from one place of residence to another, but rather with a shift from an urban to a rural environment that is intentionally driven by a pursuit of "lifestyle migration"[162]: the "countryside life" must be perceived as "better" than "city life".

In this study, we will analyze the meanings attributed to the "countryside life" by individuals who, to varying degrees, fall into the category of "migratory repeasantisation". To this end, we focused our research on the Facebook group "Mutat la țară – viața fără ceas" ("Moved to the countryside – life without a clock"). This group is particularly relevant to our study for several key reasons. Primarily, it serves as a social media platform where individuals who have relocated to rural areas – after spending many years in cities within Romania or abroad – interact with one another. Within this space, they share the stories of their relocation, seek advice, and engage in discussions regarding the various facets of "country living".

The Facebook group was established by a Romanian who, after spending many years abroad (particularly in Great Britain), relocated to a village in the Apuseni Mountains. Within the group, he shared his personal journey, prompting other Romanians (all interactions occur exclusively in the Romanian language) to share theirs as well. By 2026, the group had reached a total of 381,000 members. Between 2022 and 2026, we identified over 5,000 posts. Furthermore, members are encouraged – as stipulated by one of the rules accepted upon joining – to contribute long-form texts. Consequently, we are provided with an in-depth exploration of various experiences regarding the "move to the countryside", reflecting a process of "repeasantisation" that is either more or less traditional in nature.

Through the content analysis method, we have successfully extracted the meanings attributed to the "countryside life", the process of "repeasantisation", and the motivations behind these actions within the 100 most viral posts between 2022 and 2026, ranked by the number of comments. The present study is thematic in nature. We have sought to capture the diversity of these meanings, while assigning secondary importance to quantitative aspects – such as determining which meanings are the most dominant.

In our research, we sought to address the question of repeasantisation:

What meanings do the individuals who post on the Facebook group "Mutat la țară – viața fără ceas" attribute to the "countryside life" – a concept closely linked to the process of repeasantisation?

Any social action occurs by virtue of a specific meaning attributed by individuals to their own behavior[163]; thus, we proceed from the presumption that "repeasantisation through migration" also takes place in accordance with the meanings that those who have "moved to the countryside" attribute to "countryside life".

[162] See Michaela Benson and Karen O'Reilly, "Migration and the search for a better way of life: a critical exploration of lifestyle migration", in *The Sociological Review*, 2009, 57:4, pp. 608–625.

[163] Max Weber, *Economy and society. An outline of interpretative sociology*, edited by Roth Guenther și Claus Wittich, Berkeley, Los Angeles and Londra, University of California Press, 1978, p. 4.

2. MEANINGS OF "LIFE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE" (THE "COUNTRY HOUSE")

For those who have "relocated," "countryside life" or a "country home," as the case may be, carry the following general meanings, which we have categorized into these subtypes: "a slice of heaven," nature, genuine connections, well-being, freedom, an environment conducive to a healthy childhood, and an alternative to city living.

We observe that we are referring to a particular sense of well-being attributed to "countryside life". This is a positive state, positioned in contrast to that which is specific to urban environments. This "well-being" is anchored in one's living space (direct contact with nature), in human connections, in childhood (whether one is reliving the memories of one's own childhood, or ensuring for one's offspring that childhood which one considers appropriate), in freedom (of movement or the fact that one is in the position of being a "master"), and in beauty, described as a "slice of heaven".

2.1. Nature

To begin with, let us point out that "movers", or those who intend to move but have not yet done so, associate the village with nature. The associations between the village and nature are so frequent that it is no wonder we encounter the notion that they have, in fact, moved into the middle of nature, rather than into "countryside life".

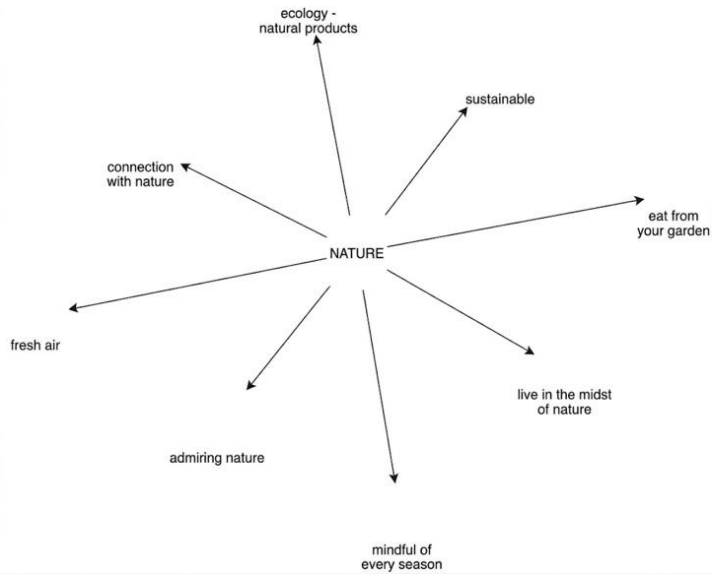


Fig. 1 – Meanings attributed to "nature." Infographic based on an analysis of posts from the Facebook group "Moved to the Countryside-Life Without a Clock".

The meanings attributed to "nature" oscillate between nature as a space to be admired and nature as a source of sustenance. The former interpretation should not surprise us, given that the individuals in question have lived for a long time "between blocks of flats". The nature to which one has retreated is the same nature encountered during mountain hikes taken before the move. There is, however, a difference between hiking and living in the midst of nature. In the countryside, you have the opportunity "to connect" with nature, rather than simply admiring it.

Regarding nature as a source of nourishment, this significance can only emerge for those who work the land they own. Moving beyond the stage of mere admiration occurs when the individual who has "relocated" cultivates the land to obtain produce (greenhouses, gardens, orchards, etc.). In doing so, one lives "sustainably" or "ecologically". One has the opportunity to "eat from one's garden" "natural products", rather than the ultra-processed goods found in the city. Only in such instances is the bond with the land – the very raison d'être of "countryside life" – fulfilled[164] it interweaves with the concept of "countryside life" – and by extension, the idea of nature. Connecting with nature means grounding oneself only when one is actively working the land. Naturally, not everyone who relocates also works the soil. Even the founder of the analysed Facebook group positioned themselves in a post against the idea that "one has not moved to the "countryside life" if one does not have a garden and animals":

> "It is not the garden that makes one's transition to «countryside life» complete. Neither are the chickens, nor the knowledge of how to plant tomatoes. These are merely activities that some individuals choose to undertake within this context – and they are certainly to be appreciated"[165].

It is the very act of working the land that makes those who have relocated conscious of the unique nature of each season. Specific agricultural activities are conducted during certain periods of the year. This contrasts with the urban environment, where jobs are, for the most part, repetitive – with no significant differences based on the season in which they take place. Thus, one gains a deeper understanding of "countryside life".

The newcomer only perceives the changing of the seasons if they have become "attached to the land" (working their own soil). Even those who do not tend to their

[164] See Gheorghiță Geană, „Un fapt social total. Legătura țăranului cu pământul" ["A Total Social Phenomenon: The Peasant's Bond with the Land"], in Ilie Bădescu, Ozana Cucu-Oancea and Gheorghe Șișeștean (coord.), *Tratat de sociologie rurală [Treatise on Rural Sociology]*, Bucharest, Mica Valahie Publishing House, 2009, pp. 235-238.

[165] „Nu grădina te face să fii mutat la țară. Nici găinile. Nici faptul că știi să pui roșii. Astea sunt doar niște lucruri pe care unii oameni aleg să le facă în contextul ăsta și sunt de apreciat", in ***, „«Nu ești mutat la țară dacă n-ai grădină și animale»" [" 'You're not really living in the country if you don't have a garden and animals'"], in *Mutat la țară viața fără ceas [Moving to the Countryside: Life Without a Clock]*, August 30, 2026, Available at: https://www.facebook.com/groups/740526862768545/permalink/3515128598641677/, Accessed on September 9, 2026.

gardens experience the distinction between winter and summer based on the presence of others. For those providing agritourism accommodation, summer is the season "full of people", whereas during the winter months, human presence outside of one's own family is absent or significantly reduced – a clear reflection of the cyclical nature of "countryside life".

2.2. "Well-being" and "genuine connections"

Living in the "countryside life" home is perceived as generating a greater sense of well-being than urban living. Dwelling amidst nature, working the land, and consuming "eco" products signify a healthy existence. "Doing it yourself" – in one's own household – represents a joy in itself for those who have relocated.

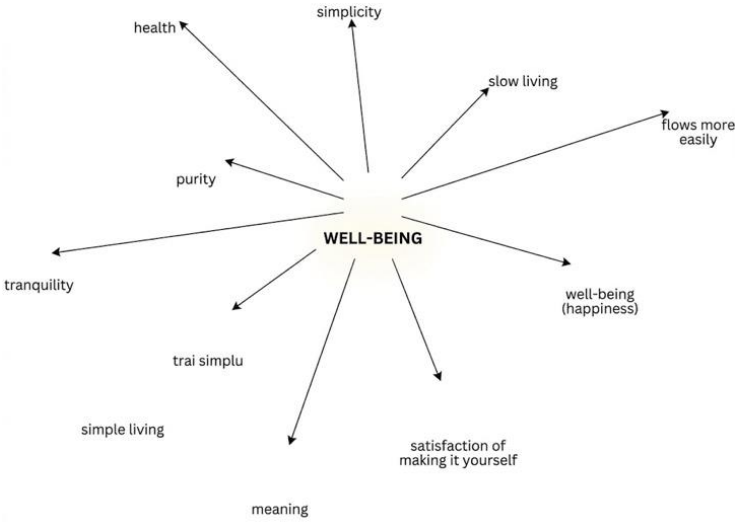


Fig. 2 – The meanings of "well-being". A figure created based on the analysis of posts from the group "Moving to the countryside – life without a clock".

"Countryside life" is perceived as simple and free from agitation, or "slow-paced", and it unfolds more easily than life "in the city". Although residents sometimes claim that they do not "have time" – since a rural home requires continuous maintenance – they assert that they do not feel the stress typically associated with a person full of activities. Having many tasks to complete does not translate, "as it does in the city", into being psychologically overloaded. Such social logic should not surprise us, given that some of "those who have moved" perform tasks in the countryside that are of much lower difficulty than those typical of their own professions. Even if the volume of household activities is high, they are not that complex for a person with a high level of educational training.

2.3. "A corner of heaven"

For some individuals, well-being is also linked to the religious dimension. They have either "come to know God" after moving, or they view their home situated in the heart of nature as "a corner of heaven", which "is taken from a fairy tale". For those who have returned from the diaspora, "countryside life" represents the "paradise" one can create within one's own country, rather than thousands of miles away. It is worth noting that "countryside life" compensates for the reduction in the material abundance typical of the city; here and there, the idea emerges that "happiness does not consist of material things and money".

The blending of heaven and nature brings to mind cosmic Christianity. Contact with nature can assist the newcomer in moving closer to the divine.

2.4. A conducive childhood

The sense of well-being derived from being surrounded by nature extends beyond those who authored the posts within the studied social media group. "Countryside life" also offers numerous benefits for the children of those who have relocated. A household is not merely a place where the land is cultivated, but also a "safe playground". Children can be raised in a natural environment, rather than the artificial one found in urban areas. It remains unclear whether this safe space is confined strictly to the household (the house and garden) or if it encompasses the entire village. In other words, following the social logic of "those who relocated", if children venture beyond the household, are they still considered to be safe?

Drawing an analogy with urban parks, parents enjoy the natural setting typical of a leafy city park within their own household, while also benefiting from the security of supervision similar to that of a playground. In "countryside life", one can supervise one's child as they play in a natural, healthy environment.

In some cases, parents want their children to have a childhood like the one they themselves experienced during the summers they spent with their grandparents. Back then, they used to play outdoors, untroubled by modern technology. It is no wonder that they encourage their own children to experience "country life" without "mobile phones" or "television":

> "Children should be engaged with their schooling and spend their free time in the garden. I do not permit my children to have mobile phones! They must have pursuits other than just playing games. They should learn to cherish nature, to water a tree, or tend to a vegetable. It is vital that they learn to love 'countryside life' – and to love plants!"[166].

[166] „Copiii cu școala și în timpul liber prin grădină. Eu nu le accept telefoanele copiilor mei! Ei trebuie să aibă altă preocupare în afară de joacă. Să învețe să iubească natura, să ude un pom, o legumă. Să iubească plantele!", in ***, „De trei ani de zile am găsit de cuviință că trebuie ..." ["For the past three years, I have felt it necessary to … "], in *Mutat la țară viața fără ceas [Moving to the Countryside: Life Without a Clock]*, May 10, 2022, Available at: https://www.facebook.com/groups/740526862768545/permalink/2138647876289763/, Accessed on September 9, 2026.

2.5. Liberty

Another meaning attributed to "countryside life" is that of freedom. Working within one's own household means "to be one's own master". Even if you work from home ("remote") for a "boss", within your household, you are the one who organizes your tasks and decides when and what to work on. "Moving to the countryside – life without a clock" also signifies, for the members who have posted, the absence of time management in accordance with the typical work schedule of the city.

Being free also relates to the sentiment of ownership. You become the holder of land in "countryside life". The probability that those who have relocated will rent their village residence is near zero. In the overwhelming majority of cases, those who have moved become the owners of the house and property in the village to which they immigrate – a trend that reflects one's desire for lasting stability.

2.6. "Countryside life" in contrast "with city life"

In the final typology regarding the description of "countryside life" or the rural home, we have included those elements that stand in opposition to the urban environment. Ultimately, the category of "relocators" consists of individuals who have resided in an urban setting for an extended period – sufficient to accumulate the resources necessary for moving.

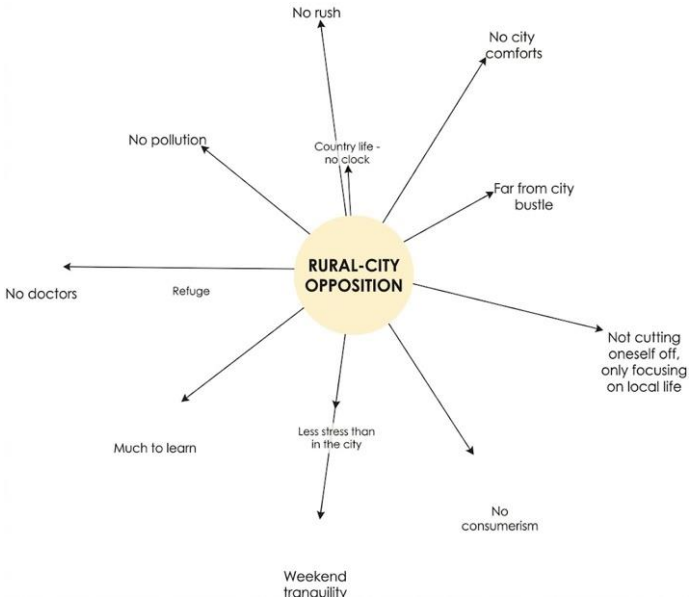


Fig. 3 – The meanings of "countryside life" in contrast to urban living. An illustration developed based on the analysis of posts from the group "Mutat la țară – viața fără ceas".

In the final typology regarding the description of "countryside life" or the rural home, we have included those elements that stand in opposition to the urban environment. Ultimately, the category of "relocators" consists of individuals who have resided in an urban setting for an extended period – sufficient to accumulate the resources necessary for moving.

Whether individuals have relocated permanently or not, "countryside life" is one that does not unfold "by the clock". It is not a life dominated by reflected will (Ferdinand Tönnies) – "composed of proper reflection, calculation and speculation, knowledge, egoistic and dominating attitude"[167], in which one programs one's time according to the clock and the calendar, as opposed to "countryside life" – a mode of existence governed by the rhythms of nature.

"Countryside life" represents a fresh start where the individuals in question "have much to learn".

The less prior exposure (before relocating) an individual has had to the management of a household – such as not having spent summers assisting grandparents in rural areas or not having originated from a village – the more one is expected to claim to have "learned a great deal" following the migration: "you have learned to do many things around the household because you previously knew nothing". It is worth noting that the "relocated individuals" carry out their professional activities both before and after the migration in non-agricultural sectors, and if one has had no contact with "countryside life", it will seem all the more significant that "one has learned a great deal".

Moving to the countryside and living there requires the mastery of certain skills that the studied individuals either do not possess or possess only at an underdeveloped level – having been away from the village for an extended period: digging the soil, planting, plastering the walls of the house one intends to renovate, or pruning the trees in the purchased orchard, among others.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Among the meanings attributed by those who have relocated to "countryside life" are nature as a "corner of heaven", genuine connections, and childhood as a source of traditional behavioural models. Nature as a "corner of heaven" belongs to the concept of cosmic Christianity (Eliade) –

> "a liturgy beneath the vault of the sky and the dome of the church which cultivates in the believer the wisdom to live in peace with one's fellows and with the nature that surrounds them"[168].

[167] Ion Ungureanu, *Paradigme ale cunoașterii societății [Paradigms of society understanding]*, Iași, Junimea Publishing House, 2002, p. 82.

[168] „o liturghie sub bolta cerului și cupola bisericii care cultivă în credincios înțelepciunea de a trăi în pace cu semenii și cu natura ce-l înconjoară", in Ion Ghinoiu, *Panteonul românesc. Dicționar [The Romanian Pantheon: A Dictionary]*, Bucharest, Enciclopedică Publishing House, 2001, p. 58.

Nature is a guide for the person seeking to draw closer to the divine. For those who have "countryside life" – in stillness, in peace, and in simplicity – it represents living in harmony with God.

The village is characterised, as F. Tönnies demonstrates, by relationships of kinship, friendship, and neighbourliness. These types of relationships are also found, to a greater or lesser extent, among those who have relocated to the "countryside life". Kinship bonds vary depending on whether individuals have returned to their ancestral village; if they have not, familial connections take precedence. "Countryside life" means that relocated parents have the opportunity to spend more time with their children than in an urban environment, with the household becoming a space where the playing child and the working parent interact constantly.

The data were insufficient to determine whether those who have relocated form friendships with other villagers. As for neighbours, this is a matter of "luck". One may have "reliable neighbours" – who might even feed one's animals when one is away from the village – or "noisy neighbours", as debates regarding issues associated with neighbours, such as loud music or theft, are frequently posted in online groups.

Another aspect of "countryside life" that is closely linked to the traditional rural experience is childhood. For parents, the childhood spent "in the countryside" – whether they lived in a village or visited their grandparents – has become the benchmark for the childhood they wish to provide for their own offspring. Their own childhood serves as a source of traditional inspiration, as they once "went caroling, or performed with the goat and the bear", meaning they were in direct contact with traditional customs and habits. It remains to be seen in future research whether parents endeavour to pass these traditional elements on to their children: do they encourage them to go caroling in a village where "caroling is happening less and less" with each passing year?

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THE "CAROL I" MOSQUE IN CONSTANȚA

Emil Țîrcomnicu[169]

ABSTRACT

On May 31/June 13, 1913, in Constanța, King Carol I and Queen Elisabeth inaugurated the "Melik" Mosque (Melik = royal), located on Independenței Street. In honor of the King, it also bears his name and is therefore often referred to as the Carol I Mosque. The mosque was built between 1910 and 1913 to commemorate the granting to the Aromanians living in the Ottoman Empire of the right to freely use the Romanian language in schools and churches. These rights were granted through an imperial decree (iradea) issued by Sultan Abdul Hamid II on May 9/22, 1905. The decree was announced through its publication in the newspapers of Constantinople on May 10, 1905, Romania's National Day. The iradea recognizing the Romanian nationality within the Ottoman Empire caused considerable excitement among Romanians at the time, as demonstrated by the contemporary press. The foundation stone of the mosque was laid on June 25, 1910, and by the autumn of 1912 the construction was nearly complete. The mosque was built on the site of an older mosque dating from 1823. The construction cost 400,000 lei. The designs were conceived by architect Victor Stephănescu, an advocate of the Neo-Romanian architectural style, while the building was constructed by engineer G. Neculcea using reinforced concrete for its structure. The mosque was equipped with radiators and an electrical installation. It also received gifts from Sultan Mehmed V, including carpets, pieces of furniture, and two silver candlesticks, all valued at 100,000 lei.

Keywords: Constanța Mosque, Aromanians, Turks, cultural rights.

1. THE OPPORTUNITY

The oldest information regarding the Romanian government's intention to build a Mosque for the Muslims of Constanța was found by me in the newspaper *Adevărul* of February 28/March 13, 1905, in which the situation of the Turkish minority was weighed, as reciprocity, against the situation of Romanians in the Ottoman Empire and the rights that Romania was requesting on their behalf. Therefore, two months before the obtaining of the Ottoman Iradea of May 10, 1905, the construction of the Mosque was being discussed as an element in the negotiations between Romania and the Ottoman Empire.

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> "It is said that the future budget of the Ministry of Religious Affairs will also provide a sum of nearly 100,000 lei in order to build a Turkish mosque in Constanța, for the Muslim population of that city. By building this mosque, the government wishes to provide yet another proof of the tolerance enjoyed by the Muslim population of Romania. This decision by the government appears to be connected with the imminent resolution of the issue of the Romanians living in Macedonia"[170].

On May 13, 1905, three days after the publication of the Ottoman Iradea recognizing the Romanian nationality within the Ottoman Empire, the representative in Constantinople, Al. Em. Lahovary, announced

> "that the Romanian government, out of gratitude for the Sultan's continued goodwill toward the Kutzo-Wallachians, had decided to build a monumental mosque in Constanța"[171]

as a piece of news that appeared in the newspaper *Neuigkeits-Welt-Blatt*, Vienna[172].

Four years later, newspapers from 1909 announced the intention to build a mosque in Constanța:

> "It is known that following an imperial Iradea issued in 1905, by which the former Sultan Abdul Hamid II recognized the Romanian nationality in Turkey, the Romanian government, in order to express its satisfaction, decided to build a large mosque in Constanța. A sum of 120,000 lei had been allocated for this construction, to which another 80,000 lei was subsequently added. The Ministry of Religious Affairs commissioned Mr. architect V. Ștefănescu with preparing the plans for the mosque. The plans are ready, and the new mosque will be put under construction immediately after the demolition of the old one, which has been permitted to continue operating until after the end of the Ramadan celebrations. It is believed that His Majesty the King, who will soon visit Constanța on the occasion of the silos' inauguration, will attend the laying of the foundation stone of the new mosque"[173].

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[170] „Se spune că prin viitorul budget al ministerului cultelor se va prevede și o sumă de aproape 100.000 lei spre a clădi o moschee turcească la Constanța, pentru populațiunea musulmană din acel oraș. Prin clădirea acestei moschee, guvernul voește să dea încă o dovadă de toleranță de care se bucură populațiunea musulmană din România. Hotărârea aceasta a guvernului pare a fi în legătură cu apropiata rezolvare a chestiei românilor din Macedonia", in *Adevărul*, February 28, 1905, Year XVIII, No. 5588, p. 3.

[171] „că guvernul român, din recunoștință pentru bunăvoința continuă a sultanului față de kuțovalahi, a decis să construiască o moschee monumentală la Constanța", Dated according to the New Style, May 27, 1905, No. 121, p. 4.

[172] *Ibidem*.

[173] „Se știe că în urma unei iradele imperiale dată în anul 1905 prin care fostul sultan Abdul Hamid II recunoștea naționalitatea română din Turcia, guvernul român, pentru a-și exprima satisfacerea sa, a hotărât construirea unei mari moschee la Constanța. Pentru această construcție fusese destinată o sumă de 120.000 lei, la care s-a mai adăugat încă 80.000 lei. Cu facerea planurilor moscheii a fost însărcinat de către ministerul de culte, d-l arhitect V. Ștefănescu. Planurile sunt gata și noua moschee va fi pusă în construcție imediat după dărâmarea celei vechi care a fost îngăduită să mai funcționeze încă până după sfârșitul serbărilor Ramadanului. Se crede că M. S. Regele care va vizita în curând Constanța cu ocazia inaugurării silozurilor, va asista la punerea pietrei fundamentale a noii moschei", See the newspapers *Voința Națională*, September 18, 1909, Year XXVI, No. 7261, p. 2, and *Ungaria*, October 13, 1909, Year III, No. 190, p. 6.

On July 28, 1909, the newspaper *Dimineața* (Year VI, no. 1951, p. 3) announced that

> "The Administration of the Church Fund is announcing an auction for contracting the construction of the mosque in the city of Constanța. A separate bid will be made for the demolition of the old mosque and the leveling of the land"[174].

2. THE CONSTRUCTION

On June 25/July 8, 1910, the foundation stone was laid for the future Mosque, in the presence of the Minister of Education Spiru Haret and the Turkish Minister in Bucharest, Sefa Bey. On this occasion, Mufti Hafiz-Rifat-efendi delivered the following speech:

> "Mr. Minister, Honored Assembly,
>
> First of all, we are duty-bound to offer pious thanks to the Almighty, who has deemed us worthy today to witness this magnificent solemnity, namely the laying of the foundation stone of a mosque, a place of prayer for Muslim believers, which will be a noble monument of the country, worthy of this historic locality which, in days of distress, served as an eternal refuge for the immortal poet Ovid, one of the great Roman figures. This new mosque under construction is being built on the site of an old mosque, which had its origins in the year 1823, during the reign of Sultan Mahmut. At that time, the commander of the city of Constanța was the late Hafaz Hussein Pasha, a deeply religious man. His sense of piety prompted him to build the former mosque here, on these foundations, at his own expense, and it was dedicated to the Sultan of that time, Mahmut, in his capacity as Grand Caliph and, at the same time, his August Sovereign. However, the old 'Sultan-Mahmut' mosque was no longer commensurate with modern Constanța. Since it was known that this mosque was situated precisely in the city's principal district, it was a moral duty for the Muslim community of the municipality to have a monumental mosque of its own. Today's religious celebration therefore also constitutes an important historical moment, for the document, written in Turkish and Romanian, which is being laid in the foundation, will remind future generations that here, on the shores of the Black Sea, upon the ruins of ancient Tomis, where beautiful Constanța now flourishes, under the glorious reign of the wise and Great Captain, His Majesty King Carol I, this holy place is being erected at the expense of the Romanian State, and thus an even stronger and everlasting bond of brotherhood and affection is being cemented between the Romanians and Muslims of Dobrogea, children of the same homeland. Furthermore, gentlemen, the provision of the Muslim community of Constanța with such a magnificent mosque by the Romanian government itself will cause the hearts of Muslim believers even in the most distant corners of the globe to rejoice, because it demonstrates to all how much hospitality, goodwill, and parental affection are enjoyed here in Romania by the children of the country, regardless of their ethnic origin or religion. In the past and under exceptional circumstances, a weak current of emigration had formed among the Muslim population of Dobrogea; nevertheless, the Romanian government quickly put an end to that current, for, as always, it distinguished itself through excellent and well-considered administrative measures, respecting the language, faith, and

[174] „Administrația Cassei Bisericei publică licitație pentru darea în întreprindere a construcțiunei moscheei din orașul Constanța. Pentru dărâmarea vechei moschei și nivelarea terenului se va face ofertă deosebită", in The newspaper *Dimineața*, July 28, 1909, Year VI, No. 1951, p. 3.

customs of each group, granting all equally the benefits of an equal administration of justice, and alleviating as much as possible the suffering of the weak. Today, following the example of the great voivodes of the past, our great voivode, King Carol I, assisted by the wisdom of his patriotic counselors, for the glory of the country, in addition to the many newly built churches, is having the old religious and historical monuments, which for the most part constitute the pride of Romania, repaired and beautified. Today's beginning of the construction of this noble mosque is yet another testimony that His Majesty King Carol I, together with his High Government, worthy and faithful successors to the virtues of their ancestors, does not forget to include among the long list of newly built houses of God those belonging to other faiths as well. With a refined nature and full of nobility, the Romanian man, here at the gates of the Orient, demonstrates to the world that, while respecting everyone's faith, he himself has the right to be respected. Today's Romania, raised up here through the bravery of her sons, through school and church, beacons of light and civilization, employing gentleness and legality, will surely fulfill her lofty mission of remaining in the future at the forefront of the other small Balkan states. We Muslims of Dobrogea, lovers of our good homeland, Romania, respectful followers of the Holy Quran, which teaches us continuous work, enlightenment through learning, and honor, must show through our deeds that we are worthy of the sacrifices that the country makes for us in this direction. Let us fully understand the high and beneficent protection of our beloved Sovereign and His Government and, filled with gratitude and veneration, thanking everyone and especially the current Minister of Religious Affairs and Education, to whom we owe a warm contribution toward the rearing of this grandiose mosque, let us cry out with all our hearts and with complete sincerity: Long live Romania, Long live His Majesty King Carol I, Long live Her Majesty the Queen, Long live the Romanian Dynasty!"[175].

[175] „Domnule ministru, Onorată Adunare,

În primul rând, datori suntem a înălța pioase mulțumiri Celui A-Tot-Puternic, că ne învrednicește astăzi să asistăm la această măreață solemnitate, adică la punerea pietrei fundamentale a unei moschee, locaș de rugăciuni al credincioșilor musulmani și care locaș va fi un falnic monument al țărei, demn de această localitate istorică care în zile do restriște a servit de azil nemuritorului poet Ovidiu una din măreţele figuri romane. Această nouă moschee în construcţiune se clădește pe urmele unei vechi geamii, care și-a luat începutul în anul 1823 pe timpul domniei Sultanului Mahmut. Pe acea vreme era pe aci, comandant, al orașului Constanța, răposatul Hafaz Hussein Paşa, un om foarte religios. Sentimentul său de pietate l-a determinat ca aci pe aceste temelii, cu propria sa cheltuială, să ridice fosta geamie, și a fost dedicată Sultanului de pe atunci Mahmut, în calitate de Mare Calif și în acelaș timp Augustul său stăpan. Însă vechea geamie «Sultan-Mahmut» nu mai era la înălțimea Constanței moderne, știut fiind că această geamie e situată tocmai în cartierul principal al orașului, era o îndatorire morală pentru comunitatea musulmană din localitate, ca să-și aibe și dânsa o monumentală geamie. Serbarea religioasă de astăzi constitue dar și un important moment istoric, căci punerea în temelie a documentului, scris în limba turcă și română, va aminti generațiunilor viitoare că aci, pe malul Mărei Negre, pe ruinele vechiului Tomis și unde astăzi înfloreşte frumoasa Constanța, sub domnia glorioasă a înțeleptului și Marelui Căpitan, Maiestatea Sa Regele Carol I, se ridică cu cheltuiala Statului român, acest sfânt locaș și astfel se cimentează și mai mult și pentru totdeauna o puternică frăție și dragoste între românii și musulmanii din Dobrogea, fii ai aceleași patrii. Ceva mai mult, domnilor, înzestrarea comuuității musulmane din Constanța cu o moschee atât de măreață de către însuși guvernul român, va face să tresalte de bucurie inimile credincioșilor musulmani chiar din cele mai îndepărtate unghiuri ale globului pământesc, pentru că se arată tuturor de câtă largă ospitalitate, bunăvoință și dragoste părintească se bucură aci în Romania, fii țărei, fie dansii de ori ce neam și de ori ce religie. Pe timpuri și în mod excepțional, se formase un slab curent de emigrare în elementul musulman, din Dobrogea, totuși guvernul român a curmat repede acel curent, căci ca întotdeauna s-a ilustrat prin excelență cu măsuri de administrație bine chibzuite, respectând fiecărui element limba, credința și obiceiurile, impărtășindu-i pe toți în mod egal de binefacerile unei egale împărțiri de dreptate și indulcind pe cât posibil suferințele celor slabi. Astăzi, după pilda voevozilor mari din trecut, marele nostru voevod, Regele Carol I, ajutat de luminile patrioților săi sfetnici, spre mărirea țarei, pe lângă multe biserici clădite din nou, face a se repara și înfrumuseța monumentele

At the beginning of 1912, the sum of 80,000 lei was additionally allocated to the budget of the Church Fund for the "completion of the mosque in Constanța, furnishings, and enclosure"[176].

On May 21, 1912, during their visit to Constanța, King Carol I, accompanied by Prince Nicolae, after attending the religious service at the Cathedral held on the occasion of the feast of Saints Constantine and Helena, also stopped by the Mosque, which was in the final stage of construction[177].



Fig. 1 – The "King Carol I" Mosque in Constanța[178].

The newspapers announced that Sultan Muhamed IV had gifted the future Mosque a carpet of great value[179].

vechi religioase şi istorice, care în mare parte fac fala României. Începutul de astăzi al înălţării acestei falnici moschee, este încă o mărturie că Maiestatea Sa Regele Carol I cu Înaltul Său guvern, vrednici şi fideli următori ai virtuţilor strămoşeşti, nu uită a cuprinde în lunga nomenclatură a locaşelor Dumnezeeşti din nou zidite şi pe acelea de altă credinţă. Cu o fire aleasă şi plin de nobleţă, Românul aci la porţile Orientului, dovedeşte lumei că El, respectând credinţa fiecăruia are şi dânsul dreptul şi că trebue să fie respectat. România de astăzi ridicată aci, prin vitejia fiilor ei, prin şcoală şi biserică, făclii de lumină şi civilizaţie, uzând de blandeţe şi legalitate, cu siguranţă va îndeplini înalta ei menire de a fi şi pe viitor în fruntea celorlalte mici state balcanice. Noi musulmanii din Dobrogea, iubitori ai bunei noastre patrii, România, respectuoşi ascultători ai Sfantului Coran, care ne învaţă munca continuă lumină prin invăţătură şi cinste să ne arătăm şi prin fapte că suntem demni de sacrifiile ce ţara face pentru noi în această direcţiune. Să ne dăm bine seama de protecţia înaltă şi binefăcătoare a iubitului nostru Suveran şi a guvernului Său şi, plini de recunoştinţă şi veneraţie, mulţumind tuturor şi în special actualului ministru al cultelor şi instrucţiunei, căruia îi datorăm întru ridicarea acestei grandioase moschee, un călduros concurs, să strigăm din tot sufletul şi cu toată sinceritatea: Trăiască Romania, Trăiască Maiestatea Sa Regele Carol I, Trăiască Majestatea Sa Regina, Trăiască Dinastia Română", See the newspapers *Universul*, June 28, 1910, Year XXVIII, No. 174, p. 3, and *Conservatorul*, June 29, 1910, Year X, No. 140, p. 2.

[176] See the newspaper *Dimineața*, January 20, 1912, Year IX, No. 2828, p. 3.

[177] See the newspaper *Universul*, May 24, 1912, Year XXX, No. 140, p. 5.

[178] *Universul*, 1935, 11B-1659414755, p. 8.

[179] See the newspaper *Evenimentul*, June 28, 1912, Year XX, No. 97, p. 3.

In the autumn of 1912, the construction had been completed and the inauguration was awaited, as shown by the article in the newspaper *Dimineața*[180], which reported that the inauguration was expected.

Only in the following year, on May 31/June 13, 1913, in Constanța, did King Carol I and Queen Elisabeth inaugurate the "Melik" Mosque, which, in honor of the King, also bears his name and is therefore often called the Carol I Mosque.

The construction of the Mosque cost 400,000 lei. The plans were drawn up by architect Victor Stephănescu, who favored the Neo-Romanian style. In fact, Victor Stephănescu had Aromanian origins, being the son of composer Georghe Stephănescu and the grandson of merchant Mihail Hagi Stephan. The construction was carried out by engineer G. Neculcea, with reinforced concrete being used in its structure. The Mosque was equipped with radiators and an electrical installation. The inventor Gogu Constantinescu also worked on the dome, using thin reinforced concrete shells for the first time for the vault's construction.

Architect Victor Stephănescu made several research trips to the Muslim world, to Cairo, Constantinople, Baghdad, and Bursa.

To welcome King Carol I, His Excellency Mahmud Essad Effendi, Minister of Cadastral Affairs and special envoy of the Sultan, and His Excellency Seffa Bey, Minister of Turkey in Bucharest, came to Constanța. The two were accompanied by the mayor of Constanța, Mircea Solacolu. The consuls of Turkey, Italy, Germany, and France were present at the inauguration. The carpets in the Mosque and two large silver candlesticks had been received as gifts from the Sultan and were worth 100,000 lei[181].

The Turkish Minister of Cadastral Affairs received from King Carol I, on the occasion of the inauguration of the Mosque, the Order of the Star, his three companions received the rank of Knight, and the Mufti of Constanța acquired the rank of Commander[182].



Fig. 2 – The interior of the mosque[183].

[180] September 4, 1912, Year IX, No. 3054, p. 1.

[181] See the newspaper *Gazeta Ilustrată*, June 15, 1913, Year II, No. 27, pp. 9–10, the newspaper *Conservatorul*, June 4, 1913, Year XIII, No. 119, p. 3, and the newspaper *Dimineața*, June 2, 1913, Year X, No. 3320, p. 1.

[182] See the newspaper *Universul*, June 3, 1913.

[183] *Universul*, 1935, 11B-1659414755, p. 8.

The speech of the Minister of Cadastral Affairs, Essad Effendi, the Sultan's envoy, was the following:

> "Your Majesty, the assignment given to me by His Majesty the Sultan to represent Him at this solemnity is a great honor for me; Your Majesty's high goodwill in presiding over the inauguration of this mosque constitutes, moreover, a spiritual consolation both for my August Sovereign and for the Muslim population everywhere, for whereas until today in all the regions inhabited by Turks mosques are being demolished, here, in Your Majesty's country, new and beautiful houses of prayer are being built. The greatest conqueror of his time can only be he who is able to win the hearts of his subjects. Your Majesty is the conqueror of the hearts of Your people, and for this reason the Turks of Dobrogea feel fortunate that they can live under Your Majesty's aegis. My Lord, I am the spokesman of Islam, and, in its name, I lay at Your Majesty's feet its homage of respect and wish you many long and happy years, together with the entire Dynasty"[184].

His Excellency, Seffa Bey, continued:

> "Your Majesties have today given new proof of the affection you bear toward the Muslim population of Dobrogea. His Majesty the Sultan and my government are pleased with the honor you do them by attending the inauguration of the mosque"[185].

> "His Majesty the King, in reply, asks His Excellency Mahmud Essad Effendi, Minister of Cadastral Affairs, upon going to Constantinople, to convey to His Majesty the Sultan the friendship He bears toward Him, assuring Him at the same time of the sympathy He has for the Muslim nation. He wishes prosperity to the Turkish Empire in the future, wishing that it may become what it once was"[186].

The Mufti of the city of Constanța, Afuz Kemal Effendi, expressed his thanks for the beautiful words spoken by the King[187].

King Carol I wished to specify, at the end, that the personnel involved in maintaining the Mosque was to be financed by the Romanian state.

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[184] „Sire, însărcinarea ce mi-a dat-o M. S. Sultanul de a-L reprezenta la această solemnitate este o mare cinste pentru mine, înalta bunăvoință a M. Voastre de a prezida inaugurarea acestei moschei, constituie, de altfel, o alinare sufletească atât penru Augustul meu Suveran cât și pentru populația musulmană de pretutindeni, căci de unde până astăzi în toate părțile locuite de turci se dărâmă moscheele, aici, în țara M. Voastre, se ridică noi și frumoase localuri de rugăciune. Cel mai mare cuceritor al timpului nu poate fi decât acela ce poate câștiga inimile supușilor săi. M. Voastră sunteți cuceritorii inimilor poporului Vostru și de aceea turcii din Dobrogea se simt fericiți că pot trăi sub egida M. Voastre. Sire, sunt interpretul Islamismului și, în numele lui, depun la picioarele M. Voastre omagiile sale de respect și vă urez să trăiți ani mulți și fericiți, cu întreaga Dinastie.", The speech is taken from the newspaper *Conservatorul*, June 4, 1913, Year XIII, No. 119, p. 3.

[185] „Majestățile Voastre au dat azi o nouă dovadă de afecțiunea ce o poartă elementului musulman din Dobrogea. M. Sa Sultanul și guvernul meu se simt satisfăcuți de onoarea ce le faceți asistând la inaugurarea moscheii", in *Ibidem*.

[186] „M. S. Regele răspunzând roagă pe Exc. Sa Mahmud Eșad Effendi, ministru Cadastrelor ca, ducându-se la Constantinopol, să exprime M. S. Sultanul amiciția ce-i poartă, asigurându-l totodată și de simpatia ce are pentru națiunea musulmană. Urează prosperitate imperiului turcesc în viitor, dorindu-i să devie ceea cea fost odinioară", in *Ibidem*.

[187] *Ibidem*.

Subsequently, on June 2, King Carol I made another visit to the Mosque, in order to inquire once again about what still remained to be done for the completion of the Mosque. In the evening, he organised a banquet in honor of the Turkish delegation. With this occasion, the Turkish delegation presented Mayor M. Solacolu with the Order of Osmanieh in the rank of Officer, and engineer Niculcea and architect Victor Stephănescu with the Order of the Medjidie in the rank of Commander[188].

Seven days later, in the newspaper *Românul* of Arad[189], the message of Sultan Mehmed V addressed to King Carol I was published:

> "I thank Your Majesty for having wished to personally inaugurate the mosque which Your Majesty has erected in Constanța. It is a new proof of the great goodwill which Your Majesty has never ceased to show toward your faithful Ottoman subjects. From the bottom of my heart, I offer sincere wishes of happiness and prosperity for the Romanian Muslims and for the entire Romanian nation, under the august reign of Your Majesty, which I wish to be of very long duration. I also present to Her Majesty the Queen an expression of the wishes for happiness which I extend to her. – Mehmed V"[190].

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[188] See the newspaper *Dimineața*, June 4, 1913, Year X, No. 3322, p. 2.

[189] Year III, No. 123, June 7/20, 1913, p. 7.

[190] „Mulțămesc M. Voastre de a fi ținut să inaugureze în persoană moscheea pe care M. Voastră a ridicat-o la Constanța. E o nouă dovadă de multă bunăvoință pe care Al. Voastră nu a încetat să o arate față de credincioșii săi supuși otomani. Fac din toată inima urări sincere de fericire și prosperitate pentru musulmanii români și pentru întreaga națiune română, sub augusta domnie a M. Voastre, care doresc să fie de foarte lungă durată. Prezint de asemenea M. Sale Reginei expresiunea urărilor de fericire pe care i le fac. – Mehmed V", in the newspaper *Românul*, June 7/20, 1913, Year III, No. 123.

FROM THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF "SAINT HIERARCH NICHOLAS" IN COSTICENI, FORMER HOTIN COUNTY

Sergiu Barbuța[191]

ABSTRACT

This article reconstructs the history of the church dedicated to "St. Hierarch Nicholas" in the locality of Costiceni, former Hotin County (now in the Cernăuți region, Ukraine), the native village of the Bessarabian poet Ion Vatamanu. The study begins with the earliest documentary attestations of the holy place of worship, dating from 1770, and continues to the present day. Based on parish registers, diocesan bulletins, archival documents, and oral testimonies of local residents, it presents the succession of priests who served in Costiceni beginning at the end of the 16th century, the process by which the church was endowed with land between 1840 and 1923, as well as the construction, between 1858 and 1879, of the present stone church in place of the wooden one, which had been affected by the passage of time and the floods of the Prut River. A separate chapter is devoted to the policy of Russification of the Bessarabian clergy after 1871, the 1911 visit of the Russian bishop Serafim Ciceagov, and the circumstances that led to the controversial removal of the parish priest. The consequences of the two world wars for the community, the effects of the Union of Bessarabia with Romania in 1918, and the purchase of new church bells from Bucharest in 1924 are also analyzed. The final part of the study describes the situation of the Costiceni parish in the postwar years, in the context of Sovietization, collectivization, and religious persecution. Through the information brought together, the article places the history of the religious community of Costiceni within the context of the transformations that took place in northern Bessarabia over the last two and a half centuries.

Keywords: church history, parish clergy, Costiceni, Hotin district, Bessarabia.

1. INTRODUCTION

The village of Costiceni, first documented on February 17, 1581, is situated on the bank of the Prut River, in the former Hotin district of Bessarabia, today included in the Cernăuți region of Ukraine. The Church dedicated to "Saint Hierarch Nicholas" represents the principal center of the community's religious and spiritual life. This article aims to reconstruct the history of this holy place of worship on the basis of parish and diocesan registers, documents from the State Archives in Cernăuți, Bessarabian and Bukovinian diocesan bulletins, as well as testimonies

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collected from local residents, tracing both the succession of the priests who served here and the evolution of the parish property and the church building. At the same time, the work captures the way in which the religious life of the community was influenced by the political and administrative changes through which the region passed, from the Moldavian period and the domination of the Tsarist Empire to the Romanian administration and the Soviet regime.

2. THE MOLDAVIAN WOODEN CHURCH AND THE FIRST DOCUMENTARY ATTESTATIONS (1770–1817)

The first documents referring to the Church in Costiceni date from 1770. At that time, not far from the Prut River, there was a wooden church in the village. According to the parish register, the holy place of worship dates from 1770, is dedicated to "St. Hierarch Nicholas", is built of wood, and is sufficiently provided with holy vessels and the other church objects[192].

According to the 1817 cartography of Bessarabia, the village of Costiceni had 3 priests, 2 church teachers, 1 sexton, and 1 minor nobleman. The lower class comprised 181 households, including 20 widows, 37 bachelors, and 8 tax-exempt dependants. Part of the estate was held by the tax official Tudorache Ciure from Moldavia beyond the Prut and by the Holban boyar family; another part, including the hamlet of Pol-Vancicăuții, belonged to the freeholding peasants. Half of the estate of the hamlet of Dumeni was held by the same Tudorache Ciure, and the other half by the official Nicolae Balș. The village of Costiceni had 9 mills on the Prut River[193].

The archive of the old wooden church was rich: in 1809 income and expenditure registers were introduced there, in 1808 registers for births and baptisms, from 1813 records of confession and communion were kept, and from 1835 marriage registers were introduced[194]. This archive has been preserved in its entirety to the present day and is the only one of its kind in the former Noua Suliță district; it requires adequate protection so that it does not lose its integrity.

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[192] Ведомость о Свято-Николаевской церкви 2-го округа Хотинского уезда села Костычаны за 1897 г.: „датируется 1770 годом, во имя Св. Николая Чудотворца, деревянная, утварью достаточна" [Record of St. Nicholas Church in the 2nd District of the Khotyn County, in the village of Kostychany, for the year 1897: "Dated 1770, dedicated to St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, wooden, with sufficient church furnishings"].

[193] Роспись землевладения и сословного строя населения Бессарабии по данным переписи 1817 года/I.N. Halippa, (ed.), in Труды Бессарабской Губернской Учёной Архивной Комиссии, t. 3, Chișinău, 1907, p. 38 [I.N. Halippa (ed.), "A Survey of Land Ownership and the Social Structure of the Population of Bessarabia Based on the 1817 Census", in *Proceedings of the Bessarabian Provincial Scientific Archival Commission*, Vol. 3, Chișinău, 1907, p. 38].

[194] Sergiu Barbuța, *Istoria bisericii Costiceni [The History of the Costiceni Church]*, Drobeta-Turnu Severin, Dandes Editory, 2019, p. 10.

3. THE FIRST PRIESTS (END OF THE 16th CENTURY – 18th CENTURY)

It is not known exactly who the first priest of the village of Costiceni was. We can only suppose that, at the end of the 16th century – beginning of the 17th century, Father Iremia served at the church altar, the father of the landowner Marica and of her brothers Tanas, Vasile, Gavriil and sister Irina (Catrina)[195]. When they sold their shares of land in Costiceni, priest Iremia may have transferred to the village of Bilăuți, in the same district. The priest may have been replaced by priest Miron, who purchased from Toderașcu Jora part of the village of Costiceni in 1673[196].

It is known with certainty that the first documented priest in the village of Costiceni was priest Ion. He appears in the 1774 Fiscal Census of Moldavia, organized by the commander of the Russian occupation troops, Piotr A. Rumeanțev[197].

Subsequently, parish documents attest Constantin Valcănescu, born in 1749 and married to Ioana Valcănescu (b. 1764). He was followed by priest Gheorghe Marcincu, son of Ion, born in 1769, who had two children, Ion (b. 1803) and Vasile (b. 1805). The children of these two priests, Petrea Volcănescu and Ion Marcincu, also served for many years as deacons at the church in Costiceni.

4. THE PRIESTS OF THE EARLY AND MID-19TH CENTURY

The next priest was Gheorghe Hasanescu, son of Ion, born in 1779. Ordained by Bishop Parfenie on May 22, 1804, and sent to Costiceni, he was married to Catrina, daughter of Constantin (b. 1775), and had three children: Ștefan (b. 1819), Nicolae (b. 1821), and Elisei (b. 1827). He served in Costiceni until 1840[198].

For 20 years the parish was shepherded by priest Elisei Ignatovici, son of Alexandru, born in 1810 and transferred to Costiceni on March 15, 1841. He was married to Maria Ignatovici (b. 1817) and had seven children. During his ministry in Costiceni, the site was blessed and construction of the present stone church began.

Beginning on June , 1862, the parish priest was Filip Ghinsca, son of Vasile (a Russified form of the Romanian name Gânsca), the son of a priest, without

[195] Gheorghe Ghibănescu, *Surete și izvoade (Documente slavo-române între 1412–1722) [Surete and Sources (Slavic-Romanian Documents from 1412–1722)]*, Vol. 22, Iași, Viața Românească, 1929, pp. 18-19.

[196] Sergiu Bacalov, *Hotinul – veche stăpânire românească/Boierimea Țării Moldovei la mijlocul secolului al XVII-lea – începutul secolului al XVIII-lea [Hotin – an ancient Romanian domain/The Nobility of Moldavia in the Mid-17th Century – Early 18th Century]*, Chișinău, 2012, p. 170.

[197] ***, *Moldova în epoca feudalismului [Moldova in the Feudal Era]*, Vol. 7, Part 1: Recensămintele populației Moldovei din anii 1772, 1773, 1774 [The Population Censuses of Moldova in 1772, 1773, and 1774], edited by P.V. Sovetov, Chișinău, Știința Publishing House, 1975, p. 143.

[198] Sergiu Barbuța, *op. cit.*, 2019, p. 7.

seminary studies, born in 1826. He served in Costiceni until 1867. On November 30, 1867, Ștefan Pascalov, son of Gheorghe (b. 1843), was appointed priest[199]. He served until October 21, 1871, when he was transferred to Stălinești, Hotin district, being replaced on February 27, 1872, by priest Ștefan Caisân from Pănășești, Chișinău district[200].

Because the contraction process of the new place of worship was in full swing, a more experienced priest was needed than the newly ordained Caisân. On June 10, 1872, the diocesan authorities decided to reinstate Ștefan Pascalov as parish priest in Costiceni, sending Caisân to Stălinești[201].

5. THE PARISH TRUSTEESHIP AND THE POLICY OF RUSSIFICATION

In the middle of the 19th century, church-parish trusteeships began to be established in the Russian Empire. On August 2, 1864, Emperor Alexander II approved the "Regulations concerning the Parish Council of Trustees of Orthodox Churches". These non-governmental organizations were established to care for the arrangement and welfare of the parish church and parish in economic terms, as well as to establish primary education for children and charity within the parish.

Priest Ștefan Pascalov decided to take advantage of the opportunities that opened up for accelerating the construction of the church if a board of trustees were established.

At a village meeting in December 1872, the decision was made to establish a church-parish trusteeship, and the chairman and members of the council were elected. The council included priest Ștefan Pascalov, churchwarden Petru Nicorici, volost mayor Todor Flofaș, and parishioners Grigore Sucevan, Constantin Rața, Ion Afanas, Ion Haisan, Gheorghe Dogolici, Gheorghe Pascari, Nicolae Pascari, and Toadere Rotari. Ion Precup, mayor of the village of Dumeni, was elected chairman[202].

Ștefan Pascalov sent the decision of the meeting to the diocesan authorities for approval. On December 24, 1872, the bishop issued the following resolution: "The chairman and members of the trusteeship are approved".

[199] Кишиневские епархиальные новости, № 12, 15 decembrie 1867, p. 137 [Church News of the Diocese of Chișinău, No. 12, December 15, 1867, p. 137].

[200] Кишиневские епархиальные новости, № 22, 15/30 noiembrie 1871, p. 525; № 5, 1/15 martie 1872, p. 109 [Chișinău Diocesan News, No. 22, November 15/30, 1871, p. 525; No. 5, March 1/15, 1872, p. 109].

[201] Кишиневские епархиальные новости, № 16, 15/31 august 1872, p. 363 [Church News of the Diocese of Chișinău, No. 16, August 15/31, 1872, p. 363].

[202] Кишиневские епархиальные новости, № 1, 1/15 ianuarie 1873, pp. 3–4: „Председатель и члены попечительства утверждаются" ["Chișinău Diocesan News, No. 1, January 1, 1873, pp. 3–4: "The chairman and members of the board of trustees are confirmed"].

On February 9, 1873, the supreme church authorities of the Russian Empire decided to introduce new positions for parishes. This decision was approved by the emperor on April 9, 1873. According to the list of urban and rural parishes, churches, and parishes of the Diocese of Chișinău, the Church of St. Hierarch Nicholas in Costiceni is defined as the principal church to which the Church of St. Demetrius in the village of Vancicăuți is assigned. The new staffing provided for: rector priest – one, assistant rector – one, cantors – two. The main requirements for the rector priest were reduced to seminary education, knowledge of the Russian language, and an age below retirement[203].

After the death of Metropolitan Bănulescu-Bodoni (d. 1821), the Diocese of Chișinău and Hotin was led only by Russian hierarchs. On June 23, 1871, Pavel Lebedev was elected Bishop of Chișinău and Hotin (raised to the rank of archbishop in 1879). During his archpastoral ministry, all clergy of the Diocese of Chișinău and Hotin, including those in the villages, were required to serve only in the Russian language. Liturgical books written in Romanian in Cyrillic script were removed from circulation. Bessarabian priests began to wear vestments cut in the specifically Russian style and pectoral crosses. In the second half of the 19th century, more and more Bessarabian priests Slavicized their names and, as a rule, married Russian and Ukrainian women.

From September 5, 1874, the parish priest in Costiceni was Nicolae Litinschi, son of Avram (b. 1826), the son of a priest and a graduate of the Theological Seminary in Chișinău. From 1875 he also taught religion at the school in Costiceni, and from November 9, 1887, at the school in Vancicăuți as well. Litinschi was tasked with completing the construction and putting the new church into use.

6. THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW STONE CHURCH (1958–1879)

Because it was located near Prut, the old wooden church was frequently flooded and severely damaged. Rain came into the church through the perforated roof, and the water was carried out in buckets. It could no longer be renovated. In 1858, it was decided to build a stone church. Initially, the site chosen for this purpose was the land on which the local secondary school was built during the Soviet period. A few years later this option was abandoned because the land was frequently flooded after rain, turning into a pool of water.

In 1875 it was exchanged for higher ground belonging to the peasant Petrea Nicorici (a total of 0.41 hectares). He was compensated for this loss with an equivalent amount of land from the church's holdings.

[203] Кишиневские епархиальные ведомости, № 14, 15/31 iulie 1873, p. 285 [Chișinău Diocesan Gazette, No. 14, July 15/31, 1873, p. 285].

The new place of worship was located approximately 300 meters from the old wooden structure. The entire village took part in the construction work. The building stones were brought by ox carts from the quarry of the village of Belăuți (a village now located in the former Hotin district). The road was long. It was necessary to pass through the fields of the Costiceni, Șerbiniți, Forosna, and Sânger estates. Thus, the villagers set out at dawn and returned home late in the evening. The work was completed in 1879. The consecration of the place of worship took place on May 22, on the feast of the Translation of the Relics of St. Hierarch Nicholas from the city of Myra in Lycia to the city of Bari (Old Style). It was a great celebration in the village: the roads were full of people coming from all the surrounding villages to share with the people of Costiceni the joy of this great spiritual event.

The construction of the new church would not have been possible without the involvement of the faithful and philanthropists who, under the guidance of the priests, contributed voluntarily, with complete dedication and out of love for God, to the construction work. For their active work in the construction of the church, in July 1880 the Holy Synod awarded certificates of honor and diplomas of merit to the founders, helpers, and benefactors of the parish: priest Nicolae Litinschi, parishioners Ion Precup, Constantin Rață, Ion Rață, Vasile Captari, Gheorghe Nicorici, Gavril Vasilaș, and landowners Victor Sonsedschi and Anna Jihovski[204].

A church document from 1890 confirms that the church in Costiceni was built in 1879. The building is made of stone and covered with sheet metal. The bell tower rises above the narthex. In the church there is an altar dedicated to Saint Hierarch Nicholas[205].

In 1887, according to data from the agricultural records of Hotin district, the inhabitants of the three villages – Costiceni, Pol-Vancicăuți, and Dumnei – contributed to the repair of the church, each community using different methods to raise the necessary funds. The villagers of Pol-Vancicăuți raised the sum of 183 rubles. The communities of Costiceni and Dumeni chose a different method of financing. The document specifies that they sold corn from the communal fund, namely from the reserve grain store. In total, the contribution amounted to 250 rubles[206].

[204] Кишиневские епархиальные ведомости, № 20, 15/31 octombrie 1880, p. 402 [Chișinău Diocesan Gazette, No. 20, October 15/31, 1880, p. 402].

[205] Ведомость о Свято-Николаевской церкви (...) за 1897 г.: „построена в 1879 году. Здание каменное, крыта железом. Колокольня возвышается над притвором. В церкви один престол во имя Св.Николая Чудотворца" [Record of St. Nicholas Church (...) for 1897: "Built in 1879. The building is made of stone and has an iron roof. The bell tower rises above the narthex. The church has a single altar dedicated to St. Nicholas the Wonderworker"].

[206] К.Н. Ермолинский, Обзор Хотинского уезда в сельскохозяйственном отношении за 1887 год, Moscova, 1888, p. 188: „Продавали кукурузу изъ общественной копилцы (т. е., изъ запаснаго хлѣбн. магазина)" [K.N. Yermolinsky, *An Overview of the Khotyn District in Terms of Agriculture for the Year 1887*, Moscow, 1888, p. 188: "Corn was sold from the public granary (i.e., from the grain reserve store)"].

7. THE PRIESTS OF THE LATE 19th CENTURY AND THE REPAIRS TO THE CHURCH

Unlike the old wooden church, built in the traditional Moldavian style, the new stone church was built according to the model of Russian churches, like all the other places of worship erected after the occupation of Bessarabia by the Tsarist Empire - and there were many of them: from 42 churches[207] in 1812, the number reached 818 in 1903, the vast majority in rural areas, in the Russian Neoclassical style, according to standard designs with minor modifications from one monument to another, the domes taking the form of onion bulbs. The church in Costiceni was also built according to such a model. The architecture is eclectic, with the Classical style combined with Russian elements: the plan consists of the square altar apse and the rectangular nave, dominated by a pyramidal roof crowned with an onion-shaped dome. A two-level bell tower was attached to the church, with a prismatic bell chamber and large arched openings.

In the activity report of the Costiceni Parish for the year 1882, the locality had 217 households, with 868 men and 857 women.

On January 23, 1890, after 10 years of priesthood, Nicolae Litinschi was transferred to the village of Hâjdieni[208], Bălți district (now Glodeni district, Republic of Moldova), and priest Spiridon Teleiman was appointed in his place, followed, from April 14, 1890, by priest Vasile Pranițchi, son of Domentie. Vasile Pranițchi was born on March 22, 1839, in Orhei district and graduated from the Theological Seminary in Chișinău[209]. From 1900 he began teaching religion at the school in Costiceni. In 1895, Gavril Roșa was church trustee of the Costiceni parish.

Although almost 30 years had passed since the consecration of the church, the place of worship had still not been completely finished and supplied with everything necessary. The rehabilitation and furnishing of the church began in 1906. It is assumed that, following disagreements between priest Vasile Pranițchi and the villagers, the fitting-out work was taken over by a doctor from the zemstvo hospital in Costiceni. Subsequently, this disagreement provoked the anger of the hierarch Serafim Ciceagov, Bishop of Chișinău and Hotin.

Among the founders of the church in Costiceni was the householder Constantin Rață, son of Nicolae (1837–1915). A forester by profession, Constantin Rață donated 200 rubles toward the completion of the fitting-out and repair work on the place of worship. The first donation was made in 1906, and the second in 1912. According to the

[207] И.Н. Халиппа, Сведения о состоянии церквей Бессарабии в 1812-13 гг., in Труды Бессарабской губернской ученой архивной комиссии, t. 3, Chișinău, 1907, p. 268 [I.N. Khalippa, "Information on the Condition of Churches in Bessarabia in 1812-13", in *Proceedings of the Bessarabian Provincial Scientific Archival Commission*, Vol. 3, Chișinău, 1907, p. 268].

[208] Кишиневские епархиальные ведомости, № 3, 1 februarie 1890, p. 101 [Chișinău Diocesan Gazette, No. 3, February 1, 1890, p. 101].

[209] Кишиневские епархиальные ведомости, № 10, 15 mai 1890, p. 433 [Chișinău Diocesan Gazette, No. 10, May 15, 1890, p. 433].

diocesan bulletin, priest Vasile Pranițchi contributed 384 rubles for the repair of the church, Ion Precup 100 rubles, and the other parishioners 224 rubles[210]. For his merits, Constantin Rață was deemed worthy to be buried in the churchyard, a fact confirmed by Order No. 4046 of September 19, 1912, of the Ecclesiastical Consistory of Chișinău[211]. On June 3, 2016, on the occasion of the 101st anniversary of his passing into eternity, a service for the consecration of the new funerary monument was officiated, the monument having been erected at the initiative of villagers Nicolae Caba and Andrei Colac. It should be noted that also buried on the church grounds are priest Nicolae, son of Vasile Pisica, the director of the zemstvo school Aleksandr Nikolaevici Koroliov, and the yesaul of the Don Cossack infantry battery, Aleksandr Dmitrievici Gherman, probably deceased on the front of the First World War.

8. THE VISIT OF BISHOP SERAFIM CICEAGOV AND THE REMOVAL OF PRIEST PRANIȚCHI

On the eve of the centenary of the annexation of Bessarabia to the Tsarist Empire, Serafim Ciceagov, one of the last Russian hierarchs of Bessarabia, undertook a pastoral visit to Hotin district, including the Costiceni parish. According to his spokesman, Archpriest Vasilie Guma, the hierarch was astonished by the condition of the parish and expressed his dissatisfaction with the behavior of the parishioners:

> "For 30 years no hierarch has visited the village of Costiceni. Therefore, the church is very neglected: the plaster has come off and fallen from the building, the crosses have bent; inside, the condition is no better, everything has blackened, even the chalice. The parish consists of 300 families. Priest Vasile Pranițchi reported to the Bishop that the parishioners had recently repaired the church, but the work had not been coordinated by him, but by a doctor who had removed him. Under these circumstances, the Bishop warned the inhabitants not to forget their own duties toward the church and the priest"[212].

At the same time, Bishop Ciceagov visited the zemstvo school, as well as the village cemetery.

> "At the zemstvo school, the Bishop found 40 boys, barefoot, dressed only in a white shirt and a red sash; the pupils do not sufficiently know the Law of God. Seeing that the cemetery in the center of the village was completely unfenced, the Bishop asked

[210] Кишиневские епархиальные ведомости, № 10, 11 martie 1907, pp. 61–62 [Chișinău Diocesan Gazette, No. 10, March 11, 1907, pp. 61–62].

[211] Кишиневские епархиальные ведомости, № 34–35, 26 august/2 septembrie 1912, p. 953 [Chișinău Diocesan Gazette, No. 34–35, August 26/September 2, 1912, p. 953].

[212] „De 30 de ani niciun ierarh nu a vizitat satul Costiceni. Prin urmare biserica este foarte neglijată: tencuiala de pe clădire s-a desprins și a căzut, crucile s-au încovoiat; nici în interior starea nu este mai bună, totul s-a înnegrit, chiar și potirul. Parohia este compusă din 300 de familii. Preotul Vasile Pranițchi a raportat vlădicii că enoriașii au reparat recent biserica, însă lucrările nu au fost coordonate de el, ci de un medic care l-a înlăturat. În aceste condiții vlădica i-a avertizat pe locuitori să nu uite de propriile datorii față de biserică și preot", in Кишиневские епархиальные ведомости, № 17–18, 29 aprilie/6 mai 1912, p. 458 [Chișinău Diocesan Gazette, No. 17-18, April 29/May 6, 1912, p. 458].

> the head of the zemstvo and the head of the volost, A. Moșan, to influence the local residents so that they would urgently fence the cemetery, or at least dig a ditch all around it, so that the dead would be buried in a certain order (...)"[213].

At the end of the visit, the hierarch decided, without much hesitation, to remove the priest and the church cantor from service at the holy altar. According to the Official Bulletin of the Diocese of Chișinău, priest Vasile Pranițchi, aged 72, was placed outside the staff establishment on August 20, 1911.

In 1912, the Russian historian, publicist, and ethnographer Nikolai Durnovo published a series of articles in which he criticized the Tsarist regime in Bessarabia and the activity of Metropolitan Serafim Ciceagov, accusing him of opportunism, greed for money, and the intention to Russify the Bessarabian Romanians through the institution of the church, showing that the metropolitan behaved brutally toward the native clergy because

> "the most distinguished spiritual and cultural forces are driven out of Bessarabia by him"[214],

citing as an example the case of priest Vasile Pranițchi of the Costiceni parish, who, according to testimonies, had been exiled after 50 years of faithful service to the Russian Orthodox Church. Subsequently, an article appeared in the official diocesan bulletin in which Serafim Ciceagov rejected all the accusations, stating that Vasile Pranițchi had retired from the priesthood because of his age and health problems[215].

9. THE INTERVENTION OF GENERAL MIHAIL SCHINA AND THE NEW BELLS PURCHASED IN BUCHAREST

On September 11, 1911, after completing his theological studies, Eusebie Popovici was ordained priest of the parish. In 1915 he was promoted, and on March 16, 1915, he was replaced by priest Mihail Poleanschi, son of Andrei (b. 1881), from the church in Cugurlui, Bender (Tighina) district[216]. On October 28, 1915, church cantor Nicolae Dimitriu was placed outside the staff establishment. One year later,

[213] „La școala de zemstvă Vlădica a găsit 40 băieți, desculți, îmbrăcați doar într-o cămașă albă și cingătoare de culoare roșie; elevii nu stăpânesc suficient legea Domnului. Văzând că cimitirul din centrul satului este complet neîngrădit, Vlădica l-a rugat pe mai marele zemstvei și pe șeful de voloste, A. Moșan, să-i influențeze pe localnici ca aceștia de urgență să îngrădească cimitirul, sau cel puțin să se sape un șanț de jur împrejur, ca cei morți să fie înmormântați într-o anumită ordine (...)", in Кишиневские епархиальные ведомости, № 17–18, 29 aprilie/6 mai 1912, p. 458 [Chișinău Diocesan Gazette, No. 17–18, April 29/May 6, 1912, p. 458].

[214] „cele mai alese forțe spirituale și culturale sunt izgonite de el din Basarabia", in Кишиневские епархиальные ведомости, № 24–25, 17–24 iunie 1912, p. 8 [Chișinău Diocesan Gazette, No. 24–25, June 17–24, 1912, p. 8].

[215] Кишиневские епархиальные ведомости, № 24–25, 17-24 iunie 1912, p. 8 [Chișinău Diocesan Gazette, No. 24–25, June 17–24, 1912, p. 8].

[216] Кишиневские епархиальные ведомости, № 13–14, 29 martie/5 aprilie 1915, p. 209 [Chișinău Diocesan Gazette, No. 13–14, March 29/April 5, 1915, p. 209].

on August 4, 1916, the position was taken over by Iacob Gherbanovschi (b. 1892), a native of the village of Vasieni, Orhei district, who would later become a priest.

In the cemetery of Costiceni is the grave of Porfirea Gherbanovschi (b. 1865), the mother of Iacob Gherbanovschi. The woman passed into eternity on October 11, 1929, at the age of 64. The Romanian-language inscription engraved on the tombstone was covered with lime during the Soviet period, as was the inscription on the monument to the Bessarabian soldiers, erected in 1928 in the churchyard in Vancicăuți[217].

With the outbreak of the First World War, hundreds of men from the former Hotin County, including from Costiceni, were mobilized into the Tsarist army. The Russian 8th Army was concentrated on the territory of the district, and its maintenance fell largely on the shoulders of the surrounding peasants and priests. During the war years, the church's brass bells were requisitioned and melted down for ammunition.

After the world conflagration, with the collapse of the three great empires – Austro-Hungarian, Russian, and Ottoman –, Bessarabia, including Hotin district, united with Romania on March 27, 1918. A Romanian armed force of 4 divisions crossed the Prut. The 1st Cavalry Division, led by General Mihail Schina, intervened in northern Bessarabia. According to the general's notes, for the purpose of protecting and researching objects of historical value, the division's officers collected 73 documents and objects from Hotin district, which were later sent to the Romanian Academy in Bucharest. Among them were three documents from the church in Costiceni: a "Strastnic" printed in 1773, a register of church ornaments from 1809, and a "Vedemus" mentioning the laying of the church foundation in 1858[218].

On November 30, 1917, Nicolae Pisica, son of Vasile, was appointed priest. From December 3, 1917 he taught religion at the school in Costiceni, and from 1918 also at the schools in Pol-Vancicăuți and Dumeni. Born on October 8, 1865, into the family of church teacher Vasile Pisica from the village of Bardar (today Ialoveni district, Republic of Moldova), he had spent several years at Hârbovăț Monastery before coming to Costiceni. According to the 1922 Diocesan Yearbook, the church teacher was the same Iacob Gherbanovschi, aged 30, and the parish consisted of 560 families.

In a 1924 letter preserved in the church archive, priest Nicolae Pisica mentions the purchase from the "Nicolae Spireanu" Factory in Bucharest of five new bells, valued at 68,600 lei. On April 8, 1924, the objects arrived at Mămăliga Railway Station, from where they were transported to Costiceni by the ox cart of peasant Ion Caba. The large bell weighed 420 kilograms, the second 166, the third 65, the fourth 35, and the fifth 28 kilograms. Around the 1940s, the large bell cracked while sounding the alarm for a fire in the locality.

[217] Sergiu Barbuța, „Memoria cvasiumană (Amintiri din monumente)" ["Quasi-Human Memory (Memories from Monuments)"], in *Literatura și Arta [Literature and Art]*, Chișinău, 2023, No. 22–23 (June 8), p. 6.

[218] Mihail C. Schina, *Pe marginea Unirei – Basarabia (ianuarie 1918 – iunie 1919) [On the Union – Bessarabia (January 1918-June 1919)]*, 1938, p. 68.

In the summer of 1924, priest Nicolae Pisica was the victim of an armed robbery committed by a band of thieves roaming Hotin district. According to the newspaper "Universul", five-armed bandits entered the parish priest's house, taking 5,100 lei and household items worth 35,000 lei[219].

Respected and loved by the villagers, priest Nicolae Pisica was, at the community's request, buried in the churchyard after he passed into eternity on July 14, 1929[220]. After 90 years, on July 14, 2019, his grave was restored through the care of the "Valea Prutului" Cultural Society and the "Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt" Association of Costiceni, and a funerary plaque financed by donations from villagers and descendants was installed. Faithful from the priest's native village, Bardar, including distant relatives, attended the consecration service.

On September 1, 1929, Petrea Zama was appointed priest, transferred from the Berestea parish, where he had been ordained on May 1, 1927[221]. The two priests were relatives: only 9 days after the death of Father Nicolae Pisica, during the visit to Berestea of Bishop Visarion Puiu of Hotin, on July 24, 1929, it is recorded that

> "parish priest Petre Zama is away from the parish in Costiceni on the occasion of a memorial service for a relative"[222],

exactly 9 days after the death of priest Nicolae Pisica. A document from 1931 shows that, through the efforts of priest Petre Zama, church trustee Ion Savca, and the parish committee, the church was provided with two large icons – of the Mother of God and St. Mary Magdalene – and with vestments for the priest, worth 8,000 lei[223].

10. THE MISSIONARY CONFERENCE OF 1937. THE REFUGE OF PRIEST ZAMA

In November 1937, the faithful of the district attended a series of Orthodox missionary conferences organized by the Deanery of Hotin County. On November 8, 1937, priest Vasile Mihnevici, missionary of Circle II of Hotin County, held a conference at the Costiceni Parish, in the primary school (today the town hall building), with both rooms filled to capacity. The diocesan bulletin reports that, after the prayer "O Heavenly King", Mihnevici spoke about the correction of the church calendar, while Archpriest Dimitrie Crocos presented the film "The King of Kings". The parish choir, conducted by Iacob Gherbanovschi, sang religious hymns, and after the screening the missionary priest spoke about the Passion of the Savior and the danger of sects; sheets of religious literature were distributed to the people[224].

[219] *Universul*, No. 200, September 4, 1924, p. 2.
[220] Diocese of Hotin, Official Diocesan Bulletin, No. 15–16, 1929.
[221] Diocese of Hotin, Official Diocesan Bulletin, No. 17–18, 1929.
[222] „preotul paroh Petre Zama este plecat din parohie la Costiceni cu ocazia unui parastas pentru o rudă a sa", in *Ibidem.*
[223] Diocese of Hotin, Official Diocesan Bulletin, No. 8, 1931.
[224] Diocese of Hotin, Official Diocesan Bulletin, No. 23, 1937.

Professor Deomid Savca, son of churchwarden Ion Savca, left the following testimony about priest Zama:

> "Priest Petre Zama did not wear a beard, wore glasses, and spoke in the Moldavian dialect. He had two children: Eugen and Tamara. He taught us religion class. After the prayer we turned toward the icon and made the sign of the cross. I spent my entire childhood at the church altar. At Christmas, my father accompanied him by cart, and my mother, Fevronia, baked prosphora and brought them to the church. This priest had many livestock and hectares of land, and his apiary numbered about 20 beehives. Before taking refuge in Romania, the priest left the bees to my father – if anyone had found out, all our property would have been confiscated"[225].

With the entry of Soviet forces into Bessarabia, priest Petre Zama took refuge with his family in Romania. According to some sources, he served between 1952 and 1967 at the church in the commune of Cocora, Ialomița County, later settling in Bucharest, from where he corresponded with residents of the village of Costiceni, mentioning frequent meetings with other Bessarabian refugees from Vancicăuți, Cerlena, Berestea, and Șendreni.

In May 1944, churchwarden Ion Savca was mobilized for work in the city of Krivoi Rog, and his duties fell upon his 11-year-old son Deomid.

11. THE CHURCH SITUATION AFTER 1944. SOVIET PERSECUTION

By the end of March 1944, more than 470 churches were functioning in the Soviet-controlled territory that was to become the Cernăuți region, in addition to synagogues and houses of prayer. After 1944, only the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches remained in operation, while the others were banned. According to the Cernăuți Regional State Archives, of the more than 470 churches only 384 remained – 366 Orthodox and 18 Roman Catholic –, but services were not held in all of them because of an acute shortage of priests[226].

On October 8, 1944, there were only 39 priests, 2 deacons, and 162 cantors in the entire region – the entire Orthodox clergy consisting of 192 persons. Where churches were open, services were often officiated by church teachers. To replenish

[225] „Preotul Petre Zama nu purta barbă, umbla cu ochelari și vorbea în graiul moldovenesc. Avea doi copii: Eugen și Tamara. Dumnealui ne preda ora de religie. După rugăciune ne întorceam cu fața spre icoană și făceam semnul crucii. Am petrecut întreaga copilărie la altarul bisericii. De Crăciun, taică-meu îl însoțea cu căruța, iar mama, Fevronia, cocea prescuri și le aducea la biserică. Acest preot avea multe dobitoace și hectare de pământ, iar prisaca lui număra circa 20 de stupi. Înainte de a se refugia în România, preotul i-a lăsat albinele tatălui meu - dacă ar fi aflat cineva, toată averea ne-ar fi fost confiscată.", Testimony of Professor Deomid Savca, son of churchwarden Ion Savca, quoted by Sergiu Barbuța, *op. cit.*, 2023, p. 50.

[226] Dumitru Covalciuc, „Situația bisericii și a clerului din actuala regiune Cernăuți în perioada anilor 1944–1952" ["The Situation of the Church and the Clergy in the Present-Day Cernăuți Region from 1944 to 1952"], in *Țara Fagilor* XXV, Cernăuți-Târgu-Mureș, 2016, p. 40.

the clergy, Teodosie Kaverninski, Bishop of Cernăuți and Bukovina, began inviting priests from the Volîn and Podolia regions[227].

Until the end of 1944, the church in Costiceni had no priest. Beginning in 1945, the new church authorities, led by Bishop Teodosie, entrusted the Costiceni parish to church teacher Ioan Chiriac of the Vancicăuți parish, who also served at the small church in the hamlet of Făgădău.

> "We took him to Costiceni by cart. We opened the church and rang the bells. Priest Chiriac walked home. This priest stood by the parishioners of Costiceni during the famine of 1946–1947"[228],

Deomid Savca recounts, testifying that the lifeless bodies of villagers who had died from famine, including those found by the roadside or in ditches, were brought and piled up in the churchyard, then transported and buried in dozens of mass graves in the village cemetery.

In the spring of 1947, the locality had a new priest, a Romanian about whom not much was known. He did not serve for long in Costiceni, disappearing toward the end of the year. People believed that he had crossed the Prut into Romania, because he had repeatedly been seen swimming in the river. Before his probable refuge, two students from Cernăuți had come to his home, wearing the caps of Romanian high-school pupils[229].

During the period 1948–1959, priest Pavel Saveliev, son of Constantin, called Savelea by the villagers, served at the church altar; he was married to Elena Saveliev and had three children. The faithful built the family a house on forked posts, roofed with reeds and consisting of three rooms – a dwelling preserved to this day, although in an advanced state of deterioration.

In the first postwar years, local activists of the Soviet authorities tried, with particular hatred, to destroy the Christian customs and traditions inherited from their forebears. Christians were hardly allowed to celebrate Christmas, the Baptism of the Lord, and the Resurrection of the Lord. With the establishment of the Costiceni Collective Agricultural Farm (September 1947), the persecution intensified. According to an archival document, the chairman of the collective farm announced to the General Assembly of collective farmers that the patronal feast would no longer take place on May 22, as the church had established, but on May 1, and later on May 9.

In July 1950, priest Pavel Saveliev informed Mihail Ivanovici Kasatkin, the commissioner for matters of the Russian Orthodox Church attached to the executive committee of the Cernăuți Regional Council, that the chairman of the collective farm in Costiceni was sending the peasants out to agricultural work even on Sundays. When the faithful reminded him that Sunday had been given by God as a day of rest,

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[227] *Ibidem.*

[228] „Îl aduceam la Costiceni cu căruța. Deschideam biserica și trăgeam clopotele. Preotul Chiriac pleca pe jos acasă. Acest preot a fost alături de enoriașii din Costiceni în perioada foametei din 1946-1947", in Sergiu Barbuța, *op. cit.*, 2023, p. 50.

[229] *Ibidem.*

the chairman replied: "There is no God, for He has gone away to advanced training courses!"[230].

The management of the collective farm later decided to turn the old village cemetery into the collective farm's apiary. The rotten wooden crosses were removed, and beehives were placed on the old graves. Because of his worsening health, priest Pavel Saveliev was forced to retire from his position. He died and was buried in the city of Luțk in the Volîn region.

12. THE PARISH FROM 1959 TO THE PRESENT

From 1959 to 1992, the mission of preaching the word of God to the parishioners of Costiceni was entrusted to priest Dimitrie Mândrescu, born on October 23, 1925, on the boundary between the villages of Mahala and Cotul Ostriței, localities situated approximately seven-eight kilometers from the city of Cernăuți.

After the fall of the communist regime, Father Dimitrie was among the pillars of national revival in the Cernăuți region: a founding member of the "Mihai Eminescu" Society for Romanian Culture, co-organizer of the first Celebration of the Romanian Language in Cernăuți, and participant in the First Congress of Romanians on June 7, 1992, during which the "National Development Program of the Moldavian Romanians of the Cernăuți Region" was unanimously approved.

From 1992 until August 2024, the church in Costiceni was shepherded by priest Aurel Pițu, son of Ioan, a native of the locality of Oprișeni, Hliboca district. In January 2019, Father Marcel Bivolaru was installed as concelebrating priest. From September 2024 to the present, the parish priest of the church has been priest Mihai Moisei, a native of Tărăsăuți, transferred from the Forosna parish[231]. Throughout all these years, the church underwent a series of major repairs and maintenance works. The fence and roof were rebuilt, the façade of the place of worship was renovated, and the inner courtyard was paved. The church floor was tiled, and a heating system was installed. Thanks to the faithful several roadside crosses and three chapels were erected and consecrated in the village. The inhabitants of the village have played and continue to play an important role in the financial support of the place of worship.

[230] Державний архів Чернівецької області. Ф. 995, оп. 1, спр. 4, арк. 121 [State Archives of the Chișinău Region. F. 995, op. 1, file 4, p. 121].

[231] Valea Prutului Editorial Team, „Slujba de pomenire a preoților și ctitorilor de la Biserica Sfântul Nicolae din Costiceni: 250 de ani de continuitate spiritual" ["Memorial service for the priests and founders of St Nicholas' Church in Costiceni: 250 years of spiritual continuity"], in *Valea Prutului*, October 9, 2024, Available at: https://costiceni.blogspot.com/2024/10/slujba-de-pomenire-preotilor-si.html, Accessed on August 13, 2026.

13. CONCLUSIONS

The history of the Church of "Saint Hierarch Nicholas" in Costiceni recounts, on a local scale, the same transformations experienced by all of Bessarabia over the last two and a half centuries. From a modest wooden church of the Moldavian period, through the period of Tsarist occupation and the construction of the present stone church, to the Union of 1918 with Romania. Then, the two world wars, the difficult years of persecution, and the hardships imposed by the Soviet regime. The parish archive, preserved to this day, continues the documentary succession of the priests, while the collective memory preserved by the parishioners constitutes a valuable testimony to the spiritual and community life of the village situated in the Prut valley.

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INTERWAR ROMANIAN THEOLOGY BETWEEN ANTICOMMUNISM AND NATIONALISM

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ABSTRACT

This study traces the historical roots of interwar Romanian theological anti-communism, beginning with a long-standing Russophobia, fueled by Tsarist expansion toward the straits and by disappointment over Russia's breach of promises regarding Romania's territorial integrity (especially after the Congress of Berlin in 1878). The turning point was World War I: the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 transformed Russia from an ally into a direct threat. The author details specific episodes, beginning with Russia's separate withdrawal under the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the march of Bolshevik-aligned troops through the streets of Iași, the Soviet ultimatum of January 1918, the arrest of Romanian diplomat Constantin Diamandy in Petrograd, and the repressive actions of Cristian Rakovski in Odesa against Romanian refugees. These events, along with the Romanian army's entry into Chișinău, are presented as the "birth of" Romanian anti-communism. The Great Union of 1918 (Chișinău, Cernăuți, Alba Iulia) consolidated this anti-communism as an element of national identity, further strengthened by the defeat of Béla Kun's Bolshevik regime in Hungary (1919). During the interwar period, this movement also took on an intellectual and religious dimension: the author lists key figures (Nichifor Crainic, Nae Ionescu, Mircea Eliade, Dumitru Stăniloae, and others) and publications (Gândirea, Criterion, Cuvântul) that linked Orthodox Christian spirituality with nationalism.

Keywords: anti-communism, interwar Orthodox intellectual elite, nationalism, theology, Russophobia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Relations between Romania and Russia have been marked over time by a series of events that have shaped Romanians' perceptions and attitudes toward their eastern neighbor. This complex dynamic – accompanied by growing resistance to the Russian tsars' advance toward the straits and warm seas, and later by anti-communist sentiments – has its roots deep in Romanian history, decisively influencing the course of events and the formation of national identity. The evolution of Romanian-Russian relations in the modern era has gone through various stages.

Thus, in the years following the introduction of the Organic Regulations, the efforts of the revolutionaries in the Romanian Principalities were directed against Turkish suzerainty, but above all, toward the removal of the Russian protectorate. In the pre-1848 period, dissatisfaction with Russian influence in the Romanian Principalities

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was particularly evident among the political and intellectual elites. The intensification of this early sentiment of opposition to Russia's imperialist policy was driven by negative experiences during and after the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878), particularly by the profound disappointment caused by the Congress of Berlin (June 13 – July 13, 1878), where Russia's promises regarding Romania's territorial integrity were violated. After 1878, the myth of the Tsarist Empire's "protective role" toward Christian Romanians was definitively shattered. Aversion to Russian policy began to spread beyond the elites, becoming a sentiment shared by the broader masses. After Tsar Alexander II (1855–1881) broke his promise to respect Romania's territorial integrity, there was a major shift in Romanians' perception of the Russians[233].

During World War I, Romania – a member of the Entente alongside Tsarist Russia – suffered a fatal blow from the latter as a result of the outbreak of the Bolshevik Revolution on October 25/November 7, 1917, and the establishment of a Marxist-based political system known as *Soviet power*. Through the coup d'état, planned and coordinated by Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky, Russia was withdrawn from the so-called imperialist war, and on March 3, 1918, in Brest-Litovsk, it concluded a separate peace with Germany. Romania remained isolated and without any external support on the Eastern Front, with two Russian armies stationed there and in the midst of Bolshevization, while most of its national territory was occupied by Germany, which forced it to sign the Treaty of Buftea on May 7, 1918. Although this treaty was ratified by the Romanian parliament in the summer of 1918, it was never promulgated by King Ferdinand I, as Romania resumed the war in November 1918 and declared the treaty null and void.

The revolutionary frenzy quickly transformed the Russian army from an ally into a veritable enemy – even more treacherous than the German and Austrian troops – because it directly threatened the constitutional order in Romani[234]. Romania's response was firm and swift; Romanian army units crossed the Prut River and entered Chișinău on January 8/21, 1918, thereby forcing the Bolshevik-controlled Russian troops to retreat to the Dniester River line. The threatening specter of Bolshevism for Romania marked the birth of Romanian anti-communism, as a result of the metamorphosis of inherited Russophobia.

The historical reality at that time painted a rather bleak picture for the country's future. In the context of a Romania that had been defeated and occupied by Germany, in accordance with the provisions of the Buftea Peace Treaty of May 7, 1917, approximately 15,000 Russian soldiers carrying red flags marched through the streets of Iași on April 18/May 1, 1917. This powerful Bolshevik demonstration[235] exerted significant pressure from the streets, forcing the release from prison of several prominent Bolshevik supporters, including Cristian Racovski, a Romanian

[233] Dan Falcan, „Războiul din 1877-1878, independența României și Marile Puteri" ["The War of 1877–1878, Romania's Independence, and the Great Powers"], in *Historia Special*, Vol. XI, No. 38, 2022, p. 8.

[234] Ioan Popa and Luiza Popa, *Românii, Basarabia și Transnistria [The Romanians, Bessarabia, and Transnistria]*, Bucharest, Titulescu European Foundation, Center for Strategic Studies, 2012, p. 65.

[235] *Ibidem*, p. 66.

citizen of Bulgarian origin and one of the leaders of the PSDR, who had taken refuge in Odessa, Russia, after this event, where they established the Social Democratic Action Committee, which set out to rebuild the labor movement and change the country's political regime.

Immediately following the victory of the Bolshevik Revolution, numerous anti-Romanian statements and actions were made by representatives of the new Bolshevik regime in Russia[236] . *The Supreme Autonomous Council for Russian-Romanian Affairs*, established by the Soviet government in Odesa, advocated triggering events modeled after those in Russia, including the implementation of a plan to arrest King Ferdinand and establish Soviet power in Iași. The Council of People's Commissars (the government of Soviet Russia), in its ultimatum of December 31, 1917/January 13, 1918, demanded that the Romanian government cease all actions against Russian military personnel involved in anti-Romanian Bolshevik demonstrations within 24 hours, warning that, otherwise, "the most severe military measures" would be taken. On the evening of that same day, before the ultimatum expired, V. I. Lenin ordered the arrest of Constantin Diamandy, Romania's minister plenipotentiary in Petrograd, along with the entire diplomatic and consular staff, as well as members of the Romanian Military Mission, and their detention in the Petropavlovsk Fortress in Petrograd[237].

Following the entry of Romanian troops into Chișinău on January 8/21, 1918, at the request of the Sfatul Țării, the Council of People's Commissars made public its decision of January 13/26, 1918, to withdraw Bolshevik troops to the Dniester River, unilaterally sever diplomatic relations with Romania, and confiscate the Romanian treasury deposited in Moscow during World War I.

In the period that followed, the Bolshevik authorities launched large-scale reprisals against Romanian citizens who had taken refuge in Russia, many of whom had fled because of the war[238]. Particularly notable in Odessa were the actions of the Supreme Autonomous Council for Russian-Romanian Affairs, led by Cristian Rakovski, who ordered the mass arrests of Romanians and their transport on warships, under the pretext of implementing security measures due to the state of hostilities that had arisen in Romanian-Russian relations on the night of January 27–28, 1918. On February 28/March 13, 1918, C. Rakovski informed V. Lenin and L. Trotsky that the purpose of his mission to Odessa was

> "to drive the counterrevolutionary Romanian forces out of Bessarabia and to spark a revolutionary movement in Romania"[239].

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[236] *Ibidem*, pp. 66–69.

[237] The Romanian officials were released after two days, following a vigorous protest by twenty foreign diplomatic missions in Russia, which accused the Bolshevik authorities of a flagrant violation of diplomatic immunity.

[238] Grigore Procopiu, *Parlamentul în pribegie (1916–1918) [Parliament in Exile (1916–1918)]*, Bucharest, Universitaria Publishing House, 1992, p. 36.

[239] „a alunga forțele române contrarevoluționare din Basarabia și de a provoca o mișcare revoluționară în România", in ***, *Relațiile româno-sovietice. Documente [Romanian-Soviet Relations. Documents]*, Vol. I, 1917–1934, Bucharest, Encyclopaedic Publishing House, 1999, p. 28.

The establishment of Greater Romania in 1918, through the acts of March 27 (Chișinău), November 28 (Cernăuți), and December 1 (Alba Iulia), as well as the anti-communist experience Romania gained in a very short time – both in the face of Soviet Russia's aggression and through the Romanian Army's overthrow of Bella Kuhn's Bolshevik regime in Hungary in 1919 – positioned Romania as an anti-communist geopolitical outpost of democratic and anti-totalitarian Europe. The democratic consolidation of Greater Romania called for new reforms aimed at modernizing and standardizing all of its provinces. Bolshevism was perceived as a threat to national security. The fury of atheism and materialism unleashed by Bolshevism, Lenin's express desire to destroy the church through terror, the repression and liquidation of its clergy with rare violence, the looting and desecration of places of worship, and the general Leninist plan of action[240] on the anti-religious front – were well known to Romanian society and had alarmed the international community. For the Bolsheviks, the Church represented genuine ideological and logistical competition[241].

Thus, World War I brought a new dimension to Romanian-Russian relations, particularly through the consequences of the Bolshevik Revolution. Russia's withdrawal from the war and the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk left Romania in a vulnerable position, amplifying anti-Russian sentiments and laying the groundwork for deep hostility toward communist ideology. This context served as the catalyst for the

[240] See:

1. Ioan C. Popa, *Mecanismele puterii în regimul totalitar comunist din perioada bolșevică [Mechanisms of Power in the Communist Totalitarian Regime During the Bolshevik Period]*, Bucharest, Titulescu European Foundation, Center for Strategic Studies, 2011, p. 169;

2. Manuel Mireanu, „Marea Unire si discursul anticomunist" ["The Great Union and the Anticommunist Discourse"], in *Critic Atac*, July 9, 2019, Available at: https://www.criticatac.ro/mareaunire-si-discursulanticomunist/, Accessed on August 12, 2026: „În primăvara lui 1919 în timpul Conferinței de Pace de la Paris, necesitatea eliminării comunismului din Europa devenise mai mult decât o chestiune strategică. Anticomunismul ajunsese în sfârșit un discurs bine articulat ideologic. În contextul foametei postbelice, a grevelor numeroase, a revoltelor soldaților francezi din Odessa și a declarării republicilor comuniste în Ungaria și Bavaria, liderii Antantei au declarat comunismul ca fiind principalul lor dușman. Mai mult, se pare că existau deja mii de soldați ruși în teritoriul Franței în timpul Conferinței, iar aceștia, nefiind neapărat bolșevizați, dădeau semne de neliniște și violență. Astfel, în timp ce negociau pacea la Paris, liderii Antantei organizau planuri ofensive împotriva Ungariei și Rusiei. Cel mai concret astfel de plan a aparținut mareșalului Foch, care a organizat în martie 1919 o adevărată «cruciada» internațională împotriva comunismului. El a propus folosirea de trupe poloneze, cehe, finlandeze, grecești, alb-rusești, sârbe și românești pentru a stârpi orice urmă de simpatie pro-bolșevică din Europa Centrală și de Est și pentru a avansa în Rusia". ["In the spring of 1919, during the Paris Peace Conference, the need to eliminate communism from Europe had become more than a strategic issue. Anticommunism had finally become a well-articulated ideological discourse. Against the backdrop of postwar famine, numerous strikes, the revolts of French soldiers in Odessa, and the declaration of communist republics in Hungary and Bavaria, the Entente leaders declared communism to be their main enemy. Moreover, it appears that there were already thousands of Russian soldiers on French territory during the Conference, and these, not necessarily Bolshevized, were showing signs of unrest and violence. Thus, while negotiating peace in Paris, the Entente leaders were organizing offensive plans against Hungary and Russia. The most concrete such plan belonged to Marshal Foch, who organized in March 1919 a veritable international 'crusade' against communism. He proposed using Polish, Czech, Finnish, Greek, White Russian, Serbian, and Romanian troops to stamp out any trace of pro-Bolshevik sympathy in Central and Eastern Europe and to advance into Russia"].

[241] Radu Preda, *Comunismul, o modernitate eșuată [Communism: A Failed Modernity]*, Cluj-Napoca, Eikon Publishing House, 2009, p. 139.

transformation of Russophobia into anti-communism, a shift that would profoundly shape Romanian society and politics in the decades to come. The year 1918, with its significant unionist moments in Chișinău, Cernăuți, and Alba Iulia, not only consolidated Greater Romania territorially but also crystallized anti-communism as a central element of the national ideology. Subsequent experiences with Soviet aggression and Romania's contribution to the defeat of the Bolshevik regime in Hungary in 1919 reinforced this orientation. Anti-communism, combined with nationalist and Christian values, thus became a defining pillar of Romanian national identity.

2. THE THEOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT IN THE INTERWAR HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The nationalist movement, which shaped the modern Romanian era in the 19th century and inspired the Great Union, continued as a guiding principle for identity-based education for new generations and within the new constitutional frameworks. *The new nationalism* [242] evolved into anti-communism with an anti-Russian orientation and included ecclesiastical, intellectual, and populist components. The intellectual component was represented by the so-called interwar intellectual elite, including Nichifor Crainic and the journal "Gândirea", Mircea Vulcănescu and the journal "Criterion", Nae Ionescu and the newspaper "Cuvântul", George Racoveanu and the magazine "Predania", Nicolae Paulescu, Vasile Băncilă, Father Dumitru Stăniloae, Eugen Lovinescu, Constantin Noica, Mircea Eliade, Lucian Blaga, Radu Dragnea, Corneliu Z. Codreanu and the Legionary Movement, etc. The centrality of Orthodox Christianity did not strictly depend on religious faith, but it became one of the axioms of *the new nationalists*[243] .

At the same time, nationalism was promoted as a democratic, moral, and patriotic value by both traditional Romanian churches – the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Greek Catholic Church – as well as in education at all levels. It is no coincidence that

> "the most important avenues for the revival of Christianity and the church were nationalism and so-called spiritualism"[244] –

nationalism and spiritualism that brought all the major themes[245] of political, national, cultural, religious, and economic life into the public discourse: Orthodoxy,

[242] Peter Sugar, *Naționalismul est-european în secolul al XX-lea Eastern European [Nationalism in the Twentieth Century]*, Bucharest, Curtea Veche Publishing House, 2002, p. 236

[243] *Ibidem*, p. 238.

[244] „cele mai importante direcții de recuperare a creștinismului și bisericii au fost naționalismul și așa-zisul spiritualism", in George Enache, *Ortodoxie și putere politică în România contemporană [Orthodoxy and Political Power in Contemporary Romania]*, Bucharest, Nemira Publishing House, 2005, pp. 455–456.

[245] See:

1. Constantin Schifirneț, *Geneza modernă a ideii naționale [The Modern Genesis of the National Idea]*, Bucharest, Albatros Publishing House, 2001, pp. 435–550;

2. Constantin Mihai*, Biserica și elitele interbelice [The Church and the Interwar Elites]*, Iași, European Institute Publishing House, 2009, p. 43.

ethnocracy, Christianity and ethnicity, the Church, the state and the nation, traditionalism, democracy and demophilia, totalitarianism, anti-Semitism, national culture, the individual, communion and the national community, and the national character of the human being.

According to archival documents from the Romanian Ministry of the Interior, theological anti-communism during the interwar period manifested itself primarily among students. Universities, in particular, became the forums for these debates – on nationalism, spiritualism, and anti-communism. In turn, the theology faculties in Arad, Bucharest, Chișinău, Cernăuți, Cluj-Napoca, and Sibiu also engaged in these debates, all the more so because they supported the development of a specific missionary-religious and apologetic approach, the affirmation of the Church's values, and the identification of the danger posed by Bolshevik atheism. However, anti-communist nationalism also had anti-Semitic undertones, due to the Jewish origins of a significant portion of the founding and leading Bolshevik elite in Russia and of the Communist International [246] . Thus, this version of Romanian nationalism – particularly Legionaryism – was labeled anti-democratic and a threat to the constitutional order of the Romanian state. For this reason, members and sympathizers of this political movement came under the scrutiny of the surveillance agencies of the Directorate of Police and General Siguranța of the Ministry of the Interior[247] .

The year 1918, with its significant pro-unionist moments in Chișinău, Cernăuți, and Alba Iulia, not only consolidated Greater Romania territorially but also cemented anti-communism as a central element of the national ideology. Subsequent experiences with Soviet aggression and the contribution to the defeat of the Bolshevik regime in Hungary in 1919 reinforced this orientation. Anti-communism, combined with nationalist and Christian values, thus became a defining pillar of Romanian national identity. The intensification of anti-Russian sentiment as a mass phenomenon and its transformation into anti-communism – to the point of involvement in an anti-Bolshevik crusade – permeated the entire interwar Romanian society, becoming the driving force behind Romanian cultural and theological missionary work until the events of August 23, 1944, and the occupation of Romania by Soviet forces.

The interwar period saw an intensification of these sentiments, with academic and theological circles reflecting and promoting nationalist and anti-communist values. Universities and theological seminaries became centers for debating and promoting these ideas, sometimes intersecting with anti-Semitic tendencies, given the association of Jews with the Bolshevik movement. This dynamic had profound

[246] Florin Mătrescu, *Holocaustul Roşu [The Red Holocaust]*, Vol. II, Bucharest, Irecson Publishing House, 2008, pp. 42–58.

[247] In the appendix to this article, for the first time, previously unpublished archival materials are introduced into the historiographical discourse. These materials reflect the development of the nationalist/anti-communist movement among theology students in interwar Romania and are held at the CNSAS Archives in the collection titled "The Society of Theology Students in Romania (1924–1942)" and "The Student Movement, 1937–1946".

repercussions on the evolution of Romanian society and politics. Only the establishment and maintenance, for a period of over four decades, of a Soviet-style dictatorial regime in Romania and in the Romanian territories reoccupied by the USSR in 1944 placed the anti-communist resistance within the context of the greatest anti-Christian persecution in history, leading to the crowning of Romanian theological anti-communism with the halo of sanctity.

The legacy of the sentiment of rejection toward Russian imperial interference and pressure, alongside the evolution of anti-communism in Romania, is thus closely linked to the nation's historical and political context. This transformation of sentiments and attitudes has decisively influenced Romania's national identity, domestic and foreign policy, as well as its ideological orientation. Understanding these developments is essential to appreciating the complexity of Romanian history and culture in an ever-changing world.

3. ANNEXES

Encrypted telegram from Romulus Voinescu, Director General of the Police and General The "Siguranța" of the Ministry of the Interior, to the General Inspectorate of Police and The "Siguranța" of Bessarabia, regarding the publication in Chișinău of the magazine "Gândul Neamului":

"No. 29081, May 14, 1924, Bucharest,

We have been informed that the magazine 'Gândul Neamului', published by Christian students and printed at 122 Schmidt Street, appears twice a month in that city and is run by a committee from the Theological Seminary in Chișinău[248].

Since martial law is in effect in this region, I ask that you intervene with the Military Command to halt the publication of this magazine"[249].

Report from the General Inspectorate of the Siguranța in Bessarabia to the General Directorate of Police and General Siguranța of the Romanian Ministry of the Interior, regarding the inauguration ceremonies marking the beginning of the second academic year at the Faculty of Theology in Chișinău.

[248] On May 11, 1924, the following informational note was sent from Chișinău: "At the student cafeteria on Gutenberg Street, the magazine *Gândul Neamului* is on sale; it is published by Christian students in Chișinău, printed at 122 Smidt Street in that city, and managed by a committee from the Chișinău Theological Seminary. The magazine is published twice a month," in the CNSAS Archives, Documentary Collection, file 008189, f. 5.

[249] „Nr. 29081, 14 mai 1924, București,

Suntem informați că în acel oraș apare de două ori pe lună revista «Gândul Neamului», editată de studenții creștini și tipărită în str. Schmidt, Nr. 122, fiind condusă de un comitet de la Seminarul Teologic din Chișinău.

Întrucât în această regiune este stare de asediu, vă rog, interveniți pe lângă Comandamentul Militar pentru oprirea apariției acestei reviste", in CNSAS Archives, Documentary Collection, file 008189, f. 6.

"November 8, 1927, Chișinău[250],
Today, at 12:00 p.m., at the Faculty of Theology, the opening ceremony for the second academic year of this faculty took place in the presence of the following dignitaries: His Eminence Archbishop Gurie, General Scărișoreanu, numerous priests, students, etc.

Mr. [Constantin] Tomescu[251], a professor at this faculty, took the floor and traced the history of the struggle to realize this ideal of the Moldovan people across the Dniester: a higher educational institution in the capital of Bessarabia. He highlighted the moral and cultural influence exerted in Bessarabia by the existence of a higher educational institution such as the Faculty of Theology, as well as the efforts made to achieve this successful outcome. He quotes excerpts from speeches delivered by various politicians during this debate in and outside of parliament and makes special mention of Mr. Petrovici, former Minister of Education, and His Eminence Gurie, who used all the authority they enjoyed to bring this national project to fruition, for which a bust was erected in their honor in the reception hall of the Faculty of Theology.

It highlights the progress made over the past year, the results achieved, the improvements planned for the future, and the sacrifices made by the state and various cultural institutions – all of which have led to the outcome we see today. Chișinău, he says, must become the metropolis of religious sciences for all of Moldova, just as Iași is the metropolis of secular sciences. We are grateful to all those who contributed, in small or large ways, to the realization of this great national undertaking – which, by its very existence, will have the most beneficial influence on all communist ideas that seek, through various means, to penetrate the soul of our people – we raise our most heartfelt prayer to the Almighty for the happiness and strengthening of our Fatherland.

Mr. Ștefan Ciobanu[252], principal of the Real High School, pays tribute to the life, work, and admirable, brilliant achievements of the greatest king of all Romanians – a king who will remain forever in the hearts and memories of Romanians everywhere. He describes the various stages His Majesty went through, from his entry into the country to his emotional burial at Curtea de Argeș, and prays to Heaven to grant peace to the one who has entered eternity and to give his successors the strength to continue the work begun by their great forefather[253].

[250] The text of the report was accompanied by letter No. 19374 dated Nov. 10, 1927: "We have the honor to submit to you, for your information, the report on the opening ceremonies of the Faculty of Theology in Chișinău, which took place on November 8 of this year," in the CNSAS Archives, Documentary Collection, file 008189, f. 8.

[251] Constantin N. Tomescu (1890–1983), professor and journalist, the first associate dean of the Faculty of Theology in Chișinău (1926–1940), a prominent figure in Romanian culture during the interwar period.

[252] Ștefan Ciobanu (1883–1950), a leader of the Romanian national movement in Bessarabia and a member of the Sfatul Țării (1917–1918). Historian and author of numerous studies and works on early Romanian literature. Professor at the Faculty of Theology in Chișinău (1926–1938). Member (since Oct. 1918) and vice president (1944–1948) of the Romanian Academy.

[253] This refers to King Ferdinand I of Romania, who died on July 20, 1927, and was buried at the Curtea de Argeș Monastery.

Mr. Tomescu, on behalf of the Faculty of Theology, thanks all the attendees for taking the time to come and participate in the opening of the second academic year of the Faculty of Theology in Chişinău"[254].

Copy of the Russian-to-Romanian translation of the article "A Restless Night at the Theological Boarding School. 'Bessarabia (...) Is Not for Bessarabians'", published in the Chişinău newspaper "Poșta Basarabiei", No. 3672, December 17, 1932, forwarded by the General Inspectorate of the Siguranța in Bessarabia to the General Directorate of Police and General Siguranța of the Romanian Ministry of the Interior[255].

"December 17, 1932,

Last night, the students at the Faculty of Theology were very agitated. They didn't sleep. They discussed the meaning of life.

The issue is as follows: Students from the Kingdom sent a delegation to the local City Hall, from which they received 25,000 lei as a grant. The amount was divided as follows: 80% for students from the Kingdom and 20% for students from Bessarabia. The Bessarabian students were indeed upset. At the local Faculty of Theology, 60% of the students are from Bessarabia and 40% are from the Kingdom.

[254] „8 noiembrie 1927, Chișinău,

Astăzi, la ora 12, în localul Facultății de Teologie, s-a făcut inaugurarea celui de-al doilea an al acestei facultăți, în prezența autorităților: I.P.S.S. Arhiepiscopul Gurie, d-lui general Scărișoreanu, a numeroșilor preoți, studenți etc.

A luat cuvântul dl. [Constantin] Tomescu, profesor al acestei facultăți, care a făcut istoricul luptei pentru înfăptuirea acestui ideal al poporului moldovean de peste Nistru, o instituție superioară de cultură din capitala Basarabiei. D-sa arată influența morală și culturală pe care o exercită în Basarabia existența unei instituții superioare de cultură, așa cum este Facultatea de Teologie, și sforțările care s-au făcut pentru a se ajunge la acest rezultat fericit. Citează fragmente din discursurile pronunțate de diferiți oameni politici, cu ocazia acestei discuții în parlament și în afară și face o mențiune specială pentru d-l Petrovici, fost ministru al Instrucțiunii, și pentru I.P.S.S. Gurie, care au pus toată autoritatea de care se bucurau, pentru a înfăptui această operă națională, fapt pentru care li s-a ridicat câte un bust în sala de recepție a Facultății de Teologie.

Arată progresele făcute în cursul anului trecut, rezultatele obținute, îmbunătățirile proiectate pentru viitor, sacrificiile făcute de stat și de diferitele instituții culturale, care toate au dus la rezultatul pe care îl constatăm astăzi. Chișinău, spune D-sa, trebuie să devină metropola științelor religioase pentru întreaga Moldovă, după cum Iașul este metropola științelor profane. Recunoscători tuturor celor care au contribuit în mică sau mare măsură la realizarea acestei mari opere naționale, care, prin însăși existența ei, va influența în cel mai fericit mod asupra tuturor ideilor comuniste care încearcă, prin diferite mijloace, să pătrundă în sufletul poporului nostru, ridicăm către Atotputernicul rugăciunea cea mai caldă pentru fericirea și consolidarea Patriei noastre

Dl. Ștefan Ciobanu Directorul Liceului real face apologia vieții, operei și a admirabilelor, strălucitelor rezultate pe care le-a produs domnia celui mai mare rege al tuturor românilor, a regelui care va rămâne etern în sufletul și amintirea românilor de pretutindeni. Descrie diferite faze prin care a trecut Domnia Sa de la intrarea în țară până la emoționanta înmânare de la Curtea de Argeș și roagă Cerul să dea liniște Celui intrat în veșnicie și puterea urmașilor să continue opera începută de Marele lor înaintaș

Dl. Tomescu, în numele Facultății de Teologie, mulțumește tuturor asistenților pentru osteneala ce și-au dat de a veni să ia parte la deschiderea celui de-al doilea an al Facultății de Teologie din Chișinău", in CNSAS Archives, Documentary Collection, file 008189, pp. 9–10.

[255] The text submitted was accompanied by Letter No. 20756 of December 28, 1932, signed by Constantin Maimuca, head of the General Security Inspectorate of Bessarabia: "We have the honor to submit herewith a copy of the translation from Russian of the article 'A Restless Night at the Theological Boarding School. 'Which Bessarabia (...) is not for the Bessarabians,' published in the newspaper 'Poșta Basarabiei' No. 3672 of December 17, 1932. This article shows how a divide was being created among university students by drawing a distinction between 'people from the Kingdom' and 'people from Bessarabia'", in the CNSAS Archives, Documentary Collection, file 008189, f. 15.

Students from the Kingdom receive substantial subsidies from their home municipalities, which they do not share with students from Bessarabia, and now that the city government has provided financial aid, the students from the Kingdom have received the lion's share.

The persecuted students refused to accept the 'crumbs'. The faculty professors also sided with them. They all seem to be like blood brothers. But so far, nothing has been decided.

It is interesting to note that students from the Kingdom enjoy certain privileges at the university, while students from Bessarabia appear to be quite 'impoverished'. Could Bessarabia truly belong to the Bessarabia's"[256]?!

Memo from the Mobile Brigade of the General State Police regarding the spread of anti-communist sentiment among students at the Faculty of Theology in Chișinău.

"December 4, 1933,

Among the students of the Faculty of Theology in Chișinău, there is growing interest in forming an anti-communist organization, whose goal would be to launch a strong counter-propaganda campaign against communism in the villages, where this movement has begun to infiltrate.

The plan is to form various teams of students who will travel through the villages and, through lectures, celebrations, movies, literary gatherings, and plays, highlight the dangers of communism.

It is believed that this organization will have the government's approval and support. The initiator of this idea is the journalist [Elefterie] Negel from Chișinău, the representative of the newspaper 'Universul' for Bessarabia"[257].

[256] „17 decembrie 1932,

Noaptea trecută, studenții de la Facultatea Teologică au fost foarte agitați. N-au dormit. Ei au discutat problema vieții.

Chestiunea constă în următoarele: Studenții regățeni au trimis o delegație la Primăria locală, de la care au primit suma de 25 000 de lei ca subvenție. Suma arătată a fost împărțită astfel: 80% pentru studenții regățeni și 20% pentru studenții basarabeni. Basarabenii s-au agitat și într-adevăr. La Facultatea Teologică locală sunt 60% studenți basarabeni și 40% studenți regățeni.

Studenții regățeni primesc subsidii însemnate de la comunele lor natale, pe care ei nu le împart cu studenții basarabeni, iar acum, când Primăria orașului a dat un ajutor, studenții regățeni au primit partea leului.

Studenții persecutați au refuzat să primească «fărâmiturile». De partea lor au trecut și profesorii facultății. Toți par a fi frați de sânge. Dar până în prezent nimic nu s-a hotărât.

Interesant de remarcat că studenții regățeni se deosebesc la facultate prin privilegii, iar studenții basarabeni au o aparență destul de «sărăcăcioasă».

Va fi oare Basarabia a basarabenilor?!", in CNSAS Archives, Documentary Collection, file 008189, f. 16.

[257] „4 decembrie 1933,

Printre studenții Facultății de Teologie din Chișinău se agită ideea formării unei organizații anticomuniste, al cărei scop ar fi începerea unei puternice contrapropaganda comuniste la sate, unde această mișcare a început să se infiltreze.

Se intenționează să se formeze diferite echipe de studenți care să cutreiere satele și prin conferințe, serbări, filme de cinema, șezători literare, piese de teatru, să se arate primejdia comunismului.

Se crede că această organizație va avea asentimentul și ajutorul guvernului. Inițiatorul acestei idei este ziaristul [Elefterie] Negel din Chișinău, reprezentantul ziarului «Universul» pentru Basarabia", in CNSAS Archives, Documentary Collection, file 008189, f. 24.

"Letter No. 20375, December 5, 1933,
We have the honor to report that the students at the local Faculty of Theology (Chișinău – ed.) have accepted the conditions set by the Rector's Office regarding the obligation not to participate in political organizations, without staging any protests"[258].

Informative note from the Chișinău Police Inspectorate.
"November 6, 1934,
Students at the Faculty of Theology in Chișinău intend to take a decidedly hostile stance against certain university professors, such as Constantinescu-Iași and, probably, Ciobanu, whose ideas are far removed from nationalist principles. Second-year students in the Department of Agronomy are closely following the stance of their colleagues in Theology"[259].

Telephone memo from the Bucharest Regional Police Inspectorate to the General Police Directorate,
"December 20, 1934,
The Iași Inspectorate informs us that this evening, at 10:48 p.m., 20 students from the Faculty of Theology in Chișinău departed from Iași on express train No. 76, bound for Bucharest"[260].

Report from the Chernivtsi General Police Inspectorate to the General Directorate of Police and State Affairs regarding the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the "Orthodox Academy" society in Chernivtsi.
"No. 9901, May 30, 1934,
On the 28th of this month, the 'Orthodox Academy' theological students' society in Chernivtsi celebrated the 50th anniversary of the society's founding.

At 10 a.m., a divine service was held in the local cathedral, attended by His Eminence Metropolitan Nectarius, as well as representatives of local authorities.

On this occasion, the flag of the 'Orthodox Academy' was consecrated.

After the service, the theology students, formed into a marching column, proceeded to the University, where a festive gathering took place. During the event, His Eminence Metropolitan Nectarie delivered a brief speech highlighting the society's contributions in the cultural and national spheres.

[258] „Adresa nr. 20375, 5 decembrie 1933,
Avem onoare a vă raporta că studenții de la Facultatea de Teologie din localitate (Chișinău – n.n.) au primit condițiunile puse de Rectorat, relativ la obligațiunea de a nu activa în organizațiile politice, fără să facă manifestații de protestare", in CNSAS Archives, Documentary Collection, file 008189, f. 19.
[259] „6 noiembrie 1934,
Studenții de la Facultatea de Teologie din Chișinău intenționează să ia atitudine hotărât ostilă, contra unor profesori universitari ca Constantinescu-Iași și, probabil, Ciobanu, ale căror idei sunt departe de principiile naționaliste. Studenții din anul II de la Agronomie urmăresc cu interes atitudinea colegilor de la Teologie", in CNSAS Archives, Documentary Collection, file 008189, f. 20.
[260] „20 decembrie 1934,
Inspectoratul Iași ne comunică că astă-seară, la ora 22.48, cu trenul accelerat nr. 76, a plecat din Iași, cu destinația București, un număr de 20 de studenți de la Facultatea de Teologie din Chișinău", in CNSAS Archives, Documentary Collection, file 008189, f. 28.

At 4:00 p.m., the meeting continued in the reception hall of the Metropolis, with approximately 200 participants. Speakers included: His Eminence Metropolitan Nectarie[261] the dean of the Faculty of Theology, Professor Gheorghian, University Professor [Grigore] Nandriș, Professor Cuparencu, Professor [Dimitrie] Marmeliuc, the mayor of the city, Bishop Vorobchievici[262] and students Galatiuc, Străchineanu, Olinici, and Trebici – all members of the former 'Iron Guard' organization.

In their speeches, they highlighted the struggle waged by theology students to free the Romanian people from under the yoke of Austrian rule. Student Trebici made scathing remarks about the government, pointing out that while theology students had asked the government for financial assistance to make the flag and were turned down, the government had instead subsidized local Jewish banks with 400.000 lei. He went on to criticize the current government for dissolving the 'Iron Guard', a nationalist organization, while other subversive and irredentist organizations are allowed to exist. During the speech delivered by student Trebici, prominent figures in the hall left the meeting in outrage. That evening, a banquet was held, attended by His Eminence Metropolitan Nectarie"[263].

Memo from the Bucharest Regional Police Inspectorate regarding organizational and activity issues involving students at the Faculty of Theology in Bucharest.

"January 28, 1935, Bucharest,

Among the theology students, there is a certain degree of dissatisfaction with their president, Gh. Furdui.

[261] Metropolitan Nectarie (born Nicolae Cotlarciuc, 1875–1935) held the rank of Archbishop of Chernivtsi and Metropolitan of Bukovina from 1924 to 1935.

[262] Ipolit Vorobchievici (1849–1939), a Romanian Orthodox scholar and clergyman, served as vicar bishop of the Metropolis of Bukovina from 1919 to 1939.

[263] „Nr. 9901, 30 mai 1934,

În 28 curent, societatea studenților în teologie «Academia Ortodoxă» din Cernăuți, a sărbătorit jubileul semicentenar de la înființarea societății.

La ora 10 s-a celebrat în catedrala din localitate un serviciu divin, la care a luat parte I.P.S. Mitropolitul Nectarie, precum și reprezentanții autorităților locale.

Cu această ocazie, a fost sfințit steagul «Academiei Ortodoxe».

După oficierea serviciului divin, studenții teologi, formați în coloană de marș, s-au îndreptat spre Universitate, unde a avut loc o ședință festivă, la care I.P.S.S. Mitropolitul Nectarie, printr-o scurtă cuvântare, a evidențiat meritele societății pe teren cultural și național.

La ora 16, ședința a continuat în sala de recepție a Mitropoliei, cu cca. 200 de participanți. Au vorbit: I.P.S.S. Mitropolitul Nectarie, decanul Facultății de Teologie, profesor Gheorghian, profesor univ. [Grigore] Nandriș, profesor Cuparencu, profesor [Dimitrie] Marmeliuc, primarul orașului, Episcopul Vorobchievici și studenții Galatiuc, Străchineanu, Olinici și Trebici, toți membrii în fosta organizațiune a «Gărzii de Fier».

În cuvântările rostite, au scos în evidență lupta studenților teologi dusă pentru desrobirea neamului românesc de sub jugul dominațiunii austriece. Studentul Trebici a făcut aprecieri malițioase la adresa guvernului, accentuând că studenții teologi, cerând de la guvern un ajutor bănesc pentru confecționarea steagului, au fost respinși; în schimb, însă, guvernul a subvenționat băncile evreiești din localitate cu suma de 400 000 de lei. În continuare, a criticat actualul guvern pe tema dizolvării «Gărzii de Fier», care este o organizație naționalistă, pe când celelalte organizații subversive și iredentiste sunt tolerate să existe. În timpul cuvântării rostite de studentul Trebici, persoanele marcante aflate în sală, au părăsit indignate ședința. Seara a avut loc un banchet la care a luat parte și I.P.S.S. Mitropolitul Nectarie", in CNSAS Archives, Documentary Collection, file 008189, p. 27.

He is accused of not having been active enough since becoming president, and all his efforts have been focused on a single conference. His term as president expires in May, and he will certainly not be re-elected to the committee.

Gheorghe Furdui, sensing the hostility toward him from the theology students, is now seeking to get as close to them as possible and intends to organize a series of spiritual gatherings that will address a scholarly topic from a critical perspective.

These lectures are scheduled to take place at the University beginning on February 10. To secure the venue, an appeal will be made to Professor Nichifor Crainic, who will approach Professor Gheorghiu, Ph.D., the University Rector, to obtain his approval. Among the speakers will be Messrs. Gerota, Dr. Trifu, Rădulescu-Cluj, and others"[264].

Telegram from the Chișinău Regional Police Inspectorate to the General Directorate of Police and General Siguranța, regarding aspects of the activities of students at the Faculty of Theology in Chișinău.

"March 25, 1935, Chișinău

On March 16 of this year, student Traian Cotigă arrived in Chișinău and took part in a meeting of the study group affiliated with the Chișinău Faculty of Theology.

Traian Cotigă said that he was on a tour of all the university centers; he spoke out against regionalism among students, urging them to join forces to ensure the spiritual unity of the people and that of the new Romania. The generation that fought for Greater Romania has lost its sense of nationalism; therefore, the student body must close ranks to realize the national ideal. He gave a brief overview of his efforts leading up to this year's student congress, noting that the government had approved the congress in principle in early December 1934 – it was to be held in Arad – but that the rector of the University of Cluj had opposed it. He stated that he was determined to organize the congress, even without the approval of the government or the university. No date has been set, but it is believed it will be on April 17 or 18 in Arad. Congress participants will commit to not leaving the congress until their demands are met. It was also decided that requests to the relevant authorities should be made in writing, so as not to be deceived again as they were last year, when approval was given verbally and then retracted. He asked for the students' support in obtaining approval for the congress, as the obstacles are significant.

[264] „28 ianuarie 1935, București,

În sânul studenților de la Teologie, se manifestă o oarecare nemulțumire față de președintele lor, care este Gh. Furdui.

I se aduc învinuiri că, de când e președinte, n-a activat suficient și toată acțiunea sa se răsfrânge asupra unei singure conferințe. În mai, mandatul său de președinte îi expiră și cu siguranță nu va mai fi ales nici în comitet.

Gheorghe Furdui, simțind ostilitatea în contra sa a studenților de la Teologie, caută acum să se apropie cât mai mult de ei și vrea să organizeze o serie de ședzători spirituale, care să ocupe un subiect de știință cu program critic.

Aceste conferințe urmează să se țină la universitate cu începere de la 10 februarie. Pentru obținerea sălii, se va interveni pe lângă profesorul Nichifor Crainic, care să meargă la dl. Profesor doctor Gheorghiu, rectorul universității, ca să le aprobe. Între conferențiari vor fi și d-nii: Gerota, doctor Trifu, Rădulescu-Cluj și alții", in CNSAS Archives, Documentary Collection, file 008189, f. 31.

Student Viorel Trifa said that local students are joining the 'Union of Christian Students' movement in Romania. Yesterday, on the 12:00 p.m. train, Traian Cotigă left for Iași-Bucharest. The meeting proceeded peacefully"[265].

Note regarding the establishment of the General Federation of Orthodox Theology Students in Romania.

„December 16, 1935

The General Federation of Orthodox Theology Students in Romania was recently established. On December 14 of this year, the committee of this federation decided to officially notify the theological student societies at universities across the country of the federation's establishment and, to this end, will send the following letter to the presidents of the theological student societies:

'December 14, 1935, General Federation of Romanian Christian Theology Students: Mr. President, On the occasion of the U.NS.C.R., taking advantage of the presence in Bucharest of several presidents and delegates of the theological student societies from across the country, and in agreement with them, we have decided that our Federation, which has existed in principle for years, should become a reality once and for all. To this end, a committee was elected, composed of:

1. President, I. Rodeanu, president of the Theological Students' Society;
2. Vice President, Viorel Trifa, former president of the Chișinău Student Council;
3. Secretary General, Remus Cocoș, delegate of the Bucharest Theology Students' Society;
4. Treasurer, Vlad Radu, delegate of the Bucharest Theology Students' Society;
5. Members: Cosma, delegate of the Chernivtsi Theology Students' Society; Gh. Arghiropol, president of the Chernivtsi Student Center; and Gh. Bică, president of the Sibiu Student Center.

The primary goal of this committee is to establish a solid foundation for the Federation, to organize a pre-congress, and to convene the Congress of Orthodox Theology Students in Romania; its future aspiration is to hold a pan-Orthodox congress.

[265] „25 martie, 1935, Chișinău,

În ziua de 16 martie a.c., a sosit la Chișinău studentul Traian Cotigă, luând parte la o ședință a cercului de studii, de pe lângă Facultatea de Teologie Chișinău.

Traian Cotigă a spus că se află într-un turneu pe la toate centrele universitare, a combătut regionalismul dintre studenți, îndemnându-i să lupte cu forțe unite pentru a asigura unitatea sufletească și aceea a României noi. Generația care a luptat pentru România Mare a pierdut naționalismul; de aceea, studențimea trebuie să strângă rândurile pentru a realiza idealul național. A făcut un mic istoric al activității sale în vederea congresului studențesc din anul acesta, menționând că guvernul a aprobat în principiu congresul la începutul lunii decembrie 1934, care urma să aibă loc la Arad, dar că s-a opus rectorul Universității din Cluj. A declarat că e foarte decis să organizeze congresul, chiar fără aprobarea guvernului sau a universității. Nu s-a fixat data, dar se crede că va fi la 18 sau 17 aprilie, la Arad. Participanții la congres își vor lua obligația să nu părăsească congresul, până nu se vor realiza deziderateле lor. A mai decis că intervențiile la autoritățile în drept să se facă în scris, pentru a nu mai fi înșelați ca anul trecut, când aprobarea s-a dat verbal și apoi a fost retractată. A cerut concursul studenților pentru obținerea aprobării congresului, deoarece piedicile sunt mari.

Studentul Trifa Viorel a spus că studenții din localitate se unesc cu mișcarea „Uniunea Studenților Creștini" din România. Eri, cu trenul de ora 12, Traian Cotigă a plecat în direcția Iași-București. Întrunirea a decurs în liniște", in CNSAS Archives, Documentary Collection, file 008189, f. 33.

Mr. President,

For us, the current leaders of the theological student body, these goals have become categorical imperatives. Today, when the enemies of the Church are so numerous and their attacks increasingly relentless, we can no longer remain disorganized. Orthodoxy expects more from us. Let us not forget that we are the largest Orthodox country today (...) set aside personal issues or matters of that sort. Our first steps were guided by Mr. Gh. Furdui, the current president of the U.N.S.C.R., who, for his advice and work, has been nominated as honorary president of the Federation (...) We would also like to know your opinion on this matter'"[266].

Memorandum from the General Directorate of Police regarding Legionary agitation among students in Chernivtsi.

"Letter No. 461, March 3, 1936, Bucharest,

With the exams now over, the Chernivtsi Student Center has begun agitating the student body for demands that are, for the most part, unachievable, with the aim of spreading Legionary propaganda to rally the entire student body around the Legionary center.

The center's president, Legionary commander Filon Laurich, is seeking to call a general strike. Yesterday, before noon, the center's president summoned the student body to a hall at the University, where, through the Legionary propagandist Vasile Posteucă, he formulated the following demands (...) In this regard, the center has also drafted a memorandum that it will present to the university rector. The rector's decision

[266] „16 decembrie 1935,

De curând s-a constituit Federația Generală a studenților ortodocși teologi din România. În ziua de 14 decembrie a.c., comitetul acestei federații a hotărât să aducă la cunoștința Societăților studenților în teologie de la facultățile din țară constituirea Federației în mod oficial și, în acest scop, va trimite către președinții Societăților studenților teologi următoarea adresă:

«14 decembrie 1935, Federația Generală a studenților Teologi Români Creștini: Domnule Președinte, Cu ocazia Consiliului U.N.S.C.R., profitând de prezența în București a mai multor președinți și delegați ai Societăților studențești teologice din țară, de comun acord cu domniile lor, am hotărât ca Federația noastră, care există în principiu de ani de zile, să devină odată pentru totdeauna realitate. Pentru aceasta s-a ales un comitet compus din:

1. Președinte, I. Rodeanu, președinte al Societății studenților teologi;
2. Vicepreședinte, Viorel Trifa, fost președinte al C.S. Chișinău;
3. Secretar general, Remus Cocoș, delegat al Societății studenților teologi București;
4. Casier, Vlad Radu, delegat al Societății studenților teologi București;
5. Membri, Cosma, delegat al Societății studenților teologi Cernăuți; Gh. Arghiropol, președinte al Centrului studenților Cernăuți și Gh. Bică, președintele Centrului studenților Sibiu.

Acest comitet are ca prim scop organizarea pe baze solide a Federației, un pro-congres, organizarea congresului studenților teologi ortodocși din România, iar ca deziderat de viitor, un congres pan-ortodox.

Domnule Președinte,

Pentru noi, conducătorii actuali ai studenției teologice, aceste deziderate au devenit imperative categorice. Astăzi, când dușmanii Bisericii sunt așa de numeroși și atacurile lor din ce în ce mai insistente, nu mai putem sta neorganizați. Ortodoxia așteaptă de la noi mai mult. Să nu uităm că suntem cea mai mare țară ortodoxă, actuală (...) chestiunile de persoane sau altele de felul acesta, lăsați-le la o parte (...) Primii pași ai noștri au fost călăuziți de dl. Gh. Furdui, actualul președinte al U.N.S.C. R, care pentru sfaturile și munca d-sale a fost propus ca președinte de onoare al Federației (...) Am dori să știm și părerea Dvs. și în această chestiune»", in CNSAS Archives, Documentary Collection, File 008189, pp. 65–67.

is awaited, after which the center will organize the movement, which would be led in the Legionary spirit"[267].

Note from the General Directorate of Police regarding the incidents between students and Jews in Chernivtsi.

"Letter No. 560, March 13, 1936, Bucharest,

The Jewish minority newspapers in Chernivtsi, having published inaccurate and exaggerated reports regarding the incidents between students and the Jewish population, following police intervention, the division commander and the Royal Commissioner of the Fourth Army Corps summoned all newspaper editors, and warned them of the consequences they would face for inciting the population and students through false reports. The newspaper editors acknowledged the inaccuracies they had published and promised to publish only verified news reports from then on.

At its meeting on March 12, the University Senate decided to expel student Preminger – who had struck Professor Niculescu – from all universities. It is noted that, although student unrest is subsiding, the Jewish leadership remains agitated, issuing protests in newspapers against the measures taken by police authorities, who have prohibited Jews from passing in front of the University in order to avoid incidents with students.

No incidents were reported throughout the course of yesterday. Jewish students continue to stay away from classes"[268].

Note from the General Directorate of Police regarding the activities of the Committee of the Society of Theology Students at the University of Bucharest.

"February 4, 1937, Bucharest

The Committee of the Theology Students' Society has decided to organize a series of educational lectures within a Legionary nationalist framework.

[267] „Adresa nr. 461, 3 martie 1936, București,

Terminându-se examenele, Centrul studențesc Cernăuți a început să agite studențimea pentru revendicări în cea mai mare parte irealizabile, în scop de propagandă legionară pentru gruparea întregii mase studențești în jurul centrului legionar.

Președintele centrului, comandant legionar, Filon Laurich, urmărește declararea grevei generale. Eri, înainte de amiază, președintele centrului a convocat studențimea într-o sală a universității, formulând prin intermediul propagandistului legionar Vasile Posteucă, următoarele cereri (...) În acest sens, centrul a alcătuit și un memoriu pe care îl va prezenta rectorului universității. Se așteaptă hotărârea rectoratului, după care centrul va organiza mișcarea, care ar fi condusă în spirit legionary", in CNSAS Archives, file D 012694, vol. 6, f. 5.

[268] „Adresa nr. 560, 13 martie 1936, București,

Ziarele minoritare evreiești din Cernăuți, dând știri inexacte și exagerate cu privire la incidentele petrecute între studenți și populația evreiască, în urma intervenției poliției, comandantul diviziei și d-l Comisar Regal al Corpului IV Armată au convocat pe toți directorii de ziare și le-au pus în vedere consecințele ce le vor suferi de pe urma agitatării populației și studenților prin știri mincinoase. Directorii de ziare au recunoscut inexactitățile publicate și au promis că nu vor mai publica decât știri controlate.

Senatul universitar, în ședința de la 12 martie, a hotărât eliminarea din toate universitățile a studentului Preminger, care a lovit pe profesorul Niculescu. Se constată că, deși agitația studenților e în descreștere, păturile conducătoare ale evreilor, continuă a fi agitate, trimițând protestări prin ziare, împotriva măsurilor luate de autoritățile polițienești, care au interzis trecerea evreilor prin fața Universității, spre a se evita incidentele cu studenții.

În tot cursul zilei de ieri nu a fost semnalat nici un incident. Studenții evrei continuă să se abțină de la cursuri", in CNSAS Archives, file D 012694, vol. 6, f. 7.

Professors Nae Ionescu, Mihail Manoilescu, Dragoș Protopopescu, Simion Mehedinți, and others will be invited to speak at these lectures.

To this end, Apostol Ion, president of the Theology Students' Society, will approach the dean of the faculty to request the necessary authorization for these lectures to be held in the faculty's lecture hall. In the event of a negative response, the lectures will be held in a cultural hall"[269].

Note from the General Directorate of Police regarding the activities of the Legionary student group at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Bucharest.

"February 5, 1937, Bucharest

On the afternoon of February 4, a new meeting of the group of Legionary theology students took place at the headquarters of the 'Everything for the Country' party.

Legionary instructor Ganciu was appointed to temporarily lead this group.

The discussion then turned to Professor Nichifor Crainic's attitude toward the Legionary movement, noting that he continues to publish articles in 'Sfarmă Piatră' that are offensive toward Corneliu Codreanu and the other leaders of the Legion.

It was decided that the group of Legionary students in the Theology Department would, through an indirect intervention, urge Professor Crainic to cease this campaign, warning him that, otherwise, the Legionaries in the Theology Department intended to take action against him"[270].

Memorandum from the Bessarabian Police Inspectorate to the General Police Directorate regarding the manifestation of nationalist sentiment among students at the Faculty of Theology in Chișinău.

"August 7, 1937, Chișinău

Pursuant to your Order No. 35967 of June 7 of this year, we have the honor to report that on May 21 of this year, a group of 30 students from the local Faculty of Theology,

[269] „4 februarie 1937, București,

Comitetul Societății studenților teologi, a hotărât să organizeze un ciclu de conferințe educative, într-un cadru naționalist legionar.

La aceste conferințe, vor fi invitați a vorbi profesorii Nae Ionescu, Mihail Manoilescu, Dragoș Protopopescu, Simion Mehedinți și alții.

În acest scop, Apostol Ion, președintele Societății studenților teologi, va interveni pe lângă decanul acestei facultăți, pentru a da cuvenita autorizare ca aceste conferințe să se țină în amfiteatrul facultății. În cazul unui răspuns negativ, conferințele se vor ține într-o sală culturală", in CNSAS Archives, Documentary Collection, file 008189, f. 69.

[270] „5 februarie 1937, București,

La sediul central al partidului «Totul pentru Țară» a avut loc, în după-amiaza zilei de 4 februarie, o nouă consfătuire a grupului studenților legionari de la Teologie.

S-a dat delegație legionarului instructor Ganciu de a conduce în mod provizoriu acest grup.

S-a discutat în continuare atitudinea pe care o are profesorul Nichifor Crainic față de mișcarea legionară, arătându-se că continuă a publice în «Sfarmă Piatră» articole jignitoare la adresa lui Corneliu Codreanu și a celorlalți fruntași ai Legiunei.

S-a hotărât ca grupul studenților legionari de la Teologie, printr-o intervenție indirectă, să atragă atenția profesorului Crainic de a înceta această campanie, atrăgându-i-se atenția că, în caz contrar, legionarii de la Teologie înțeleg să reacționeze împotriva dânsului", in CNSAS Archives, Documentary Collection, file 008189, f. 70.

led by professors, took a trip to Căpriana Monastery, from where they returned on May 23 of this year. From the train station, they traveled to the faculty by tram, singing national songs.

No action was taken by our authorities, as upon getting off the tram they walked quietly to the dormitory, without engaging in any political demonstrations"[271].

Note from the General Directorate of Police regarding the dissolution of the Committee of the Theology Students' Society at the University of Bucharest

"November 18, 1937, Bucharest

The committee of the Theology Students' Society (now dissolved) is striving to obtain approval from the dean's office of the Faculty of Theology so that it may hold a general assembly to elect a new committee and, at the same time, secure recognition of the society under the university law of spring 1937. On the other hand, the group of Legionary theologians is counting on the fact that, at the eventual general assembly, they will succeed in electing a Legionary committee, given the large number of Legionaries and Legionary sympathizers enrolled in the society compared to that of independent students"[272].

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[271] „7 August 1937, Chișinău

La ordinul Dvs. Nr. 35967 din 7 iunie a.c., avem onoarea de a raporta că în ziua de 21 mai a.c., un număr de 30 de studenți de la Facultatea de Teologie din localitate, conduși de profesori, au făcut o excursie la Mănăstirea Căpriana, de unde s-au înapoiat în ziua de 23 mai a.c. De la gară au venit la facultate cu tramvaiul, intonând cântece naționale.

Nu s-a luat nicio măsură de către organele noastre, deoarece la scoborârea din tramvai s-au dus în liniște până la cămin, neproducând nicio manifestare cu caracter politic", in CNSAS Archives, Documentary Collection, file 008189, f. 71.

[272] „18 noiembrie 1937, București

Comitetul Societății studenților teologi (dizolvată) se străduiește să obțină aprobarea de la decanatul Facultății de Teologie, pentru a putea ține o adunare generală pentru alegerea unui nou comitet și totodată pentru a obține recunoașterea societății pe baza legii universitare din primăvara anului 1937.

Pe de altă parte, grupul legionarilor teologi contează că în eventuala adunare generală va reuși să aleagă un comitet legionar, dat fiind numărul mare de legionari și simpatizanți legionari înscriși în societate, în raport cu cel al studenților independenți", in CNSAS Archives, Documentary Collection, file 008189, f. 73.

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THE PAULICIAN BULGARIANS – AN ETHNO-RELIGIOUS AND ENDOGAMOUS COMMUNITY IN SOUTH-EASTERN BUCHAREST

Cezar-Petre Buiumaci[273]

ABSTRACT

This study traces the two-century history of the Paulician Bulgarians (Pavlicians), a Catholic ethnic-religious community that settled on Bucharest's outskirts – in Cioplea and Popești, on either side of the Dâmbovița River – after fleeing Russian-Turkish conflicts. It examines their role in shaping Bucharest's urban consumption habits and situates them within the city's broader ethnic diversity and "ethno-business" landscape. Renowned as skilled gardeners and cattle breeders, the Pavlicians became the capital's main suppliers of vegetables and dairy, securing a lasting presence in its markets and even altering local eating habits by monopolizing certain products, such as okra. As a closed community, they preserved their language, Catholic faith, and endogamous marriage practices far longer than Orthodox Bulgarians, who assimilated more rapidly. Their agrarian way of life - dependent on open land and the Dâmbovița – was disrupted by forced industrialization and collectivization: their lands were absorbed into agricultural cooperatives (C.A.P.s), and much of Cioplea was demolished to build housing blocks for workers of the new industrial platforms in eastern and southern Bucharest. Today, the Paulician Bulgarian population has dwindled, with Cioplea and Popești now absorbed into new real estate development and inhabited largely by outsiders. Few descendants remain in traditional market occupations, most having transitioned to industrial work under communism and, later, market-economy activities.

Keywords: Paulician Bulgarians, ethnic identity, religious community, urban transformation.

The South Danube Slavs were generically called Serbs by the Romanians, even though most of them were Bulgarians. They migrated due to Ottoman oppression and settled in the vicinity of Bucharest and are mentioned in a statistic from 1830 as follows: "Census of how many Serbs are based here, in the city of Ploieşti, all Bulgarians". During the reign of Michael, the Brave, between 12.000 and 16.000 Bulgarians and Serbs were in Muntenia, from where the name of "Sârbi" comes from. Bulgarians also settled near the capital in Cioplea, Popești-Leordeni or Popești Pavlicheni, Dobroieşti, Chiajna, Giuleşti and in other Ilfov localities, where there was a massive grouping, considering that out of 7.779 South Slavs registered in 1815, 2.232 were in Ilfov. They did not come all at once, but settled here over time, in successive waves, in the time of Matei Basarab, Constantin Brâncoveanu, Alexandru Moruzzi (1793–1798), then in the time of the 1804 Serbian Uprising (1804–1812), the Russo-Turkish war of 1806–1812 and the one that ended in 1828–1829. The latter war was

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followed by a massive emigration wave, unheard of until then, of 16.565 families from the Sliven region in the southern Balkans, of which 6.283 initially chose to settle in Romania[274]. The Bulgarians actively participated in the economic life of the capital, this mention being made of the merchants from Reguz, Chiprovic, Arnautchioi and Gabroven. The Raguzans, originally from Raguza or Dubrovnik, a Slav-Italian mixture, are mentioned since the 16th century, with trade being their main occupation. The Chiprovicans, merchants and silversmiths themselves, were descended from the villages of Chiprovat and Cobilovat, and were the ones who took part in the restoration of the Catholic Church of Bărăţia, destroyed by the Turks in 1659. Arnautchioils were originally from Arnautchioi or Arbănasi, a village destroyed during the Russian-Turkish battles of 1810. The merchants of Gabrovo will later give the name to the street Gabroveni, found in Bucharest. The main occupation of the Bulgarians settled at the gates of Bucharest was agriculture. Being recognized as good gardeners and cattle breeders, the Bulgarians had their own place in the "big market", namely the "Serbs' market"[275], and there was also a locality founded by Bulgarian craftsmen who made postcards, called Postăvari, located between Popești-Leordeni and Frumuşani[276]. While Russian troops were stationed in the Principality, Bulgarian emigrants turned to military leaders to defend their interests. Their complaints were well received, and in 1830 General Kiseleff submitted to the approval of the Moldovan and Wallachian diwans a series of measures designed to protect the Bulgarian communities. Approved first in Moldavia and then, in a more restricted version, in Wallachia, the measures included exemption from taxes for a period of 3 years and payment of half the taxes for the next 6, the conditions under which the colonists could settle in a particular place, their rights and obligations, including the privilege of founding new towns[277].

1. THE PAULICIANS

The Paulicians were part of a heretical sect that appeared between the 6th and 7th centuries in Armenia and were deported to various parts of the Byzantine Empire by Emperor John I Tzimisces (969–975) in order to suppress this group of heretics. But the action had the opposite effect: the Paulicians created strong communities in the places where they were removed, influencing the locals. A similar thing happened in Thrace, where some of the Bulgarians adopted the heresy[278]. As a

[274] Constantin Velichi, „Aşezămintele coloniştilor bulgari din 1830" ["The Settlements of the Bulgarian Colonists of 1830"], in *Romanoslavica*, Vol. III, 1958, p. 118.

[275] Constantin C. Giurescu, *Istoria Bucureştilor din cele mai vechi timpuri până în zilele noastre [The History of Bucharest from the Earliest Times to the Present Day]*, Bucharest, Publishing House for Literature, 1966, pp. 267–269.

[276] *Ibidem*, p. 111.

[277] Constantin Velichi, *op. cit.*, pp. 119–130.

[278] Iosif Gabor, „Din istoria parohiei Popești-Condurat (Leordeni)" ["From the History of the Popești-Condurat (Leordeni) Parish"], in Dănuț Doboș (coord.), *Catolicii din Popeşti-Leordeni: Istorie şi credinţă [Catholics in Popești-Leordeni: History and Faith]*, Bucharest, Roman Catholic Archdiocese Publishing House, 2007a, p. 12.

doctrine they denied the importance of the Old Testament and affirmed the existence of two gods: The evil God of the Old Testament, the Creator of the world and matter, and the good God, the Creator of soul and spirit, the only one worthy of worship. They rejected the Eucharist, the cult of the Virgin Mary, the saints and the incarnation of Jesus, whom they considered an angel. But even in this religious group there were doctrinal currents, at least two identified:

> "some believe in a docetic and dualistic doctrine, and others accept the unity of God but deny the divinity of Christ"[279],

even going so far as to identify a certain closeness with Islam[280]. Iconoclasts, they repudiated the cross[281] but converted to Catholicism between the 16th and 17th centuries. The Paulician Bulgarians would come to venerate the cross[282]. Following the war waged by the Holy League against the Ottoman Empire in 1687–1688, and the Catholic uprising in Chiprovtsi[283], Bulgarian Catholics fell prey to Ottoman vengeance, being massacred, and those who survived emigrated north of the Danube, settling in three centres temporarily under Austrian rule: Craiova, Râmnicu Vâlcea and Brădiceni. Once the Austrians withdrew from Oltenia, the Bulgarians relocated to Banat and Transylvania. Those who settled at the beginning of the 19th century in the south-eastern area of Bucharest found their links with the Bulgarian Catholics in Banat, some even finding close relatives among them[284]. Thirty-five families are mentioned since 1721 in Flămânda (the old name of the village of Moșteni in Teleorman), as well as in Zimnicea or Roșiorii de Vede, but also in Slobozia, today a suburban commune of Giurgiu[285]. In 1806 it is recorded that 16 families settled near Bucharest, part of them

> "on the estate of a Basilian monastery in Marcuța, situated one hour from the city"[286],

and another part

> "settled on an estate called Mora (Moara), at a distance of three hours"[287].

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[279] „unii cred într-o doctrină docetică și dualistă, iar alții care acceptă unitatea lui Dumnezeu, dar neagă divinitatea lui Cristos", in Ilie-Cătălin Grigore, „Controverse şi concordanţe în sursele greceşti şi armeneşti cu privire la erezia paulicienilor" ["Controversies and Convergences in Greek and Armenian Sources Concerning the Paulician Heresy"], in *Pro Memoria*, No. 6/2007, pp. 253–256, p. 260 and p. 262.

[280] *Ibidem*.

[281] Dan Toma Dulciu, *Popeşti-Leordeni. File de istorie. Trecut – Prezent – Perspective, [Popeşti-Leordeni. Pages of history. Past – Present – Perspectives]*, Popeşti-Leordeni, International Publishing House, 2001, p. 46.

[282] Iosif Gabor, *op. cit.*, 2007a, pp. 12–13.

[283] Marius Oanță, *Cioplea, reşedinţă a episcopilor pasionişti (1806–1847). O serie de comunicări [Cioplea, the Residence of the Passionist Bishops (1806–1847): A Series of Papers]*, Craiova, Sitech Publishing House, 2017, p. 46.

[284] Iosif Gabor, *op. cit.*, 2007a, pp. 14–16.

[285] *Ibidem*, p. 19.

[286] „pe moșia unei mănăstiri bazilitane de la Mărcuța, situată la o oră de oraș", in Ieronim Iacob, „Despre începuturile prezenţei catolice în Popești-Condurat" ["On the Beginnings of the Catholic Presence in Popești-Condurat"], in Dănuț Doboș (coord.), *Catolicii din Popeşti-Leordeni: Istorie şi credinţă [Catholics in Popeşti-Leordeni: History and Faith]*, Bucharest, Publishing House of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese, 2007, pp. 43–44.

[287] *Ibidem*.

Although they renounced the Paulician heresy, they were still called so by the others, who still considered them heretics, even though they had converted to Catholicism[288]. The situation in which the Bulgarian Catholics found themselves in their own country is described by a Passionist missionary monk in Bulgaria in his letter to the Emperor of Austria of March 26th 1822, in which he shows that, although they had renounced the Paulician heresy, they were considered heretics, and were forbidden to worship

> "as the Catholics in Turkey are allowed to worship. A stable serves as a disguised church; if it breaks down it is not allowed to be repaired. They are not allowed to have bells in the disguised church, lamps, decorations, crosses, candlesticks, icons, church vestments made even of simple cloth, etc. It is required that cattle be kept in the church, and missionaries are forced to keep the cooking machine here, degrading the house of God into a kitchen and a place of dishonesty. (...) The Turks and Orthodox count and treat them as heretics, they have no authorization for the public exercise of worship, for which reason they are forced to buy this permission temporarily and with gifts to evade the vexations of state officials, but even this is not enough. Holy Liturgy, rosary, religious instruction, visiting the dying sick, prayer, all are done in secret. People are threatened with beatings and often beaten when they come to church, and the priest is threatened with a gun in hand when he is performing his church duties, he is mistreated and the ugliest words are spoken to him. If in one place people riot, the priest is considered the head of the rioters and he too ends up being robbed of everything. No one defends him and he is calumniated without restraint and false pretexts are made to impose exorbitant fines. It is claimed that he attends invalidated weddings because of destructive impediments, especially where the bride is kidnapped. It is claimed that the priest is responsible for the conduct of the people, is threatened with death for every trifle and is regarded as a slave (...)"[289].

2. THE BULGARIANS OF CIOPLEA

Next the attention will be focused on the Bulgarians who settled in the south-east of Bucharest, namely in the localities of Dudești-Cioplea and Popești-Leordeni,

[288] Iosif Gabor, *op. cit.*, 2007a, p. 17.

[289] „așa cum (se) permite exercițiul catolicilor din Turcia. Un grajd servește de biserică deghizată; dacă se strică nu este permis a fi reparată. Nu au voie să aibe clopote, dușumea în bisericuțele deghizate, lămpi, curățenie, decor, cruci, sfeșnice, icoane, odăjdii bisericești confecționate chiar din pânză simplă etc. Se cere ca în biserica să fie ținute vitele la adăpost, iar misionarii sunt siliți să țină aici și mașina de gătit, degradând casa lui Dumnezeu în bucătărie și loc de necinste. (...) Turcii și ortodocșii îi socotesc și îi tratează ca pe eretici, n-au autorizație pentru exercițiul public al cultului, din care cauză sunt nevoiți să cumpere temporar această permisiune și cu cadouri să se sustragă de la vexațiunile funcționarilor de stat, însă nici aceasta nu ajunge. Sf. Litughie, rozariul, instrucția religioasă, vizitarea bolnavilor ce trag de moarte, rugăciunile, toate se fac într-ascuns. Se amenință cu bătaie și de multe ori poporul este lovit atunci când vine la biserică, iar preotul când îndeplinește funcțiunile bisericești este amenințat cu pistolul în mână, este maltratat și i se spun cuvintele cele mai urate. Dacă într-un loc lumea se răscoală, preotul este socotit capul răsculaților și și acesta ajunge că să fie jefuit de toate. Nimeni nu-i ia apărarea și este calomniat fără stingherire și i se aduc pretexte mincinoase pentru a i se impune amenzi exorbitante. Se pretinde că asista la căsătorii invalide din cauza unor piedici distrugătoare, mai ales la care mireasa este răpită. Se susține că preotul este răspunzător de conduita poporului, e amenințat cu moartea pentru orice fleac și e considerat ca un sclav (...)", in *Ibidem*, pp. 17–18.

Catholic Bulgarians also known as Paulician or Pavlician Bulgarians. This attribution of the name Pavlician to the Catholic Bulgarians is used mainly to differentiate them from the Orthodox and not because they assumed the Paulician heresy, considering them (the two attributes) synonymous: Pavlician = Catholic.

The reason why the Bulgarians leave their native lands are the Russian-Turkish war and its aftermath as well as the plague epidemic coming from the Ottoman Empire. This happened immediately after the signing of the Russo-Turkish peace, when the Bulgarians crossed the Danube with Russian troops and settled at the gates of Bucharest, because there was a Catholic church there. The one who had this initiative and who shepherded the Bulgarians all this way was the Passionist missionary Fortunato Ercolani, who is considered the founder of the village of Cioplea on the Dudești estate, the place where the Bulgarians eventually settled and whose name comes most likely from a craft of the population, that of wood or stone carvers. Important details about this emigration are given by the Passionist priest Filippo Squarcia, missionary in Bulgaria and then parish priest in Cioplea between 1827 and 1830, who wrote that

> "one of the Catholic missionaries – wishing to free the Bulgarian Catholics from the tyranny of the Turks – came up with the idea of moving them to Wallachia, where there was religious freedom, and as the territory was unpopulated, they could easily settle there. He raised the problem to the Russian army generals, and this was enough to get all the Bulgarian Catholics to cross with all their cattle to Wallachia. Many of them joined the 200 or so people who had fled there before because of the Bulgars (the Bulgars who were active in Bulgaria, Serbia and Oltenia) and a large number of them settled near Bucharest, where they founded a village called Ciople, which the Russians, having occupied Wallachia, gave to the Catholic bishop who was staying in Bucharest. To this bishop the Russians gave ownership of the village and – as a sign of obedience – the people paid the bishop a small annual tax – until 1828, when the state ownership passed, together with all the Bulgarian settlements, to the ruler in Bucharest"[290].

However, this was not the first emigration of Bulgarian Catholics north of the Danube, this had happened, as mentioned, in successive waves before. 12,000 Bulgarians were settled by Michael the Brave in the Wallachian countryside on the expedition of 1598. A century later, during Constantin Brâncoveanu's time,

[290] „unuia dintre misionarii catolici – în dorința de a-i scăpa pe bulgarii catolici de tirania turcilor – i-a venit ideea să-i treacă în Valahia, unde era libertate religioasă, și cum teritoriul era lipsit de populație, puteau să se așeze cu ușurință acolo. A pus problema generalilor armatei rusești, și acest lucru a fost de ajuns ca toți bulgarii catolici să treacă cu toate vitele lor în Valahia. Mulți s-au unit cu ce cam 200 de inși care fugiseră acolo mai înainte din cauza cârjalilor (tâlhari care acționau în Bulgaria, Serbia dar și Oltenia) și o mare parte din ei s-au stabilit lângă București, unde au întemeiat un sat pe nume Ciople, pe care rușii, ce au ocupat Valahia, l-au dat episcopului catolic care stătea la București. Acestui episcop i-au dat rușii stăpânirea satului și – ca semn al supunerii – oamenii îi plăteau episcopului o mică taxă anuală – până în 1828, când stăpânirea statului a trecut, împreună cu toate așezările bulgărești, la domnitorul din București", in *Idem*, „Parohia Cioplea în veacul al XIX-lea" ["The Cioplea Parish in the Nineteenth Century"], in Dănuț Doboș (coord.), *Cioplea: două veacuri de istorie [Cioplea: Two Centuries of History]*, Bucharest, Roman Catholic Archdiocese Publishing House, 2007b, pp. 15–17.

Bulgarian Catholics emigrated from Chiprovăț to Banat and Muntenia, creating strong communities in Craiova, Câmpulung, Râmnic, Brădiceni, Târgoviște and, probably, Bucharest, where a small community with a small church is recorded since the mid-17th century[291].

The newcomers around Bucharest received a place to live and to build a church from the owner of the estate land. The village was located 1,5 km from the village of Dudești and was set up in 1813, one year after the arrival of 33 families, numbering about 230 inhabitants. In less than ten years there were 300 inhabitants, and in 1884-1885 the village counted 502 villagers[292]. The village, completely inhabited by Paulician Bulgarians, had its own administration, consisting of a representative of the Bishop of Bucharest, assisted by four to six councillors. The Dudescu estate, which also gave the name to the village of Dudești, was sold in 1815 by the owner to Ioan Hagi Moscu, who in turn, around 1828, sold it to Baron Simon de Sina[293]. In the descriptions of the Catholic rulers, the Paulician Bulgarians were stubborn, "stubborn to the point of hatred and revenge", dissatisfied, considered themselves wretched, and were accused by the clergy of having taken over from the native population pagan customs and rituals, such as witchcraft, superstitions and charms, mostly in order to get rid of evils and diseases. One of their characterizations sounds as follows:

> "(...) Bulgarians are humiliated when they are in trouble; then they run to the priest and fulfil all their wishes, but then, when the danger is over, they speak ill of him or, at least, they are stubborn or disobedient to what they are told for their own good and indelicate in their strange ways (...)"[294].

One problem that Ferreri noted was that the parents refused to marry their daughters so that they could stay and help them in the household, which is why they were stolen by the lads and lived without a religious marriage, or by the Turks "who mocked them or kept them for themselves". Any Christian community was defined by the church in its midst. So the religious service was initially held in one of the rooms of the parish house which served as a chapel, so that, a year after their arrival here, the Bulgarians built their own church. So on May 18th 1813 the foundation stone of the first church in Cioplea was consecrated. Its construction began during the Russian occupation, which had given its consent for this, and on August 29th 1813, it was possible to obtain the approval of the ruler Ioan Caragea for the

[291] Carmen Mazăre-Dobrescu, „Aspecte privind dezvoltarea comunității bulgare catolice din Dudești-Cioplea" ["Aspects Regarding the Development of the Bulgarian Catholic Community in Dudești-Cioplea"], in *Materiale de Istorie şi Muzeografie [Materials of History and Museography]*, Vol. XXX, 2016, pp. 267–268.

[292] Iosif Gabor, *op. cit.*, 2007b, pp. 19–21 and p. 53.

[293] *Ibidem*, pp. 17–19.

[294] „(...) Bulgarii sunt umiliți când au necazuri; atunci aleargă la preot și-i împlinesc toate dorințele, dar apoi, trecând primejdia, îl vorbesc de rău sau, cel puțin, sunt încăpățânați sau neascultători la ceea ce li se spune pentru binele lor și îndărătnici în apucăturile lor cele strâmbe (...)", in *Ibidem*, pp. 21–22.

"renovation" of the church. The church was built of wood with clay, had two steeples and was covered with reeds. The church was ruined after a storm on July 5th 1821, followed by a strong earthquake. Thus one of the two Catholic churches of Bucharest disappeared. After more than two years the parish residence and the church was rebuilt by public subscription in which ruler Grigore Ghika himself participated. In Cioplea, the parish house was also the residence of the Bishop of Nicopolis ad Istrum who was also the apostolic administrator of Wallachia, Bulgaria and Serbia[295].

Priest Ieronim Iacob launches the hypothesis that the Bulgarian Pavlicians founded the village of Ciolpea earlier than 1812, namely in 1806, at the beginning of the Russian-Turkish conflict, when he identifies a mention of Monsignor Francesco Ferreri and about which the priest notes that the Bulgarians crossed the Danube and settled in the villages of Slobosia, Flămânda and Cakanova near the river. But at the same time

> "at last, 16 families came to the suburbs of Bucharest, six on the estate of a Basilian monastery at Mărcuţa, situated one hour from the city, and another six families settled on an estate called Mora [Mill], at a distance of three hours"[296].

It is very possible that the six Bulgarian families settled at Mărcuţa were the founders of the village of Dobroieşti. Further, Iacob considers that in 1806 the nucleus of Cioplea village was laid by the settlement here of 16 families, with a number of approximately 90–100 members and that later other families came, reaching a number of approximately 30 families. By the settling of other families, the composition of Cioplea village would be somewhat finalized and will reach somewhere around 120 families totalizing about 700 people. The subsequent decrease in this number is attributed to the return of some of the emigrants to their places of origin and to the ravages of the plague epidemic of 1912–1913. So the author proposes that the period between 1806 and 1812 should be considered as the founding period of the town[297]. The places from where the Bulgarians left for Wallachia are Pleven, Lovec, Sevlievo, Dobric and Ruse. They settled in Muntenia and Oltenia, and those settled in Muntenia are grouped mainly in Ilfov County in the villages of Glina, Chirnogi, Odăile, Ciorogârla, Cățelu, Brănești, Fundulea, Dudești, and those from Dudești, Cioplea, Epurești and Chiajna came from the Ruse area. Although most historians who have studied this community state that the name of Cioplea is given by the Bulgarian Pavlicians who came here, Cioplea, in the form Ceplea, is mentioned in a document issued on the 2nd of June 1707 in the time of Constantin Brâncoveanu[298]. However, even before this date, on the 26th of January

[295] *Ibidem,* pp. 22–26 and p. 33.

[296] „în sfârșit, 16 familii au venit în suburbiile Bucureștiului, șase pe moșia unei mănăstiri bazilitane de la Mărcuța, situată la o ora de oraș, și alte șase familii s-au așezat pe o moșie numită Mora [Moara], la o distanță de trei ore", in Ieronim Iacob, „La o nouă lectură Cioplea – sat de bulgari catolici, întemeiat în anul 1806 la porțile Bucureștiului de ep. Francesco Maria Ferreri" ["A New Reading of Cioplea – a Village of Catholic Bulgarians Founded in 1806 at the Gates of Bucharest by Bishop Francesco Maria Ferreri"], in Dănuț Doboș, *op. cit.*, 2007b, pp. 176–177.

[297] *Ibidem,* pp. 178–180.

[298] Alina Dorojan, „Evoluția administrativă" ["Administrative Evolution"], in *Ibidem,* pp. 189–190.

1621, the "land from Cioplea, which is around the village of Dudești" is mentioned, then on the 7th of April 1623 a deed of purchase of two parts of the same land by the Abbot Gligorie is recorded[299]. Over time the name of the village was spelled differently according to phonetics in Catholic documents written in different languages. Thus in German Cioplea takes the forms Ciopli, Csiöpli, Csiopli, Csople, Csoplu, Tschoplu, Tsöpli, Tsöplu, and in Latin and Italian Ciopple, and in French Tsoplia[300]. The fact that the village has been mentioned since before the arrival of the Bulgarian Pavlicians leads the author to consider erroneous the theory that the village got its name from one of the occupations of these foreigners[301].

As for the two Bulgarian communities in Dudești and Cioplea, they have different origins, so that those living in Ciolpea are originally from the village of Svestov in northern Bulgaria, while those in Dudești were from the villages of Sliven and Karnabat, a region in the centre of the neighbouring country. So, the two communities in such close proximity came from different areas and had different confessions, which is why there were no marriages between members of the two Bulgarian communities[302]. The similarities between the two communities were not only the language they spoke but also the occupations they practiced, namely gardening and raising cattle for the purpose of supplying Bucharest with vegetables and dairy products[303].

A series of negative events in the first half of the 19th century that befell Cioplea village endangered its very existence. The plague epidemics of 1828–1829, the locust invasion of 1830, the cholera epidemic of 1831 (during which 44 inhabitants of Cioplea died) and the great disease that affected cattle the following year. In addition to these there were the complaints about the compulsory work, which would increase from 12 days to 56 days following the implementation of the Organic Regulations. These issues threatened the existence of the village and even made some people leave it. On November 1st 1853 the entire parish complex, which included both the church and the parish house with its outbuildings, was destroyed in a fire that left a pile of ashes in its wake. The church was rebuilt by Catharina Cardini, born Timotei, widow of the Italian merchant Ieronim Cardini-Momolo, who died on February 27th 1859, being buried in the cemetery of Cioplea.

Completed in 1859, the church keeps in a niche the epitaph that recalls the donation that made possible the reconstruction of the church. The parish house was rebuilt a little earlier, between 1856 and 1857, via public subscription and with the help of the congregation "De Propaganda Fide". Over time, both the church and the parish house underwent modifications and additions that allowed the creation of a crypt for the remains of the founder and the priests and the creation of a social

[299] Daniela Butnaru, „Toponimia satului Cioplea" ["The Toponymy of the Village of Cioplea"], in *Ibidem*, p. 203.
[300] *Ibidem*, p. 204.
[301] *Ibidem*, pp. 204–205.
[302] Alina Dorojan, *op. cit.*, pp. 192–193.
[303] *Ibidem*, p. 201.

settlement that included an orphanage and a home for the elderly. It is worth mentioning that at the end of the renovation works in 1931 a statue of St. Francis of Assisi with the Wolf of Gubbio was placed in front of the entrance to the church. The Passionist monks who took care of the parish were also based here. The seminary that had been in the bishop's house in Bucharest was moved here in 1874 and functioned here until 1893 when it received a new building, next to St. Joseph's Cathedral. A parish school also functioned here[304].

The community of Pavlician Bulgarians managed to survive for almost two centuries because it was a closed society for outsiders even in Wallachia, where they found a tolerant environment compared to the Muslim one in Bulgaria. Relationships with outsiders were purely commercial and marriages with outsiders were excluded. Even with the nearby Orthodox Bulgarians such as those from Dudești or Dobroieşti, the Pavlicians did not interfere. The only possible marriages were with Bulgarians from Popești or with Bulgarians of the Catholic rite. A characteristic of the community was the stealing of fiancées when the parents did not agree with the marriage or keeping the girls too long in the household in order to help with field work[305].

By establishing the episcopal residence of the Bulgarian-Wallachian Diocese in Cioplea, the locality became

> "the religious centre of Catholicism in the Danube area, on both sides of the river"[306].

The main occupations of the Pavlician Bulgarians were gardening and raising cattle. The good knowledge of these skills quickly gave them the status of the main supply source for Bucharest. Moreover, by cultivating certain types of vegetables, they managed to modify some of the gastronomic habits of the locals, such as okra consumption. Thus, the Bulgarians from Pavlich managed to establish themselves in this segment, even getting a special place in the market, namely the "Serbian market", a generic name given by the locals to the Bulgarians. Even if it is not a local farmer's market, the "Serbian" market defined the ethnicity of those who sold there. We mentioned earlier that Romanians called the Bulgarians by the name of Serbs, along with those who were of Serbian origin. C. Giurescu writes about this in *The History of Bucharest*:

> "Others have South Slavic, Serbian or Bulgarian blood. For centuries, the capital of Wallachia saw the arrival of refugees from across the Danube, who left their native lands to escape from Turkish oppression. We called them all 'Serbs', whether they were really Serbs or Bulgarians. And this name was used by peasants and city dwellers alike, who until the mid-20th century knew of the 'Serbs with vegetables', although they were dealing with Bulgarians. In a statistic from September 1st 1830, we read:

[304] Iosif Gabor, *op. cit.*, 2007b, pp. 28–35 and p. 51.

[305] „centrul religios al catolicismului din spațiul danubian, de ambele părți ale fluviului", in Ilie Cătălin Grigore, „Repere etnografice" ["Ethnographic Landmarks"], in Dănuț Doboș, *op. cit.*, 2007b, pp. 216–218.

[306] „centrul religios al catolicismului din spațiul danubian, de ambele părți ale fluviului", in Alina Dorojan, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

> 'Census of how many Serbs are staying here, in the city of Ploiești, *all Bulgarians*'. (...) The settlement of Cioplea, founded in 1812 by Bulgarian Catholics from the villages near Nicopol, on the Danube, is also due to the colonists; their descendants have preserved their language to this day. Other colonists settled in Popeștii-Pavlicheni, which still bears the adjective 'Serbs', others in Dobroiești, near Fundenii-Doamnei, becoming gardeners and dairymen – the two specialities of the South Slavic colonists – others in Chiajna and Giulești, at the opposite end of the Bucharest area, others, finally, in various villages in Ilfov, closer or further away from the Capital. Of the 7.799 families of South Slavs, noted in the 1815 census in the whole of Muntenia, 2.232 are in the former county of Ilfov, therefore near Bucharest and, this time, are listed as 'Bulgarians'"[307].

Another theory was found by Alina Dorojan, who presents the fact that the road to Serbia – "the road to the Serbs" or "the road of the Serbs" – that is to say Calea Văcărești, passed through the vicinity of the properties of the nobles who owned the villages of Dudești-Cioplea or Popești-Leordeni[308]. As for the Bulgarians being similar to Serbs, we have our own theory. So we can take into account that there are several elements that have played a part in the construction of this name: the similarity of language – both are Slavic languages, so for the Romanians they spoke the same language; the proximity – both peoples came from south of the Danube; the similarity of occupations, namely gardening. Another reason could be that the Romanians considered the Serbs as friends, since there was no conflict between the Romanians and the Serbs throughout the centuries (with small exceptions that reinforce the rule). Thus, it may be a hypothesis that the Romanians preferred to consider Serbs, *i.e*. friends, the Bulgarians settled around them and that they tolerated and finally accepted them. This last theory I also put down to the tolerance and hospitality of the Romanian people who lived for centuries with different nationalities in their neighbourhood without coming into conflict with them. Another common point is the Ottoman oppression of both peoples.

The high production and quality of the Bulgarian products was recognized by their acceptance in the canning factories. Milk and milk products were also appreciated by the people of Bucharest both by consumers and by chefs and

[307] „Alții au sânge sud slavic, sârb sau bulgar. Timp de secole, capitala Țării Românești a văzut sosind refugiați de dincolo de Dunăre, care-și părăseau ținuturile natale pentru a scăpa de opresiunea turcească. Le ziceam la toți «sârbi», indiferent dacă erau intradevar sârbi sau bulgari. Și acest nume se întrebuința nu numai de țărani sau târgoveți, care până în plin veac al XX-lea știu de «sârbul cu zarzavat» și de «sârbărie», deși au de-a face cu bulgari, dar și de oficialitate. Într-o statistică din 1 septembrie 1830 citim: «Catagrafie de cați sârbi se află cu sedererea aici, în orașul Ploiești, toți bulgari». (...) Tot coloniștilor li se datorează și așezarea Cioplea, întemeiată în 1812 de bulgari catolici din satele de lângă Nicopol, pe Dunăre; descendenții lor și-au păstrat până astăzi limba. Alți coloniști s-au stabilit la Popeștii-Pavlicheni, care poartă și acum calificativul de «sârbi», alții la Dobroiești, lângă Fundenii-Doamnei, ajungând grădinari și lăptari cuprinși – cele două specialități ale coloniștilor sud-slavi – alții la Chiajna și Giulești, în extremitatea opusă a ariei bucureștene, alții, în sfârșit, în diverse sate din Ilfov, mai aproape sau mai departe de Capitală. Din cele 7.799 de familii de sud-slavi, constatate în catagrafia din 1815 în întreaga Muntenie, 2.232 se afla în fostul județ al Ilfovului, deci în preajma Bucureștilor și, de data aceasta, sunt trecute sub numele de «bulgare»", in Constantin C. Giurescu, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

[308] Alina Dorojan, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

confectioners. The Bulgarians from Dudești, great breeders of cattle and oxen, were also well known in this branch. In Dudești-Cioplea at the beginning of the last century there were no less than 2.000 cows. In addition to these occupations the Bulgarians of Cioplea were known for making traditional shirts, leather waistcoats, woollen clothing such as stockings, gloves and the like. Another occupation was the transportation of goods and people, first with carts, then with vehicles, carrying products such as agricultural goods from the fields where they were cultivated, sand, gravel and other building materials. The nearby existence of the sand quarry or the fabric factory in Dudești offered new opportunities for the Bulgarians of Cioplea[309].

The inclusion of Dudești-Cioplea in Bucharest subjected the community of Bulgarian Pavlicians to the effects of the development of the city through urbanization called for by the forced industrialization promoted by the communist regime. This urbanization involved the demolition of houses in a large area of the locality's surface, torn down to make way for the housing blocks that were being built. The inhabitants of the demolished houses received housing in other Bucharest neighbourhoods, which contributed to the de-structuring and shrinking of the community[310]. In parallel, Bucharest's industry functioned as a magnet for people from the province, mainly from the rural areas, who settled in the large Titan - Balta-Albă district. Some of these were Catholic believers, mostly from the Moldavian area, who could be more easily accepted into the community through intermarriage as opposed to the Orthodox. As for mixed marriages, those of Greek-Catholic or Protestant confession were preferred, or those coming from Transylvania or Hungary. We note that after 1943 the rate of marriages increased 3 times, and that of mixed marriages 10 times[311]. At the same time, the inclusion of the locality in Bucharest led to an accelerated interaction of the community with the outside, which led to an alteration of the language spoken by the Bulgarians. In her study of the language and folk costume of the Pavlicians from Cioplea, Gabriela Mitu mentions the three component elements that create the identity of an ethnic group: language, dress and objects and mentions that the first one that "came out on stage" was the folk costume, followed by the Pavlician speech[312].

In Ciolpea, the parish priest Fabian Mariut told me on the 18th of October 2022 that there are about 1.500 parishioners who are of Bulgarian origin. In the discussion I had on October 14th 2022 with Dr. Marius Oanţă, researcher of the Cioplea community and author of the book *Cioplea, Residence of the Passionist Bishops (1806–1847). A series of communications and other studies on the community of Cioplea*, he is of the opinion that there are about 800 families of believers in Cioplea, of which only a

[309] Ilie-Cătălin Grigore, *op. cit.*, pp. 219–222 and Constantin C. Giurescu, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

[310] Ilie-Cătălin Grigore, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

[311] *Idem*, „Interpretări demografice pe baza registrelor parohiale din Cioplea" ["Demographic Interpretations Based on the Parish Registers of Cioplea"], in *Pro Memoria*, No. 9, 2010, pp. 98–101.

[312] Gabriela Mitu and Marius Oanţă, „Aspecte etnografice şi lingvistice ale bulgarilor pavlicheni din Cioplea" ["Ethnographic and Linguistic Aspects of the Pavlikan Bulgarians of Cioplea"], in *Pro Memoria*, No. 10–11, 2011–2012, pp. 158, p. 168 and p. 172.

quarter are of Bulgarian origin. The total figures are similar: 800 families – 1.500 parishioners, but differ when it comes to ethnic origin.

3. THE HOLY CROSS PARISH (SFÂNTA CRUCE PARISH)

After the establishment of the Holy Cross Parish in Mihai Bravu Boulevard, some of the Catholic parishioners whose houses were demolished during the last communist decade and who were assigned to the Socului Boulevard area (now Chișinău Boulevard), started to attend this church. The Holy Cross Parish was founded by the Archbishop and Metropolitan Bishop of Bucharest, Dr. Ioan Robu, in 1987. Initially, on this place there was a chapel of the Armenian Catholics, which was taken over by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Bucharest in 1956, as the religious services of the Armenian parishioners could not be held due to lack of priests. From this date until 1963, the "Holy Cross" Chapel was under the administration of the "Sancta Maria Gratiarum" parish – Bărăția, then it became a branch of the parish of the "Saint Joseph" Cathedral. With the new territorial delimitation in 1975, the chapel became a branch of the Cioplea parish. The construction of the present church started in 1992 and was finalised on May 21st 1998[313]. The data collected in 2021, on the occasion of the consecration of the houses, included the parish which "consists of 759 whole families and 483 half-families, with 2080 souls"[314]. According to the discussion I had on October 9th2022 with the parish priest Florin Bejenaru, out of this total about one third are the Ciopleni faithful. Initially, the parish was composed exclusively of Bulgarian Pavlicians displaced from Cioplea, now their number in the parish is a minority. Moreover, some of those displaced from their homes in Cioplea still attend the Catholic Church in Cioplea. So we cannot speak of a complete migration of those from the Chișinău Boulevard area to the parish in Mihai Bravu. This attachment to the place where they lived and to the church of the community can also be observed among the Orthodox Bulgarians from Dudești, neighbours of those from Ciolpea, who after their houses were demolished and they were moved to other areas of the city, still return to the services held at the Church of Saint Nicholas, where they see their relatives and elders[315]. However, the number of parishioners of this parish has increased since 1998 when there were only 400 families, a number that will quickly increase to 600 families, totalling 1600 parishioners. In 2005 the situation is as

[313] Narcis Ispas and Marius Oanță, *Biserica şi Capela «Sfânta Cruce». Schiță de monografie istorică [The Church and Chapel of the 'Holy Cross': A Historical Monograph]*, s.n., Bucharest, 2012, pp. 11–14.

[314] Parohia Sfânta Cruce, „Istoric" ["History"], in *Sfânta Cruce [The Holy Cross]*, Available at: https://sfantacruce.ro/despre, Accessed on August, 2022.

[315] Sanda Larionescu, „Cartierul Titan-Balta Albă" ["The Titan–Balta Albă District"], in Paula Popoiu (coord.), *Relaţii de vecinătate în localități urbane din sudul ţării [Neighbourhood Relations in Urban Settlements of Southern Romania]*, Bucharest, Paideia Publishing House, 2006, p. 47.

follows: 524 whole families and 348 half families, with 1785 souls[316]. The parish priest, Florin Bejenaru, with whom he had a discussion on this topic on October 9th 2022, estimates, out of the total number of parishioners, a percentage of 30% as believers of Bulgarian origin, coming from Cioplea parish and assigned to Chișinău Boulevard after the demolitions of the 1980s.

4. ST. THERESA PARISH

From the conversation I had on October 18th 2022 with the priest of Cioplea Parish, Fabian Măriuţ about the parishioners, he told me that in addition to those who go to Holy Cross, there are a significant number of parishioners who were part of Cioplea Parish and now attend St. Theresa Church. From the parish priest here, Nicolae Farcaș, we learned that there are about 200 parishioners, out of the 3000 of the parish, who were distributed in two blocks on Olteniței Road, at Piața Sudului (with one Catholic family on each floor) with the demolitions that took place in the last decade of the communist regime. The Church of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus Parish is located on Olteniței Road at no. 3–5 and was founded in 1975. The parish church was built in 1937 and consecrated by His Eminence Alexandru Cisar and repaired in 1984[317].

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[316] Narcis Ispas and Marius Oanță, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

[317] Arhiepiscopia Romano-Catolică din București, „Parohia Sfânta Tereza a Pruncului Isus (București)" ["St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus Parish (Bucharest)"], in *Arhiepiscopia Romano-Catolică din București [Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Bucharest]*, Available at: https://arcb.ro/website/arhidieceza/parohiisicler/parohiidiecezane/parohiasfantaterezaapruncului-isus/, Accessed on October 18, 2022.

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PERFORMING THE SELF IN DIGITAL INDIA: NEGOTIATING IDENTITY, AUDIENCE, AND IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Harshdeep Kaur[318]

ABSTRACT

The intensification of integration between social media and people's lives results in profound changes in identity performance and impression management within the contemporary society. While there is some scientific literature dedicated to exploring digital identity and online communications, comparatively little attention has been paid to these phenomena from the viewpoint of classical sociological theories. Therefore, in the present paper, Erving Goffman's dramaturgical approach will be applied to identify the patterns of impression management and identity performance by Indian social media users. To achieve the research objectives, a qualitative secondary-data analysis method will be used relying on the content analysis of peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, sociological theory, and digital-media reports. Data will be taken from DataReportal's Digital 2024: India, which estimates that, in 2024, there are approximately 462 million social media users and 362.9 million Instagram users in India. The study also draws information from scholarly publications discussing identity construction, digital self-presentation, online audience management, and impression management. Applying Goffman's terms of front stage, back stage, audience segregation, and impression management, this research examines the strategies adopted by social media users to perform desired online identities. The fact that family, peer, and professional audiences overlap on social media leads to a blurring of lines between public and private identities and creates novel conditions for social interaction and identity performance. With the help of dramaturgical theory adapted to the Indian digital reality, this article demonstrates that classical sociological theories can be still relevant in interpreting contemporary online behaviours' and phenomena.

Keywords: dramaturgical theory, social media, digital identity, impression management, India.

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of modern digital communication technologies has led to significant transformations in the ways social interaction occurs nowadays. Contemporary social platforms like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, X (formerly known as Twitter), and LinkedIn have become an integral part of everyday life of millions of people. Unlike conventional means of communication, social media give an opportunity for people to produce continuous representations of themselves and display them to various audiences. Therefore, social networks become not just channels for communication but complex social environments where identity is negotiated and performed.

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The importance of social media for India cannot be underestimated. In the past decades, India experienced a fast digitalization process, Internet became widely available, and smartphones started being used regularly. Today in India there are approximately 462 million social media users and 751.5 million internet users[319]. Particularly Instagram attracted approximately 362.9 million users, demonstrating its popularity in this country.

The growing prominence of social media in everyday life and communication generates many questions concerning the processes of constructing online identities. On social media people may express themselves freely, but at the same time, they have the ability to present only the most favorable representation of themselves[320]. The users can choose the photos they want to post, edit the personal information they disclose to the audience, regulate what kind of information they are looking for, etc. Thus, these actions make people wonder whether such a level of control makes the digital identity authentic or not.

Among numerous approaches to identity construction and performance, the dramaturgical model by Erving Goffman should be singled out. Goffman's work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) explains why he perceives social interaction as the performance of actors who try to create the desired impressions among their audiences[321]. Using such concepts as front stage, back stage, audience segregation, and impression management, Goffman demonstrates how people represent themselves and interact in different settings. Despite the fact that dramaturgical theory has been developed for analyzing face-to-face interactions, it is very relevant when studying people's activities in digital spaces.

First, dramaturgical perspective can be easily extended to social networks due to their similarity to theatres. User profiles, photographs, videos, stories, posts, comments, and conversations represent symbolic artifacts through which people create impressions in virtual environments. Secondly, the conditions of performance have changed dramatically due to the persistency, accessibility, and visibility of the content created on digital platforms. People can watch the performances recorded long ago as well as constantly observe the changes in profiles' content.

There are many scholarly publications that focus on self-presentation and interaction on social networks. Some researchers discuss the strategies of creating and sustaining digital identity, others pay attention to the issue of audience management, while some authors highlight influencers' culture, online reputation formation, or any

[319] Simon Kemp, "Digital 2024: India", in *Data Reportal*, February 21, 2024, Available at: https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-india, Accessed on September 10, 2026.

[320] See:

1. Danah Boyd, *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2014;

2. Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, New York, Basic Books, 2011.

[321] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Garden City, New York, Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959.

other aspect of digital interaction. The problem is that these studies mostly rely on the data collected in Western countries. Meanwhile, the process of social interaction in the digital space is unique even if the principles behind it are the same for every person. Therefore, there is a lack of literature on how dramaturgy operates in the Indian context.

Considering the fact that social media is becoming increasingly important in India, it is relevant to explore how people use it and how their performances take place. The social context in India is quite specific since people perform before the audience formed by their family members, friends, teachers, bosses, peers, and others. In this way, social media becomes an environment for negotiating various identities. Besides, the blurring of the boundaries between front and back stages can be another interesting topic to discuss within the scope of this research.

Thus, the present paper examines how users perform on Indian social media with the help of dramaturgical theory and data provided by peer-reviewed literature and statistical reports. Applying classical sociological ideas to the process of digital communication and identity construction, the author tries to demonstrate the applicability of classical sociological theories in explaining contemporary digital phenomena.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Social media and social interaction

The development of social networks has had a significant impact on social interaction since they are not only communication mediums but also unique social spaces. Social media allows people to consume and produce content actively. Furthermore, social networks are considered powerful environments for social relations construction[322].

One of the most popular topics related to social media is self-presentation. People use online platforms as means of constructing their identities. Social networks give users a great deal of freedom for expressing themselves, communicating with peers, sharing photos and videos, discussing interesting topics, and creating impressions[323]. It can be stated that social media is a place where people can show only the best sides of themselves.

Besides, online communication is viewed as one of the main causes of people's tendency towards impression management. In the modern digitalized society,

[322] See:
1. Danah Boyd, *op. cit.*;
2. José Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013.

[323] Nicole B. Ellison, Rebecca Heino and Jennifer Gibbs, "Managing Impressions Online: Self-Presentation Processes in the Online Dating Environment", in *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11(2), 2006, pp. 415–441.

individuals believe that others lead a better life judging from their online content, so they start presenting themselves in the desired way[324]. Social media can be viewed as spaces where people can develop and nurture various identities.

2.2. Self-presentation on social networks

Self-presentation is one of the central concepts used in sociological research to understand how online interaction occurs. This term refers to all the efforts made by people to influence other people's impressions about them positively. On social networks, users can employ special techniques to achieve this aim.

For instance, some scholars believe that the possibilities that people have to create and nurture their identities are much greater on social networks due to the specific character of such interactions[325]. Manago *et al*. found that the development of social networking sites allows people to explore their identities and present different selves on the Internet[326]. This process is facilitated by the availability of editing features on social media.

Additionally, the visual orientation of many social networks expands people's opportunities for constructing their identities[327]. The presence of photo editing features helps people create the best representations of themselves. High-quality photographs, videos, profile pictures, and captions become tools of performing certain social roles and constructing different social identities.

As the literature proves, online identities are constructed and maintained with regard to audience expectations[328]. In the process of interaction on social networks, people get continuous feedback in the form of likes, comments, shares, views, and followers. Based on their reactions, people can adapt their future behavior to the audience needs and requirements.

2.3. Impression management on social media

Impression management is a common topic discussed by scholars interested in online communication. It refers to the process during which a person attempts to create the impression he/she wants to be conveyed to the audience.

[324] Hui-Tzu Grace Chou and Nicholas Edge, "'They Are Happier and Having Better Lives than I Am': The Impact of Using Facebook on Perceptions of Others' Lives", in *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 15(2), 2012, pp. 117–121.

[325] Shanyang Zhao, Sherri Grasmuck and Jason Martin, "Identity Construction on Facebook: Digital Empowerment in Anchored Relationships", in *Computers in Human Behavior*, 24(5), 2008, pp. 1816–1836.

[326] Adriana M. Manago et al., "Self-Presentation and Gender on MySpace", in *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 29(6), 2008, pp. 446–458.

[327] *Ibidem*.

[328] *Ibidem*.

Researchers suggest that there are some distinctive features of impression management on social media. They include selective posting of content, photo editing, restriction or expansion of the audience, deleting of posts, etc.[329]. All these strategies aim at presenting an individual as socially desirable, attractive, intelligent, competent, etc.[330].

Unlike face-to-face interaction, social-media communication provides more opportunities for impression management since the content created on social networks can be permanently available[331]. In this way, a person always has the ability to look at his/her posts and think about the way in which he/she presented him/herself. This circumstance makes people pay more attention to the image they are building.

The process of impression management is no longer limited to social interactions since it occurs both personally and professionally[332]. There are special websites that allow professionals to maintain a positive online presence and build career-enhancing reputations. In this way, it becomes clear that impression management includes various elements from different spheres of life.

2.4. Audience segregation on social networks

Another important topic discussed by scholars studying online social interaction is audience segregation. From the dramaturgical viewpoint, individuals can maintain different social roles for different audiences. During face-to-face interaction, people can behave in one way for their parents and grandparents, in another way for their friends and neighbors, and in yet another way for their coworkers and superiors.

Social media, however, complicates the situation since individuals can be in touch with various audiences at the same time. Marwick and Boyd introduce the term 'context collapse,' implying that people use social networks to contact various audiences that were kept separated offline[333]. On social networks, individuals interact with their parents, peers, teachers, employers, and others. Such a situation forces users to adopt certain strategies to cope with overlapping audiences.

According to the literature, audience segregation is now regarded as an important element of social interaction. Since individuals tend to have multiple social roles, there is a need to maintain different audiences and perform differently in each case. This practice creates quite complicated social environments since users should keep all the audience separate.

[329] Alice E. Marwick and Danah Boyd, "I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately: Twitter Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience", in *New Media & Society*, 13(1), 2011, pp. 114–133.

[330] Bernie Hogan, "The Presentation of Self in the Age of Social Media: Distinguishing Performances and Exhibitions Online", in *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, 30(6), 2010, pp. 377–386.

[331] *Ibidem*.

[332] *Ibidem*.

[333] Alice E. Marwick and Danah Boyd, *op. cit.*

2.5. Dramaturgical theory in digital age

Dramaturgical theory by Erving Goffman remains topical to date. In his seminal book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman introduces a metaphor comparing social interaction with theatre where performers represent themselves and interact with their audiences trying to leave favorable impressions[334]. Later, some researchers tried to apply this theoretical perspective to social media interactions[335].

It is possible to say that, in many cases, dramatic performance and online identity are similar. Social-media profiles are exhibitions where performers present persistent artifact' to their online audiences[336]. However, the basic concepts of Goffman's theory can be employed when analyzing online interaction as well.

Front stage and back stage are the two most important aspects of Goffman's dramaturgical approach. Social-media profiles, posts, and videos belong to front stage where individuals perform their identities to the public audience, while back stage may include, for example, private messages, conversations in restricted groups, or anonymous accounts.

Digital environments require reconsidering the distinction between front and back stages since there is no guarantee that any piece of information will stay private[337]. The persistence, availability, and accessibility of information create conditions for blurring the line between private and public social performances.

2.6. Social media in India

India can be called one of the largest and fastest-developing digital societies. There is no doubt that in India there is the fast development of social media since today in India there are approximately 462 million social media users and 751.5 million internet users[338]. Particularly Instagram attracts approximately 362.9 million users.

There are plenty of studies related to online self-presentation, social networks, digital identity, etc., yet it seems that not enough attention is paid to these phenomena from the Indian sociological perspective. The majority of papers discussing social networks are dedicated to technology adoption, digital marketing, and political communication, yet little attention is devoted to studying social media users and the specifics of social media performance in India.

In fact, social media performance in India has several distinctive features since people in India live in specific social environments. For example, they maintain close

[334] Erving Goffman, *op. cit.*
[335] Bernie Hogan, *op. cit.*
[336] *Ibidem.*
[337] *Ibidem.*
[338] Simon Kemp, *op. cit.*

connections with their relatives, they have many expectations from their peers, teachers, employers, colleagues, and other social actors that surround them. In this way, their interaction and identity performances on social media become quite complicated.

3. RESEARCH GAP

Based on the review of literature, three gaps can be mentioned. Firstly, the majority of studies focus on the Western context, thus neglecting the issue of social media use in India, identity performance, and impression management in this particular country. Secondly, it seems that sociologists rarely refer to classical sociological theories when studying digital identity, impression management, and other aspects related to social media. Lastly, there is little empirical literature considering the recent statistical data about India's social media use.

Taking into account the outlined gaps, the present paper tries to bridge them by introducing classical sociological theory to Indian social media users. The paper examines how Indian people perform their identities, manage impressions, negotiate the audiences and cope with new challenges of digital age.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of the study is to explore the processes of identity construction and impression management among Indian social media users through the prism of dramaturgical theory developed by Erving Goffman. In the age of increased digital connectivity and widespread use of social networks, individuals continuously perform their selves to their online audiences. Therefore, there is a need for understanding how social interaction takes place in digitally mediated environments.

The research objectives are to:

1. Investigate the ways Indian social media users construct and present their digital identity on social-networking platforms.
2. Analyze the strategies employed by Indians to manage impressions on social networks.
3. Examine the applicability of Goffman's concepts of front stage and back stage in the contemporary digital context.
4. Explore how social media performance is affected by the process of audience segregation and context collapse.
5. Find out how Indian social and cultural context affects social media use and impression management strategies.
6. Discuss the applicability of the classical approach to impression management and online identity construction.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1. Research design

Since it is necessary to interpret the processes of identity construction and management on social media, secondary data analysis should be chosen as the methodology for conducting this research. It implies that the researcher will not collect primary data themselves.

5.2. Sources of data

All the information used in the analysis will come from secondary sources including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic monographs, sociological theory, research reports, and digital-media researches. Statistical data about social media and Internet use in India will be taken from recently issued digital reports (particularly, Digital 2024: India published by DataReportal[339]).

5.3. Method of data collection

For identifying the literature on the issues of interest, the databases Google Scholar, JSTOR, ResearchGate, Sage Journals, etc will be searched. The search criteria will include the following keywords: “social media”, “social network”, “digital identity”, “impression management”, “audience segregation”, “online self-presentation”, etc. Peer-reviewed papers focusing on the issues of interest will be chosen for further analysis.

5.4. Method of analysis

Content analysis will be the key method for collecting and organizing the findings. Thematic analysis of the literature will be conducted based on the concepts proposed by Goffman in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

5.5. Theoretical framework

The theoretical perspective chosen to conduct the study is dramaturgical theory proposed by Goffman[340]. This theory will provide the theoretical framework for analyzing the process of identity construction and performance on social media as well as the processes of managing impressions online.

[339] *Ibidem.*
[340] Erving Goffman, *op. cit.*

5.6. Scope and limitations

The focus of the research is on Indian social media users. Since secondary data will be used as the source of information, this paper will be based on the literature and statistical information about social media in India. Primary data collection will not be performed in the course of this research.

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

6.1. Social media as a digital front stage

According to the findings, social media serves as a stage in modern times where people act in order to establish their identities in front of different audiences. As suggested by Goffman's dramaturgy model, social media users make deliberate efforts of presenting themselves in ways that create good impressions among other users. This is achieved via social media applications such as Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and X (formerly known as Twitter). In its turn, the current research paper seeks to examine technological environments where ongoing performance of the self is facilitated through pictures, videos, status updates, stories, commentaries, and social interactions.

In conventional social environments, social performances happen in limited social contexts and are often limited in terms of time and location. In digital platforms, however, social performances tend to transcend direct contacts, and user-generated content can be reviewed for a long period of time. As a result, social performances in digital environments tend to gain in importance as people tend to revisit, assess, and interpret their performances throughout a long period. Therefore, the notion of impression management gains special importance as people's digital performance constitutes their identity in digital spaces.

As shown above, social media users rarely provide complete pictures of themselves. Social media users share photographs and other types of content that help them to create positive social images, such as pictures showing achievements, vacations, academic success, professional successes, fitness activities, and social life. On the contrary, personal losses, mistakes, problems, failures, or negative emotions do not usually appear in online pictures. In this regard, social performances on digital media reflect the postulate by Goffman who states that performers intentionally control the amount of information to be provided.

Moreover, today's digital social media platforms are visualized. Various options, such as photo editing, stories highlighting, and profile customization, are among the means that allow users to create specific digital images, which are carefully crafted. In other words, social media performances tend to be highly controlled as users present carefully prepared images of certain lifestyles and social identities rather than natural manifestations of their social selves.

In the Indian context, front-stage performances are expected by multiple audiences simultaneously. Namely, people have to meet expectations associated with families, peer groups, educational organizations, work places, and other social groups at once. Thus, their social performances in digital environments involve the attempt to strike a balance between personal representation and social norms.

Therefore, the hypothesis stating that digital environments increased the scope of social performances was confirmed by this research.

The paper argues that social media functions as the modern performative platform wherein identity construction emerges as the regular part of daily interactions through diverse audiences mediated via various processes.

6.2. Impression management and curated identity

One of the key conclusions made during the analysis is that social media users are actively involved in impression management practices through the curation of their digital identities. Based on the work of Goffman, people attempt to impact the formation of others' impressions by controlling information within social interactions[341]. The evolution of such process became more complex owing to the possibilities created by social media sites.

In fact, it has been revealed that people hardly share any piece of information accidentally. On the contrary, users tend to select the content they decide to distribute, edit, and organize in a particular way to communicate their desirable qualities. Photographs, captions, stories, and personal profile description are all carefully crafted in order to represent identity based on such categories as beauty, success, intellectuality, professionalism, creativity, or sociability.

Selective self-disclosure represents one of the most important elements of impression management. People choose which pieces of information to disclose about themselves and which ones to withhold from their online audience. Positive events –graduation, promotions at work, parties, holidays, or successful attempts at something – are often shared in their social media accounts. Negative experiences like failures, conflicts, disappointments, and other similar occurrences are left out of people's virtual life. This creates the idealized self-presentation that may differ greatly from real-life experience.

The increasing role of images in communication via social media only strengthens impression management practices among users. They are provided with a large number of editing tools in order to make their photographs and videos look better before sharing them. Moreover, filters, various image enhancing applications, and different customizations are used in such process.

Audience feedback mechanisms contribute significantly to identity creation. For instance, likes, comments, sharing, views, and followers' numbers are some

[341] *Ibidem.*

metrics of social acceptance and visibility. The results suggest that social media users continuously track their audiences' responses and plan future posts based on the outcomes. Posts that attract more attention are likely to be replicated in the future, whereas those that do not get enough attention are likely to be deleted or edited. Hence, the process of identity performance becomes interactive since it involves the constant influence of interactions between performers and spectators.

In the Indian socio-cultural context, the concept of impression management involves meeting a number of conflicting social expectations. Young Indians are forced to meet social expectations both from their families, peers, teachers, colleagues, and employers. This is why an online identity usually includes a balance between modern life and culture. Indian users try to build a progressive and digitized identity without violating social norms and standards that govern Indian society.

It is important to note that impression management does not refer exclusively to interpersonal interactions since social media is also used for professional purposes. Platforms like LinkedIn require users to create an image that reflects their academic background, skills, successes, and career goals. In this way, digital identities become integral to employment and career development. Therefore, the use of social media is not merely social since users interact with potential employers and customers as well.

In summary, one can conclude that impression management continues to remain the key element of social media. Even though the technological environment creates new mechanisms for creating impressions, the social phenomena revealed by Goffman have not disappeared. Modern social media users build their identities, control the flow of information, and manage their audiences in accordance with Goffman's principles.

6.3. Audience segregation, context collapse, and identity negotiation

One of the most significant problems that users of social media encounter is managing several audiences in a virtual space. Goffman noted that people tend to perform in front of specific audiences, who are often kept isolated from each other[342].

An individual may adopt different versions of their self for various audiences, presenting themselves differently to the family, friends, or work colleagues. It is possible to refer to this as audience segregation because according to Goffman, it allows maintaining separate social identities in different contexts.

According to evidence collected through observations, the rise of social media has made the segregation more complicated. Unlike in offline contexts, where audience segregation is facilitated by physical and social boundaries, social media removes these barriers bringing together audiences that would remain separated otherwise, including families, friends, classmates, teachers, employers, colleagues,

[342] *Ibidem.*

and strangers. In other words, the use of social media leads to users being placed in communicative environments with mixed audiences at once.

From this perspective, context collapse can be considered the primary consequence of social media use. According to the theory by Marwick and Boyd, it occurs when individuals are unable to perform in front of different audiences because several social contexts are combined in a single online environment[343].

Consequently, users cannot tailor their content to specific audiences and are unsure how their content will be perceived by others because each audience has its standards and expectations. For example, something considered amusing and acceptable among friends might look improper in the eyes of family members or employers.

Analysis shows that Indians struggle with context collapse due to the interplay between traditional and contemporary social influences. Individuals remain under the influence of families; at the same time, schools and colleges, places of work, and peer networks play a significant role in shaping the individual identity. In other words, individuals communicate online with people whose standards are very different, forcing them to negotiate their identities constantly.

Individuals have developed many strategies to handle this issue. Most commonly, they make use of privacy settings allowing restricting the visibility of certain content. Sometimes, people choose to manage different audiences by creating multiple accounts. Finally, selective posting of content in private groups is often used to segregate audiences.

The findings also indicate that identity negotiation has become a continuous and reflexive process. People tend to consider how their posts will be perceived amongst different audiences before posting. Language, photographs, political opinions, cultural expressions, and personal disclosures are often chosen with an eye to the expected responses of audiences. Users often avoid discussing topics that could be controversial to avoid social conflict and to protect their reputation in multiple social networks.

Having a diverse audience also increases self-monitoring and social awareness. People learn not only how they want to present themselves, but also how their performances might be understood by various audiences. This awareness results in the creation of managed digital identities that try to meet multiple expectations at the same time.

In conclusion, the study shows that social media has become an important social institution in shaping the construction of identity, interpersonal relationships and visibility in public. The implications extend beyond academic discussions and feed into broader conversations about digital culture, social interaction and the changing nature of selfhood in contemporary society.

[343] Alice E. Marwick and Danah Boyd, *op. cit.*

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MEGAWATTS AND MANIFESTOS: POLITICAL ELITE PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN URBAN ZANZIBAR IN DIALOGUE WITH CHINESE DEVELOPMENTALISM

Nassir Nassor[344]
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ABSTRACT

How political elites view social development is a key question in comparative sociology. Elite perceptions bridge development doctrines and the policies shaping citizens' well-being, yet the two main evidence bases research on China's party-state and studies of competitive Global South politics rarely engage each other. This article bridges them through a qualitative study of urban political elites in Zanzibar, a semi-autonomous, multi-party state with six decades of Chinese development cooperation. Using an exploratory approach with 22 key informants from Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM (10), Alliance for Change and Transparency (ACT-Wazalendo (8), and Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA (4). The study applied a thematic approach to analyse interviews and focus group discussions. Utility services, employment, good governance and democracy, and political manifesto shape elite perceptions of development. Read against modernisation theory and the capability approach, the findings show Zanzibari elites understand development in a performance-based way. A modernisation-influenced way, where services and employment mainly signal governing competence. Participation and freedom function chiefly as tools for electoral gain rather than ends in themselves. This resembles the 'performance legitimacy' documented among Chinese cadres but differs in accountability. Zanzibari politicians answer voters intermittently through manifestos, while Chinese cadres answer superiors continuously through evaluation targets. The comparison suggests that elite perceptions of development are shaped less by development theories than by the accountability arrangements through which such claims support political survival, with wider implications for elite-mass (mis)alignment in China, Africa, and beyond.

Keywords: Social development, political elites, perception, global comparative sociology, performance legitimacy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social development, though central to well-being, remains contested. Its definition in the literature differs from its application in specific contexts. Scholars

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typically associate it with strengthening human capability so people can decide, express themselves, and live the lives they value. Amartya Sen and Walter Rodney insisted that growth, freedom, welfare, and participation are constitutive of development rather than by-products of it[346]. Scholars from low-income countries tend to emphasise poverty reduction and basic needs, while those from high-income countries emphasise social protection and quality-of-life differences that shape what governments measure, fund, and celebrate. The richest literature on this concerns China, where the party-state has built performance legitimacy through observable delivery of growth, infrastructure, and services rather than procedural mandate, enforced through a cadre evaluation system tying targets to career incentives[347]. A separate literature examines competitive African systems, where survey evidence reveals gaps between citizens' priorities and rulers' performance[348]. Both ask what shapes rulers' views of development and their alignment with the governed, yet they rarely engage with each other. Hence, a study that fosters that dialogue from an African perspective is essential.

Two frameworks anchor the theoretical stakes. Modernisation theory views development as a linear, elite-driven progression from traditional to modern society, evident in industrialisation and technological progress[349]. The capability approach instead treats development as expanding substantive freedoms what people are truly able to do and become with growth and infrastructure as means whose worth depends on the capabilities they create[350]. Rather than adopting either as definitive, this study treats them as competing predictions. Modernisation implies material change will dominate elites' view of development. Capability implies participation, agency, and

[346] Praise Chasela, *Reconsidering Sen's 'Development as Freedom' through a Black existentialist lens*, Doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 2026.

[347] See:

1. Dingxin Zhao, "The mandate of heaven and performance legitimation in historical and contemporary China", in *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 53(3), 2009, pp. 416–433;
2. Hongxing Yang and Dingxin Zhao, "Performance legitimacy, state autonomy and China's economic miracle", in *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 24(91), 2015, pp. 64–82;
3. Pierre F. Landry, Xiaobo Lü and Haiyan Duan, "Does performance matter? Evaluating political selection along the Chinese administrative ladder", in *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 51(8), 2018, pp. 1074–1105.

[348] See:

1. Afrobarometer, *African insights 2024: Democracy at risk – the people's perspective*, Accra, Afrobarometer, 2024;
2. Olle Folke et. al., "Politicians' neighbourhoods: Where do they live, and does it matter?", in *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 86(3), 2024, pp. 953–967.

[349] See:

1. Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, *Modernization, cultural change, and democracy: The human development sequence*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005;
2. Ruth Lister, Ruth Patrick and Kate Brown, *Understanding theories and concepts in social policy*, Bristol, Policy Press, 2024.

[350] See:

1. Amartya Sen, *Development as freedom*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999;
2. Darley Jose Kjosavik, "Sen and development as freedom", in Gordon Crawford and Abdul-Gafaru Abdulai (coord.), *Research handbook on democracy and development*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2021, pp. 79–97.

freedom will be valued as ends in themselves. As the findings show, neither prediction survives testing intact, a double failure that is itself instructive.

Zanzibar is an unusually good site for this exercise. Its blend of Persian, Arab, Indian, and African heritage makes it a centre of multiculturalism, and its dense urban politics pits a long-dominant ruling party (CCM) against strong opposition formations (ACT-Wazalendo, CHADEMA) in genuinely competitive elections[351]. At the same time, Zanzibar holds one of Africa's oldest relationships with China. Chinese medical teams have served the islands since 1964, the TAZARA railway made Tanzania an emblematic site of Maoist-era cooperation, and Belt-and-Road-era projects from the airport terminal to health infrastructure keep Chinese state-led developmentalism visibly present in Zanzibari life[352]. Zanzibari politicians thus sit at the exact intersection this article examines. They compete for votes in a liberal-institutional idiom while governing amid the evidence of a rival, performance-based model of development.

The study aimed to explore the factors shaping urban Zanzibari politicians' perceptions of social development and to inform the comparative debate on elite-mass misalignment. Three questions guided it. What factors organise these perceptions? Do they follow modernisation theory, the capability approach, or neither? And how does this repertoire compare with that documented among Chinese local cadres? In response, the study develops the theoretical framework, describes the methods, and presents the findings and a comparative discussion, which leads to an impactful conclusion with implications for theory and policy.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Modernisation theory and its critics

Modernisation theory remains the implicit framework through which many Global South elites interpret development. Societies progress along a linear path from traditional to modern organisation, driven by modernising elites, with progress visible in industrial growth, services, infrastructure, and technology[353]. On this view, leaders drive transformation through policy execution, and their perceptions of social development can be inferred from the modernisation indicators they prioritise.

[351] Moh'd Juma Haji, *The institutionalisation of power sharing in Zanzibar*, Doctoral dissertation, The University of Dodoma, Tanzania, 2024.

[352] See:

1. Jamie Monson, *Africa's freedom railway: How a Chinese development project changed lives and livelihoods in Tanzania*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2009;

2. Deborah Brautigam, *The dragon's gift: The real story of China in Africa*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009;

3. Ching Kwan Lee, *The specter of global China: Politics, labor, and foreign investment in Africa*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2017.

[353] Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, *op. cit.*

The critical literature challenges modernisation theory's universality on three levels. First, its teleology is Eurocentric, turning Western industrialisation into a universal sequence, a move the dependency school exposed decades ago and recent reviews reaffirm. Second, its causal chain is empirically flawed. China achieved sustained modernisation without the predicted democratisation, because its legitimacy rests on performance rather than procedure[354]. Third, its elite-centred epistemology permits a politics of display, where 'development' is whatever can be demonstrated, such as roads, megawatts, terminals, rather than experienced[355]. This study therefore treats modernisation theory not as an explanatory framework but as a folk understanding elites draw upon, asking whether, how, and why Zanzibari politicians reproduce it. If so, visible material provision should dominate their development narratives.

2.2. The capability approach as a counterpoint

Sen developed the capability approach precisely in response to this reduction[356]. Development, on this view, means expanding substantive freedoms the real opportunities people have to lead lives they have reason to value with income, infrastructure, and services serving only as means to capabilities such as being healthy, educated, mobile, and politically effective[357]. However, the approach has its critics. Its ontology is arguably individualist and insufficiently attentive to social structure. Its operationalisation into measurable indicators remains disputed, and most relevant here, its vocabulary is susceptible to co-option, allowing terms such as 'empowerment' and 'participation' to circulate in political rhetoric stripped of their original purpose as ends in themselves[358]. These critiques, however, do not disqualify the framework for the present purpose; if anything, they sharpen it, since a vocabulary this easily borrowed is precisely the kind of language elites might deploy instrumentally without ever adopting its underlying commitments. The approach therefore yields a second diagnostic expectation, parallel to the one derived from modernisation theory. If elite perception follows a capability logic, participation, agency, and freedom should feature in elite accounts as integral to development in their own right. If it follows a modernisation logic instead, these same terms will, when they surface at all, function as tools to garner support or to legitimise material provision after the fact. Distinguishing the constitutive from the merely instrumental use of capability language in elite discourse is one of this study's central analytical contributions. This distinction separates genuine critical engagement with these theories from their superficial invocation.

[354] Hongxing Yang and Dingxin Zhao, *op. cit.*
[355] Ruth Lister, Ruth Patrick and Kate Brown, *op. cit.*
[356] Amartya Sen, *op. cit.*
[357] Darley Jose Kjosavik, *op. cit.*
[358] Praise Chasela, *op. cit.*

2.3. The elite-mass misalignment debate

A growing body of comparative literature examines whether those in power perceive development in the same way as those they govern, and what follows when their perceptions diverge. The Chinese case offers some of the most surprising findings on this question. Whyte challenged the widespread elite assumption that rising inequality was turning Chinese society into a 'social volcano', showing through national survey data that ordinary citizens were far more accepting of inequality than elites feared, which means the misperception ran top-down, not bottom-up[359]. Later research shows that the party-state invests heavily in monitoring and responding to public preferences. This is precisely because its legitimacy depends on performance rather than procedure, and that officials' own sense of what 'development' requires is shaped by measurable evaluation targets tied directly to their promotion prospects[360]. Elite perceptions in China, in short, are structured by a relationship of upward accountability, in which what cadres notice and prioritise is disciplined by what their superiors will later audit.

Research on competitive African polities reveals a different pattern of misalignment, one shaped less by upward audit than by the electoral calendar. Afrobarometer's pan-continental data show a persistent gap between citizens' expressed priorities, such as jobs, water, health, economic management and their governments' perceived performance in precisely those areas[361]. Folke et al. show that even politicians' residential geography shapes which issues they come to recognise and prioritise, while Haji shows how Zanzibar's power-sharing agreement directs elite focus toward managing political competition itself rather than toward the developmental content of that competition[362]. What this debate still lacks, and what this article aims to supply, is research that treats elite perception itself as a phenomenon to be explained, comparing it across fundamentally different accountability regimes rather than assuming its content follows automatically from regime type. This is the gap this study aims to fill by setting a competitive, electorally accountable elite against the bureaucratically accountable elite described in the Chinese literature.

2.4. Chinese developmentalism as a comparative mirror

Using China as a benchmark for an East African context is more than analytical convenience. Zanzibar offers a substantive reason for the comparison. The

[359] Martin King Whyte, *Myth of the social volcano: Perceptions of inequality and distributive injustice in contemporary China*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2010.

[360] See:

1. Wenfang Tang, *Populist authoritarianism: Chinese political culture and regime sustainability*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016;
2. Pierre F. Landry, Xiaobo Lü and Haiyan Duan, *op. cit.*

[361] Afrobarometer, *op. cit.*

[362] See:

1. O. Folke *et al.*, *op. cit.*;
2. Moh'd Juma Haji, *op. cit.*

connection is longstanding and visible in everyday public life. Chinese medical teams have served the islands continuously since 1964. The TAZARA railway, celebrated as 'Africa's freedom railway', made Tanzania an emblematic site of Maoist-era development cooperation and left a lasting image of Chinese state-led delivery in the country's political culture. The current engagement ranges from concessional infrastructure funding to health and port projects[363]. The relationship also shapes perception directly. Lee argues that, for Zambia, Chinese state capital matters. State capital changes not only what gets built but also how local elites come to view development as something quick, visible, state-managed, and legitimised through successful delivery rather than procedure[364]. The domestic Chinese model underpins this engagement. What the literature calls performance legitimacy is itself enacted through a cadre evaluation system that rewards measurable delivery, tempered by considerable flexibility for local improvisation in how targets are actually met[365].

The analytical framework of this study can now be stated briefly. Elite perceptions of social development sit at the intersection of two dimensions. A development ideology (modernisation-demonstrative versus capability-constitutive) and a structure of accountability (episodic-electoral versus continuous-bureaucratic). Modernisation theory and the capability approach each forecast the content of elite perception. Elites' accounts of what development consists of are shaped by their political and institutional context. Comparative literature on China suggests instead that the form this perception takes, including what elites feel they must demonstrate, to whom, and within what timeframe, is shaped less by ideology than by the structures to which they are accountable. The empirical sections that follow apply this framework to Zanzibar, and the comparative discussion draws out its wider implications for studying political elites elsewhere.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study used an exploratory design to gather detailed insight into the factors shaping perceptions of social development among urban politicians in Zanzibar. It involved 22 political leaders from Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM), Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA), and the Alliance for Change and Transparency (ACT-Wazalendo). These are the three most popular parties in Zanzibar's urban areas. Participants were selected through purposive sampling,

[363] See:
1. Jamie Monson, *op. cit.*;
2. Deborah Brautigam, *op. cit.*

[364] Ching Kwan Lee, *op. cit.*

[365] See:
1. Dingxin Zhao, *op. cit.*;
2. Hongxing Yang and Dingxin Zhao, *op. cit.*;
3. Pierre F. Landry, Xiaobo Lü and Haiyan Duan, *op. cit.*

supplemented by snowballing, to capture diverse political experience by party, tenure, and gender. Recruitment ran through political associations and contacts who helped identify eligible participants and build trust. The sample size was determined based on the principle of data saturation. The final sample comprised 22 participants, and data collection continued until no new information, concepts, or themes emerged from participants' responses. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and invited to take part voluntarily, with confidentiality, consent, and the right to withdraw strictly observed.

All participants took part in interviews, and some also joined focus group discussions (FGDs) exploring gender and political ideology. Although invitations went to equal numbers of men and women, more men responded. FGDs let group perspectives be compared with individual views. Analysis was thematic. Data were transferred into structured templates, reviewed for familiarisation, coded for key phrases, and grouped into broader themes, with particular attention to whether a participant treated a given factor (*e.g*., participation or employment) as an end of development or as a means of demonstrating performance a distinction that operationalises the framework in Section 2.

The comparative strategy is asymmetrical, in the tradition of work reading primary material from one society against a well-documented reference society. Primary qualitative data from Zanzibar are read against the secondary literature on Chinese local elites[366]. No symmetrical fieldwork is claimed. The unit of comparison is the perceptual repertoire of urban elites under different accountability structures. The conclusion addresses these limitations, including the use of a single primary case, an elite-only sample, and secondary evidence for the Chinese side.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Factors influencing social development perception of urban politicians

Four main factors emerged, including utility services, employment prospects, democracy and good governance, and political manifestos. Perceptions of social development among urban politicians depend on the current state of these factors and how effectively they are delivered, ultimately linked to citizens' trust in government to provide reliable services. Each factor is discussed below with illustrative data, situated within the literature, and read against the diagnostic expectations from Section 2. Section 4.2 presents the comparative synthesis.

[366] See:
1. Martin King Whyte, *op. cit.*;
2. Pierre F. Landry, Xiaobo Lü and Haiyan Duan, *op. cit.*

4.2. Available utility services

According to 15 participants, utility services such as water, electricity, fuel, education, health, and transportation are the main factors shaping perceptions of social progress in urban Zanzibar. Politicians described these as vital to social and economic growth. Improvements in education and health foster innovation and productivity, so when the government enhances services, well-being improves. When services decline, it worsens. During an interview at his office, a CHADEMA political leader explained:

> "For me, social development means dependable, diverse, and accessible utility services provided within transparent and accountable regulatory frameworks… As a politician, I must do my best to promote improvements in these services to enhance people's well-being".

Another politician (CCM) was also quoted:

> "Recognising the importance of utility services… we have been receiving more than 100 megawatts of power from mainland Tanzania. This will help meet the demand for economic and social services. As government leaders, we welcome investors… to invest in Zanzibar to improve our people's living standards".

These findings align with evidence that African politicians use utility services to persuade citizens ahead of elections[367]. Their theoretical significance lies in form, whereas the second quotation cites a measurable quantity of delivery (megawatts received), attributes it to government effort, and pivots to investment promotion. A performance claim structurally identical to those through which Chinese local cadres justify their tenure[368]. The diagnostic expectation from modernisation theory (Section 2.1) is thus confirmed. Services appear in elite discourse not as welfare inputs but as evidence of governing competence, while in capability, what people are enabled to do with water, power, or schooling goes unasked. Such performance claims, moreover, can coexist with and obscure politically selective delivery.

4.2.1. Employment opportunity

Employment was the second factor. Politicians believe it improves living standards and happiness by giving people access to better health, education, food, water, and electricity. An interview with a politician revealed the following quotations:

> "We use the concept of employment to motivate urban society to accept our manifesto because we understand that employment is a vital factor in improving their well-being. My role is to do my utmost to ensure the social well-being of society… by creating more employment opportunities."

[367] France Khutso Lavhelani Kgobe *et al*., "Comparative analysis of selected political party manifestos in South Africa", in *International Journal of Business Ecosystem & Strategy*, Vol. 6(4), 2024, pp. 373–383.

[368] Pierre F. Landry, Xiaobo Lü and Haiyan Duan, *op. cit.*

The above quotation is notable for its frankness. Employment is explicitly valued as a tool to motivate society 'to accept our manifesto'. The authors use capability language instrumentally, exactly as outlined in Section 2.2. Yet the gap between rhetoric and labour-market reality in Zanzibar remains wide. Youth unemployment stands at 27.4%, disproportionately affecting women. Over 80% of employment in developing countries is informal, limiting access to health insurance, pensions, and legal protections[369]. The comparison with China cuts both ways. Chinese cadres face strict, audited targets where failure carries career penalties, whereas Zanzibari politicians face soft, episodic electoral judgment on promises voters can barely verify. So, employment functions for Zanzibari elites mainly as a campaign asset rather than a delivery commitment[370]. Thus, for Zanzibari political elites, employment primarily serves as a strategic campaign promise used to attract electoral support, rather than as a clearly measurable commitment subject to implementation and accountability after elections.

4.2.2. Democracy and good governance

Good governance and democracy formed the third key factor. Participants emphasised that transparency and accountability guard against corruption and discrimination and are crucial to social well-being. Thus, good governance ensures citizens' equal rights, peace, and opportunities for livelihood. A politician from CHADEMA was quoted:

> "Without democracy, accountability and good governance, development may exist, but it will not necessarily improve people's lives".

The quotation highlights that political leaders perceive democracy, good governance and accountability as essential conditions for effective social development, because development should ultimately promote people's wellbeing and quality of life.

This factor marks the most distinct departure from the Chinese perceptual repertoire and should be read with care. Zanzibari elites claim legitimacy through a procedural framework of rights, transparency, and accountability, with no real counterpart in Chinese officials' performance-based vocabulary[371]. Read through the capability approach, this might suggest political freedoms are valued as fundamental to development, as Sen argues[372]. One consideration counsels scepticism, however, is that the local settlement matters, since Haji shows Zanzibar's power-sharing arrangements turn the language of inclusion and tolerance into currency for inter-party competition[373]. The procedural framework, in other words, may serve

[369] Yashodhan Ghorpade, Camila Franco Restrepo and Luis Eduardo Castellanos Rodríguez, *Social protection and labour market policies for the informally employed*, Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2024.

[370] Pierre F. Landry, Xiaobo Lü and Haiyan Duan, *op. cit.*

[371] Dingxin Zhao, *op. cit.*

[372] Amartya Sen, *op. cit.*

[373] Moh'd Juma Haji, *op. cit.*

electorally accountable elites much as delivery statistics serve bureaucratically accountable ones, certified evidence of fitness to govern, which clarifies why capability language is common here yet scarce for material provision.

4.2.3. Political manifestos

Only two participants highlighted this factor, noting that manifestos set out development strategies for the coming electoral period and address citizens' challenges. An interview with a political leader at the CCM office explained:

> "Our manifesto plays a crucial role in promoting human well-being within civil society. It clarifies the concept of human development, from which the idea of social development arises".

These findings align with evidence that politicians in developing countries use manifestos to outline strategies for social services and development [374]. The manifesto functions as the equivalent of the Chinese cadre's target contract. Both translate development into quantifiable commitments against which performance can be measured. However, they differ sharply in enforcement. Cadre targets are audited annually by superiors with career consequences, while manifesto promises are judged only once every five years by voters with limited information[375]. The predictable result is a widening gap between rhetoric and realisation, breeding scepticism and undermining trust[376]. In Zanzibar, parties such as CCM and ACT-Wazalendo emphasise improved services, inclusive development, and poverty reduction. Yet, many urban residents see these promises as symbolic rather than durable, with residents reporting limited access to reliable services despite initiatives since 2020[377]. The manifesto thus emerges as the institutional hinge of the perceptual system, where a performance-based understanding of development meets an accountability structure too weak to discipline it.

4.3. Zanzibar's developmental elites in comparative dialogue with Chinese developmentalism

Bringing the four factors together against the Chinese literature yields three comparative outcomes. The first is a convergence in development ideology. Zanzibari urban politicians, like Chinese local cadres, view social development primarily through modernisation and demonstrative measures. Development is what can be delivered, quantified, and showcased as megawatts, jobs, services, and projects. This is not accidental. It partly reflects the direct influence of Chinese state-led developmentalism in Tanzanian and Zanzibari political culture. From TAZARA to medical teams to Belt-

[374] France Khutso Lavhelani Kgobe *et al*., *op. cit.*
[375] Pierre F. Landry, Xiaobo Lü and Haiyan Duan, *op. cit.*
[376] Zoha Shawoo *et al*., "Political drivers of policy coherence for sustainable development: An analytical framework", in *Environmental Policy and Governance*, Vol. 33(4), 2023, pp. 339–350.
[377] Moh'd Juma Haji, *op. cit.*

and-Road infrastructure, offering local elites a nearby, prestigious model of infrastructure-focused, delivery-legitimated development [378]. African elites do not encounter modernisation theory as an academic abstraction; they experience it as built form, financed and delivered by a partner whose own legitimacy depends on performance[379]. The second difference lies in how accountability is structured, with systematic perceptual effects. Chinese cadres answer consistently upward. Evaluation targets make development perceptions clear, measurable, and career-relevant, so their accounts of development resemble audits[380]. Zanzibari politicians answer intermittently downward. The manifesto-election cycle renders their perceptions rhetorical, promotional, and hard to verify. Employment as a tool to 'motivate urban society to accept our manifesto', services as demonstrations, governance as an approved sign of legitimacy. The same ideologically driven performance, filtered through different accountability systems, thus yields audited delivery in one context and promotional display in another. The study's core argument remains that ideology sets the content of elite perception, but accountability dictates its epistemic form.

The third issue concerns elite–mass misalignment, which this article addresses. In China, Whyte found elites misjudged the masses, fearing a social eruption that survey data showed did not exist, while performance accountability kept material delivery broadly aligned with popular priorities [381]. In Zanzibar, the situation is reversed. Elite and mass priorities on services and jobs nominally align, as Afrobarometer data would predict, but weak verification between elections lets delivery drift from rhetoric, breeding scepticism and eroding trust[382]. Misalignment, the comparison suggests, is not an inherent trait of regime type. Electoral competition aligns agendas but under-enforces delivery. Bureaucratic evaluation enforces delivery but can misread agendas. Neither modernisation theory nor the capability approach explains this, since both ignore the accountability structures that shape elite perception. A gap this comparative sociology needs to fill.

5. CONCLUSION

This study explored what shapes urban politicians' perceptions of social development in Zanzibar, whether those perceptions follow modernisation or capability logics, and how they compare with the repertoire documented among

[378] Jamie Monson, *op. cit.*
[379] Hongxing Yang and Dingxin Zhao, *op. cit.*
[380] Pierre F. Landry, Xiaobo Lü and Haiyan Duan, *op. cit.*
[381] See:
1. Martin King Whyte, *op. cit.*;
2. Wenfang Tang, *op. cit.*
[382] See:
1. Afrobarometer, *op. cit.*;
2. Moh'd Juma Haji, *op. cit.*;
3. Zoha Shawoo *et al.*, *op. cit.*

Chinese local elites. Empirically, four factors emerged which are utility services, employment, good governance and democracy, and political manifestos. These factors are grounded in Zanzibar's political environment and shape livelihoods and community well-being.

Theoretically, the findings challenge both frameworks examined. Zanzibari elites reproduce modernisation theory as a folk belief in demonstrable results rather than the developmental sequence it describes. The elites use the vocabulary of the capability approach, such as well-being, opportunity, and participation. Instrumentally, as campaign currency rather than ultimate goals. The comparison with Chinese developmentalism helps explain why accountability structures shape elite perception. Continuous bureaucratic evaluation yields audited delivery, whereas episodic electoral judgement yields promissory displays. The debate on elite–mass misalignment should therefore distinguish agenda alignment from delivery enforcement. Zanzibar exhibits the first without the second, while China arguably exhibits the second with managed approximations of the first[383]. This two-dimensional framework is the study's contribution to comparative sociology and is testable beyond the cases examined here.

The study's limitations point to future directions. It relies on a single primary case read alongside secondary literature, an elite-only sample means citizens' perceptions are inferred rather than directly observed, and the comparison with China is uneven. Paired primary research, interviewing African urban politicians and Chinese local officials with a common instrument, and comparing both against citizen surveys such as Afrobarometer and the national surveys used by Whyte, would let the accountability argument be tested directly[384]. Zanzibar, with six decades of Chinese engagement and competitive politics, is well placed for this, but the core argument travels further. Wherever elites must translate development claims into political survival, accountability structures will shape what they can perceive.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

From a policy perspective, governments should build politicians' capacity to promote inclusive social development, formally recognise community-based initiatives, and invest in urban infrastructure, roads, public spaces, and services to boost welfare and economic activity. Most importantly, the study's key finding highlights the need for stronger mechanisms to monitor implementation between elections. Independent audits of political manifesto commitments could provide an important way to assess whether promised actions are delivered. Regular publication

[383] See:
1. Martin King Whyte, *op. cit.*;
2. Wenfang Tang, *op. cit.*

[384] Martin King Whyte, *op. cit.*

of service-delivery statistics would also improve transparency and allow citizens to assess government performance. Supporting participatory monitoring by civil society would strengthen accountability beyond the electoral period. Together, these measures could narrow the gap between political promises and actual delivery, strengthen public trust, and contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals on decent work, reduced inequalities, and strong institutions.

Academically, the study points to a research programme on the comparative sociology of developmental elites. Research on political leadership and institutional accountability should treat elite perception as a key explanatory variable. Future work should combine elite interviews with residents' lived experiences, pairing qualitative methods with surveys, to confront the capability approach and modernisation theory with elite practice across African, Chinese, and other Global South contexts.

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