

## HISTORY AND RELIGIOUS LIFE OF THE CROSS-BORDER ROMANIAN ORTHODOX COMMUNITIES IN THE LANDS OF CRISANA AND BANAT

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*Abstract: The drawing of the border between Hungary and Romania, in 1920, made twenty-one Romanian Orthodox church communities remain on the territory of Hungary without any hierarchically superior organization.*

*The Romanian Orthodox communities in Serbia, of Daco - Roman origin, are located in two distinct geographical areas, namely the historical Banat (Vojvodina) and the Eastern Serbia (Timoc Valley). Throughout history, the Romanian population has coexisted peacefully with the majority Serbs and Hungarians, even if sometimes they had tendencies to assimilate Romanians, especially through language and culture.*

*With the establishment of the Romanian Orthodox Vicariates of Vârșeț and Gyula, and later, of the Romanian Orthodox Bishoprics of Hungary and Dacia Felix, the church life of the Romanians in Hungary and Serbia experienced a special revival.*

*The Church, through its servants, has contributed and continues to contribute to the preservation of the Romanian identity, language, culture, spirituality and ancestral faith.*

*Keywords: voivodship, political regime, Romanian community, church organization, Hungary, Serbia, vicariate.*

The religious life of the Orthodox Romanians has been inextricably linked, since their beginnings, to the history and place where they lived, enduring all those trials that the church and its sons - over time - have experienced.

The absence of archaeological evidence regarding the beginnings of the Christian life in the intra- and cross-border lands of Crișana and Banat led some historians to resort to logical-historical and literary arguments to analyse and expose this reality of the emergence and spread of Christianity in these lands, with profound implications in the evolution of Romanian communities. According to them, in the intra-Carpathian territories one can speak with certainty about an institutionalized Christian life starting from the ninth century, in the context of the crystallization of the first prestate political formations.<sup>1</sup> The voivodships led by Gelu, Glad and Menumorut<sup>2</sup> had economic, political and ecclesiastical ties with Byzantium, which wanted to attract neighbouring peoples into its sphere of influence, especially through the Orthodox Church.

<sup>1</sup> Pavel CHERESCU, *Viața bisericească a românilor ortodocși din Bihor. Repere istorice*, OT, 3-4 (2005): 45-46.

<sup>2</sup> Gheorghe I. BRĂȚIANU, *Tradiția istorică despre întemeierea statelor românești*, (București: 1980), 190-206; Nicolae STOICESCU, *Continuitatea românilor. Privire istoriografică. Istoricul problemei. Dovezile continuității*, (București: 1980), 187-195; Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Istoria bisericii românești din Transilvania, Banat, Crișana și Maramureș până în 1918*, (Cluj-Napoca: 1992), 57-68; Ioan Aurel POP, *Istoria Transilvaniei medievale. De la etnogeneza românilor până la Mihai Viteazul*, (Cluj-Napoca: 1997).

At the beginning of the 11th century, the Hungarians led by King Stephen I the Holy (1000-1038) expanded the boundaries of their domination and established in Biharea the "headquarters" or "center" of Bihor County, documented for the first time in 1111. A Latin bishopric was also established in Biharea (or, according to others in Oradea),<sup>3</sup> in the place where the Orthodox one had functioned, in order to eliminate any trace of the old state and church organization of the local population. This phenomenon of replacing an Orthodox church institution with a Hungarian Catholic one, took place at the same time in Alba Iulia (Bălgrad) and Morisena (Cenad, near Timișoara).<sup>4</sup>

Despite these measures, the Romanians from the former duchy of Crișana<sup>5</sup> still kept and confessed the Orthodox faith, which emerges from the correspondence between King Emeric of Hungary, Pope Innocent III, the Catholic Bishop of Oradea, the Catholic Archbishop of Kalocsa and the Abbot of Pelis (Hungary), between 1204 -1205. In early 1204, King Emeric of Hungary sent a letter to Pope Innocent III informing him that there were some monasteries in his kingdom where "Greek monks" (Orthodox) lived and had come to ruin because of *"the carelessness of the diocesan bishops and the monks themselves."* To rectify this negative condition, the king proposed two alternatives: either to establish a bishopric jurisdictional-canonical subject direct to the Holy See of the Pope, or to bring in those monasteries, monks of Latin rite. Following these proposals, on April 16, 1204, Pope Innocent III wrote to the bishop of the diocese of Oradea and the abbot of Pelis (Hungary), asking them to visit those monasteries. At the same time, in order to fulfil the king's proposals, the Pope asked them to find the right ways to *"establish an episcopate headed by one of those ... who would be directly subject to us."*<sup>6</sup> On May 3, 1205, the same sovereign pontiff wrote to the Archbishop of Kalocsa - under whose canonical jurisdiction was the Latin Bishopric of Oradea in 1197 - that on the estates of the sons of the Prince Bâlea or Bela (*in terra filiorum Bele kneze*) there was a Greek rite bishopric, which was not under the jurisdiction of any metropolitan church. The pope agreed that the bishopric should be brought "under the obedience of the apostolic see" and under the canonical dependence of the Archdiocese of Kalocsa, but, the Roman pontiff said, this fact should be done *"with great care, so that, that episcopate does not be somehow subject to the Church of Constantinople because, this Church of Constantinople has recently returned to the unity of the apostolic see, we do not want to deprive it of its right"*.<sup>7</sup> This clarification was made because Constantinople was conquered by the Western Crusaders (during the Fourth Crusade) and in the former capital of the Byzantine Empire, where the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate was

<sup>3</sup> Liviu BORCEA, *Bihorul medieval. Oameni. Așezări. Instituții*, (Oradea: 2005), 70-71.

<sup>4</sup> Ioan RĂMUREANU, *Începuturile încreștinării ungarilor în credința creștină ortodoxă a Răsăritului*, ST, 1-2 (1957): 37-43; Răzvan THEODORESCU, *Bizant, Balcani, Occident la începuturile culturii medievale românești (secolele X-XIV)*, (București: 1974), 74-80; Vasile MUNTEAN, *Banatul și Bizanțul (sec. XI-XII)*, MB 1-4 (1976): 233-236; I. D. SUCIU, *Monografia Mitropoliei Banatului*, (Timișoara: 1977), 37-38.

<sup>5</sup> POP, *Românii și maghiarii în secolele IX-XIV. Geneza statului medieval în Transilvania*, 135.

<sup>6</sup> CHERESCU, *Viața bisericească a românilor ortodocși din Bihor. Repere istorice*, 47.

<sup>7</sup> Teodor M. POPESCU, *Cucerirea Constantinopolului de către latini ca mijloc de unire a Bisericilor (sec. XI-XIV)*, ST 1, (1929): 48-132; Ștefan PASCU, *Voievodatul Transilvaniei*, I, (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1979), 164 și IV, (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1986), 301.

located, a Latin patriarchate was established, under the obedience of the Western Church, whose jurisdictional rights were not to be violated. Despite the fears expressed, it was about "*a local form of church organization of the native population ... which probably continued a church organization existing even before the settlement of the Hungarians in the Pannonian Plain.*"<sup>8</sup>

After the defeat of Hungary at Mohacs (1526), Serbian Orthodoxy within it was subordinated to the metropolitan bishop based in Jenopolje. The "*Hungarian*" metropolitan bishop of the time, Iosif, is mentioned among the participants in the hierarchical synod of Ohrida, of 1532.<sup>9</sup> After Banat fell to the Turks in 1552, the *Hungarian Metropolitan Church* was divided into two parts: the part of Transylvania, based in Jenopolje, and the part ruled by the Turks, based in Lipova. Later, the headquarters of the Metropolitan Church of Transylvania was moved to Sebeş (1580).<sup>10</sup>

In the second half of the 17th century, the Orthodox Romanians from the Eastern part of the Tisza were under the protection of Bishop Sofronie, "*the metropolitan bishop of the Lipova and Gyula cities*", who had his residence at the Hodoş-Bodrog monastery.<sup>11</sup>

Very little is known about the church life of the Romanian Orthodox from Ottoman Hungary (1544-1699). It is only known that also Romanians lived in Gyula's city.<sup>12</sup> One of the three churches in the city at that time may have been Romanian. After the withdrawal of the Turks from these parts, on the depopulated territory began the recolonization with Hungarians and Romanians at the beginning of the 18th century, and later Slovaks and Germans were brought.

In these conditions, in 1664 the presence of a "*Serbian bishop*" is registered in this area,<sup>13</sup> a messenger of the ecumenical patriarch, identified by historians as Stephen, who was serving as leader in the parts of Arad, in Ineu-Lipova.<sup>14</sup>

With the reorganization of the dioceses of the Habsburg Empire, in 1695, the Serbian patriarch Arsenie III founded a new bishopric based in Oradea and ordained Ephrem Veniamin as bishop but following the strong pressures from the Roman Catholic Church by the person of Cardinal Kolonici de Ezstergom, Efrem Veniamin joined the Uniatism and became vicar for the Romanians from Hungary<sup>15</sup> who did the same as him. As a result of his actions, the patriarch dismissed him from the position of hierarch, and

<sup>8</sup>BORCEA, *Bihorul medieval. Oameni. Așezări. Instituții*, 61; PASCU, *Contribuțiuni documentare la istoria românilor în secolele XIII și XIV*, (Sibiu: 1944); CHERESCU, *Viața bisericească a românilor ortodocși din Bihor. Repere istorice*, 47

<sup>9</sup>PĂCURARIU, *Stranice istorije: odnosi rumunske i srpske crkve (Pagini de istorie: relațiile Bisericii române și ale Bisericii sârbe). Studii și cercetări. Simpozionul Banatul – trecut istoric și cultural (1996–2010)*, (Novi Sad: 2012), 272.

<sup>10</sup> Drago NJEGOVAN, Miodrag MILIN, *Mitropolia de la Karlowitz și relațiile sârbo-române din cuprinsul Monarhiei habsburgice*, AB, S.N., ARHEOLOGIE – ISTORIE, XXIII, (2015): 423.

<sup>11</sup> Feriz BERKI: *Az Ortodox Kereszténység*, (Budapest: 1975), *Lapok a magyar ortodoxia történetéből. „Egyházi Krónika”*, *Keleti Ortodox folyóirat, XV. évfolyam, 2. szám*, (1966): 192.

<sup>12</sup> Ferenc SCHERER, *Gyula város története*, I, (Budapest: 1938), 246-261.

<sup>13</sup> CHERESCU, *Viața bisericească a românilor ortodocși din Bihor. Repere istorice*, în *OT*, 3-4, (2005): 52.

<sup>14</sup> PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii românești din Transilvania, Banat, Crișana și Maramureș până în 1918*, (Cluj-Napoca: 1992), 176.

<sup>15</sup> Ștefan LUPȘA, *Fost-a Efrem Banianin episcop al Orăzii ? BOR* 5-6, (1935), 260-262; LUPȘA, *Efrem Banianin episcop titular al Orăzii, 1695-1698, BOR* 11-12, (1936), 756-757.

the Orthodox Bishopric of Oradea remained vacant.<sup>16</sup> Then, for two centuries, with only a few extremely short flashes,<sup>17</sup> priests and believers from this region were under the canonical jurisdiction of the bishops of Arad, who prevented the actions of state and church authorities - patronized especially by the Catholic bishop of Oradea, to attract the Orthodox Romanians of these parts to the Union with the Church of Rome.

Although in 1701 the Viennese Court abolished the old Orthodox Metropolitan Church based in Alba Iulia, after the deaths of Emperor Leopold I (1705) and Cardinal Kolonich of Esztergom (1707), the pressure in favour of the Uniatism diminished, with most archpriests still against it. Meanwhile, the Serbs consolidated their status in their own hierarchy, their privileges were confirmed, so they were able to represent a viable hope, of support for the Romanian Orthodox as well.<sup>18</sup>

The roots of Serbian Orthodoxy in this geographical area date back to antiquity, being highlighted from the time of Saint Sava, who in 1220 acquired at the expense of the Serbian Church the interference with the Orthodox believers from Hungary, building Serbian monasteries in the Nera Valley and Danube Gorge. Later historical developments will strengthen the ties of the Serbs and Orthodox Romanians, both in medieval Hungary and also in the Romanian voivodeships, where Serbs and Romanians lived together.<sup>19</sup>

An important change took place in the life of the church communities in these parts after 1790, when Patriarch Arsenie Cernoievici places here a number of Serbs, who organize instead of the Bishopric of Lipova, a Serbian Bishopric in Arad. To this bishopric also belonged the communities around the city of Gyula, so also the communities within the current Orthodox Bishopric of Hungary.

Only after endeavours of several decades and repeated revolting states of the Orthodox Romanians, as well as of the Serbian and Romanian priests and monks, the Habsburg authorities accepted, in 1761, the reactivation of the old hierarchical See of Alba Iulia, but only to the rank of Bishopric, based in Sibiu. The first two bishops were Dionisije Novaković (1761-1767) and Sofronije Kirilović (1770-1774). During the time of bishop Gedeon Nikitić (1784-1788), the Bishopric of Sibiu (the Romanian Orthodox Bishopric of Transylvania) was subordinated to the Metropolitan Church of Karlowitz,<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Marius EPPPEL, *Drumul către episcopie*, (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujană, 2011), 4.

<sup>17</sup> În anul 1749, când, românii, care au rămas credincioși legii strămoșești, păstrând cu fermitate credința ortodoxă, au depus nenumerate memorii și plângeri, iar Curtea habsburgică, a consacrat ca episcop ortodox de Buda pentru bisericele românești neunite, pe ecleziazarul de neam sârb, Dionisie Novacovici. (Gheorghe CIUHANDU, *Propaganda catolică-maghiară de la Macău în coasta Diecezei ortodoxe a Aradului (1815-1864)*, (Arad: 1926), 10-24.

<sup>18</sup> NJEGOVAN și MILIN, *Mitropolia de la Karlowitz și relațiile sârbo-române din cuprinsul Monarhiei habsburgice*, AB, ARHEOLOGIE – ISTORIE, XXIII, (2015), 424.

<sup>19</sup> NJEGOVAN și MILIN, *Mitropolia de la Karlowitz și relațiile sârbo-române din cuprinsul Monarhiei habsburgice*, AB, PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, (Sibiu: 1972), 259-260 ARHEOLOGIE – ISTORIE, XXIII, (2015), 420.

<sup>20</sup> PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, (Sibiu: 1972), 259-260

condition that will last until 1864, when the independent Romanian Orthodox Metropolitan Church of Sibiu was founded under the arch-pastorate of Andrei Şaguna.<sup>21</sup>

After the re-establishment of the Metropolitan Church of Transylvania, out of the 17 communities existing at that time, which today are 21 and are part of the Romanian Orthodox Bishopric of Hungary, nine belonged to the Bishopric of Arad, and eight to the Vicariate of Oradea.

This situation lasted until 1920, when the border between Hungary and Romania was delimited. It was then created for the Romanian Orthodox church communities left on the territory of Hungary, a completely new and very difficult reality and also a lot of problems waiting to be solved for the smooth running of community affairs in very difficult circumstances.<sup>22</sup>

A period of almost three decades followed, during which countless attempts were made to create a church authority here. It was hoped that it would be able to establish good order and, above all, to be a shield against the negative policy that was unleashed, with the arrival of Horthy Miklós (1920-1944), against the Orthodox Romanians from Hungary.

The only hope of escape was the establishment of a church organization that would include all the Romanian Orthodox church communities from Hungary.

In order to achieve this goal, the contact with the Bishop of Arad, PhD Andrei Magieru was resumed, a great supporter of the cause of the Romanian Orthodoxy from Hungary.

On the basis of the organization plan and according to the directives brought in the meeting of the Initiative Commission of January 15, 1946, previously approved by Bishop Andrei, the deputies for the National-Ecclesiastical Congress of the Romanian Orthodox from Hungary were elected, body that had the competence to decide the establishment of the Diocesan Consistory.

Being fulfilled all the indicated, in the report of the Initiative Commission, Bishop Andrei ordered the following: *"In order to put an end to the non-canonical situation of the Romanian Orthodox parishes from Hungary, starting with 1920, ... it is necessary to organize those parishes in a Romanian Orthodox Diocese for Romanians from Hungary, based in Gyula. As a result, ... the canonical and spiritual connection of the priests of this Diocese will continue with the Bishops of Arad and Oradea until the ordination of a Romanian Orthodox bishop, legally recognized by the Romanian Orthodox Church as well ..."*<sup>23</sup> So, the battles that lasted two and a half decades ended, and following the great political changes, the activity of the Consistory was able to take place in a favourable atmosphere. Thus ended an era full of hardships, which had as a result that each Orthodox Church from Hungary, was able to order its canonicity freely, each with its

<sup>21</sup> VASA Lupuloviћ, *Живот и рад епископа Софронија Кириловића* (Vasa LUPULOVICI, *Viața și opera episcopului Sofronie Kirilovici*), Темишварски зборник, 3, Нови Сад, (2002), 135-141; I. D. SUCIU, *Revoluția de la 1848-1849 în Banat*, București, (1968), 104-137.

<sup>22</sup> Teodor MISAROȘ, *Din istoria comunităților bisericesti ortodoxe române din Ungaria*, (Giula: 2002), 234.

<sup>23</sup> BERKI, Feriz, *Lapok a magyarortodoxia történetéből*, 6.

own supreme authority, ensuring its undisturbed functioning, and for their believers the full religious freedom.<sup>24</sup>

The Romanian Orthodox Vicariate from Hungary functions as an autonomous unit, recognized and canonically dependent on the Romanian Patriarchate, but with its own administrative organization. It has 19 church communities, with two branches and 21 priest positions. The parishes are divided into three deaneries, based in Gyula (Bichiș, Bichisciaba, Budapest, Ciorvaș, Gyula I, and Gyula II), Micherechi (Apateu with the Kormosdpusztá branch, Cristor, Darvas, Jaca, Micherechi, Peterd, Săcal and Vecherd) and Chitighaz (Aletea with the Lökösháza branch, Bătania, the Hungarian-Cenad, Chitighaz and Otlaca-Pustă).

The executive body of the vicariate is the Diocesan Consistory, headed by a president, who bears the title of episcopal vicar.

The first episcopal vicar was PhD Petru Mândruțău, whose name is inextricably linked to the establishment of this organization. After 30 years of activity, he retired from this position and was replaced by the priest Teodor Misaroș, who was ordained as episcopal vicar on November 21, 1976, in the Cathedral of the Vicariate of Gyula by His Holiness the Metropolitan PhD Nicolae Corneanu of Banat, in the presence of the representatives of the state authorities and of the other cults.

Although the Orthodox Bishopric was established by the National Church Congress of Romanians from Hungary on March 26, 1946, still, for political reasons, the first hierarch for the Orthodox Romanians from Hungary, was elected only in 1999, in the person of His Eminence PhD Sofronie Drincec, the current Bishop of Oradea.

The pastoral activity of the Bishopric includes all the spiritual activities that take place in the church communities. They are exercised by priests through the performance of the holy services, the Holy Sacraments, the preaching of the Gospel, the visit of the families of the community, but also through activities meant to preserve the ancestral traditions. At the same time, a special emphasis is manifested also in the perspective of peaceful coexistence and in good understanding with peers of another religion and nationality from their communities. In this activity, priests depend exclusively on their church authority. The liturgical and internal language of the Romanian Orthodox Church from Hungary is Romanian,<sup>25</sup> and this right is ensured by the laws of this country.<sup>26</sup> Religious and cultural missions are of particular importance. They are organized through the Diocesan Centre and are related to the most important events in the life of communities, for example, the re-sanctification of the renovated church buildings, anniversaries, commemorations or religious services at the request of the believers. On these occasions, services are held in the synod.

Missionary days can also be considered the two days of priestly conferences, which are organized for the Romanian Orthodox priesthood from Hungary in the spring and autumn of each year. The Holy Mass is always celebrated before these conferences, with the participation of the believers.

<sup>24</sup>MISAROȘ, *Din istoria comunităților bisericești ortodoxe române din Ungaria*, 258

<sup>25</sup> Antonie PLĂMĂDEALĂ, *Un episod important din lupta pentru limba română*, O 3, (1978): 417-464.

<sup>26</sup> MISAROȘ, *Din istoria comunităților bisericești ortodoxe române din Ungaria*, 259-260

The weekly and monthly publications that appear here have a missionary role among the Romanian communities in Hungary. *"In the archives of the Cultural Union of Romanians from Hungary (located at the headquarters in Gyula, 8 Gheorghe Doja Street), the oldest document referring to the publication of a future newspaper in Romanian is dated May 13, 1950. The first issue of "Libertatea Noastra (Our Freedom)" magazine (forerunner of today's "Foaia românească (the Romanian Sheet)"<sup>27</sup> appeared on June 1, 1950, but of the total print run of 2024 copies, not a single one reached to the readers. The title of the document from May 13, 1950, written in Hungarian, together with the name of the Cultural Union of Romanians from Hungary, already includes the name of the newspaper: " Libertatea Noastra (Our Freedom)". In the letter<sup>28</sup> signed on behalf of the editorial board by Bónis Lajos (former teacher at the Romanian general school in Gyula) and PhD Vild Frigyes (director of the newly established Romanian high school in Gyula - 1949/1955), it is announced that the Cultural Union will edit, with the support of the Ministry of Culture, a periodical magazine entitled "Libertatea Noastra (Our Freedom)". The newspaper, which will be meant to deepen the Hungarian-Romanian friendship, will also have the role of informing Romanians from Hungary about the cultural, educational, economic, political and social processes in the country.<sup>29</sup>*

Another weekly publication of Romanians from Hungary, published by the Press and Romanian Book Publishing House, is represented by the publication "Cronica (Chronicle)" and presents news, reports, interviews, chronicles from different levels of the Romanian society, such as church, school, daily life or the cultural field.

In the ecclesiastical area, the monthly church publication that appears uninterruptedly since 2003, established during the arch-pastorate of His Holiness Father Sofronie, is *"Buletinul Episcopiei (The Bulletin of the Bishopric)"<sup>30</sup>* newsletter of the Romanian Orthodox Bishopric from Hungary, with residence in Gyula and which since 2007 is printed with the blessing of His Holiness Father Bishop Siluan.

According to a long tradition, the Romanian institutions from Gyula are consecrated by sprinkling with Agheasma Mare (the Great Holy Water) by His Holiness Father Siluan, the Bishop of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese from Hungary and Deputy of the Dacia Felix Bishopric, accompanied by clergy from the Diocesan Centre. Thus, the Romanian Kindergarten, the Middle School, the Student Dormitory, the Romanian High School "Nicolae Bălcescu", the Self-Government in the Country of the Romanians from Hungary (SGCRH), the Documentation and Information Centre of SGCRH, the headquarters of the weekly "Cronica (Chronicle)", the Cultural Union of Romanians from Hungary (CURH), the headquarters of the weekly "Foaia românească (the Romanian Sheet)" and the Permanent Museum Exhibition of the Romanian Orthodox Bishopric from Hungary, are consecrated.

<sup>27</sup> Publicație editată de Uniunea Culturală a Românilor din Ungaria

<sup>28</sup> Scrisoarea 1/1950 poartă ștampila *Uniunii Culturale*, pe care în mijloc scrie: Gyula 1948, anul înființării Uniunii.

<sup>29</sup> ȘIMON, Eva, *Pregătiri intense pentru scoaterea primului ziar românesc din Ungaria*, în *Foaia Românească*, 15, (2021): 2.

<sup>30</sup> În prezent a ajuns la cel de-al 217-lea număr.

The Consulate General of Romania from Szeged organizes every year a cultural-literary evening, on the occasion of the *National Culture Day* (January 15), dedicated to the birthday of the poet Mihai Eminescu, the Romanian historical moment of January 24, 1859 (Union of Romanian Principalities) and the church history of Romanians from Hungary.

Starting with 1992, at the initiative of the Cultural Society of Romanians from Budapest, Romanians from the Hungarian capital travel every year, on Palm Sunday (the first after Easter), to the grave of Emanuil Gojdu's family in Kerepesi cemetery, to perform a requiem service, to light a candle and place flowers at the eternal place of the great Maecenas of Romanian culture.

Country Self-Government of Romanians from Hungary founded the distinction "*For 40 years of activity in Romanian education*" and the distinction "*For Romanian education from Hungary*", which are awarded to pedagogues for their work for 40 years in the Romanian nationality education from Hungary, but also for special merits in the Romanian nationality education. The event takes place in the auditorium of the Romanian High School "Nicolae Bălcescu" from Gyula.

Every year, the signing of the Bălcescu-Kossuth reconciliation treaty in Szeged is also marked. For 21 years, Romanians from Szeged have been celebrating the historic moment of the signing of the Romanian-Hungarian reconciliation treaty between the revolutionaries Nicolae Bălcescu and Kossuth Lajos, on July 14, 1849. Wreaths are laid at the commemorative plaque in Klauzál Square and a colloquium is organized by the Cultural Association of Romanians in the city, together with the Department of Romanian Language and Literature of the University of Szeged and with the Consulate General of Romania in Szeged.

In support of the unity of the Romanian diaspora in Hungary were for over four decades the Romanian language programs at the Hungarian Broadcasting, as well. The first transmission was broadcast on a Saturday, July 26, 1980, from the studio of Solnoc, the director of the transmission being Ștefan Frătean. When the studio of Solnoc was chosen as the headquarters of the Romanian editorial, the management of the radio considered it a suitable place, because it was the studio closest to the Romanian local communities and the border with Romania, although in Solnoc never lived a considerable number of Romanians.<sup>31</sup>

Subjected in time to a systematic process of Serbianization (including through the holy services, officiated in Serbian), Romanians from the historic Banat began a broad process of church emancipation, demanding, among other things, regaining the right to use their mother tongue in worship and ordination of Romanian priests, subject to their own hierarchy. Started in the first decades of the 19th century, this struggle ended only in 1864, when the Episcopal Synod met in Carloviț, under the presidency of Patriarch Samuil Mașirevici (1863 - 1870, former bishop of Timișoara between 1858 and 1863), approved the passage of the Romanian deaneries under the jurisdiction of the two

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<sup>31</sup> \*\*\**Calendarul Românesc 2021*, Almanah al săptămânalului românesc „Foaia românească”, (Jula: Presă și Carte românească „NOI”, 2021), 124.

Romanian Orthodox dioceses from western Transylvania, which became suffragettes of the Metropolitan Church of Transylvania.<sup>32</sup>

The Romanian bishops of Arad<sup>33</sup> and Caransebeș<sup>34</sup> through the canonical visits undertaken, through the anti-masses, the cult and learning books, or through the form letters and pastorals sent, they were in permanent contact with the believers they pastored from the historical Banat<sup>35</sup>. The church life of the Orthodox Romanians from these lands experienced an extraordinary revival during this period, being built, only during the years 1885-1918, 13 places of worship.<sup>36</sup> A special moment in the era was the consecration of the church from Vârșeț (the current Episcopal Cathedral), dedicated to the "Inaltarea Domnului (Ascension of the Lord)", which took place on May 23, 1913, being performed by Bishop Miron Cristea of Caransebes, the future patriarch of the reunited Romania.<sup>37</sup>

The fall of the Milosevic regime in 2000 created a favourable climate for the reform in Vojvodina. Following the discussions between political parties, the level of autonomy has been increased through the *Omnibus Act* of 2002.

The above-mentioned law created the premises for the assertion of the Romanian minority from Vojvodina. Thus, the *National Council of the Romanian National Minority* (NCRNM) from Serbia is established, based in Novi Sad, a legal body for achieving Romanian autonomy in the field of culture, education, information and the official use of the Romanian language. NCRNM represents all Romanians in the Republic of Serbia, regardless of the names given to them (Romanians, Rumani or Vlachs). Representatives of the main parties, associations and organizations of the Romanians from Serbia (Community of Romanians from Serbia, the Democratic Party of Romanians from Serbia, Alliance of Romanians from Vojvodina, the Democratic Movement of Romanians from Timoc and the Association for the culture of Vlach-Romanian *Ariadnae Filum*), signed and issued at May 10, 2004 *The Belgrade Declaration*, in which they expressed their desire to set up a Joint National Council for the Romanian minority from north and south of the Danube. It started its activity as a representative of the Romanians from Vojvodina and Valea Timocului (Timoc Valley) in September 2004 (replacing the old council which was composed only of representatives of the Romanians from Vojvodina), and is still active, having its administrative headquarters in Vârșeț.<sup>38</sup>

The cultural segment is well represented in Vojvodina. On November 15, 2003, after almost 50 years, the Romanian Professional Theatre was reopened, which gives

<sup>32</sup> BRUSANOWKI, Paul, *Statutul canonic al Mitropoliei ortodoxe a Transilvaniei între 1864 – 1925*, RT 3 (2010): 41-42; a se vedea și idem, „Problema episcopiiilor sufragane în contextul luptelor pentru înființarea mitropoliei românești din Ungaria și Transilvania”, *TABOR* 5, (2008): 26-44.

<sup>33</sup> Ioan Mețianu (1875-1898), Iosif Goldiș (1899-1902) și Ioan Papp (1903-1925).

<sup>34</sup> Ioan Popasu (1865-1889), Nicolae Popea (1889-1908) și Miron Cristea (1909-1919).

<sup>35</sup> MĂRAN, Mircea, *Confesiunile neopretestante ale românilor din Banatul sârbesc*, în „*Contribuții la istoria ecleziastică a Banatului*”, Academia Română – Filiala Timișoara, (Timișoara: Institutul de Studii Banatice „Titu Maiorescu”, 2011), 279-294.

<sup>36</sup> Este vorba despre bisericile din Srediștea Mică (1885), Iancaid (1888), Doloave (1893), Sărcia (1896), Alibunar (1897), Mărghita (1899), Iabuca (1901), Mramorac (1902), Cuvin (1906), Nicolinț (1911), Vârșeț (1912) și Omolița (1914).

<sup>37</sup> TANDREU, N., *O frumoasă serbare bisericească - națională*, în RT 9-11 (1913): 316.

<sup>38</sup> Siteul oficial este <https://cnmnr.org/>.

performances in the main localities with Romanian communities, such as Vârșețul, on the stage of the “Sterija” National Theatre. Cultural activity is also well represented by the state-funded publishing houses, such as *Libertatea (Freedom)*. *Libertatea* Press and Publishing House publishes approximately 20 titles annually.<sup>39</sup>

It can be said that Romanians from Vojvodina have always been concerned with preserving, capitalizing on and promoting their spiritual and cultural identity. This approach is seen in the collection and registration of all material and cultural assets, such as traditional objects, works of art, archival documents, books and publications.<sup>40</sup>

In conclusion, we can say that this community of Romanians in Vojvodina is fully manifested on all levels of the spiritual and cultural life, standing out "*and thanks to the hard work of our hardworking peasantry, the many intellectuals and enthusiasts devoted to the prosperity and prosperity of the nation of which I am a part*".<sup>41</sup>

In addition to the social and economic problems that Serbia is currently going through, a major problem is the problem of the national minorities, especially those in the east of the country. Here, the Romanian minority was officially recognized as a Vlach minority only in 2007 by the Serbian state, encountering numerous difficulties in asserting its own ethnic identity and in recognizing it as a Romanian minority. In addition, there is a marked trend of depopulation of the area, through the emigration of inhabitants to Western European countries and a low birth rate.

If in the Ottoman period of time the Romanians from the Timoc Valley had a certain form of local autonomy and religious freedom, since the annexation of the region by Serbia in 1833, a strong process of denationalization and assimilation of the Romanian community began.<sup>42</sup> Unlike the ethnic minorities in Vojvodina, where we saw that there are some rights for them, the Romanians in the Morava-Timoc area have not benefited and do not benefit from such a thing even today.<sup>43</sup>

Nowadays, it has reached the situation that for Romanian-speaking Vlachs<sup>44</sup>, although they count about 35,000 people, much more than the Romanians from Vojvodina (and about 2 - 300,000 in reality), the granting of fundamental rights to education and religion in the Romanian language should be done only at the declarative level. However, amid the progress of Serbia's accession negotiations with the European Union, things seem to be moving slowly. Thus, starting with the school year 2013 - 2014, through a pilot project organized by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of Serbia, with the involvement of the National Council of the National Minority of Romanians from Serbia, optional Romanian language classes

<sup>39</sup> FLORA, Radu, *Literatura română din Voivodina. Panorama unui sfert de veac (1946 – 1970)*, ( Panciova: Libertatea, 1971), 76.

<sup>40</sup> ROȘU, Costa, *Prezențe culturale românești. Argument*, în *Patrimoniul cultural al românilor din Voivodina. Mărturii*, (Alba Iulia: Altip, 2012), 11.

<sup>41</sup> POPI, Gligor, *Prefață*, în *Românii din Banatul sârbesc (1941-1996)*, II, 5.

<sup>42</sup> SIMION, Eugen, „Academia Română și Valea Timocului”, în *Academica XV* (2005): 30.

<sup>43</sup> BLAJ, Mihai Octavian, „Spiritualitatea românească în Serbia”, în *Studii de Știință și Cultură 2* (2020): 111.

<sup>44</sup> SORESCU-MARINKOVIC, Annemarie, „Cultura populară a românilor din Timoc-încercare de periodizare a cercetărilor etnologice”, în *Philologica Jassyensia 1* (2006): 74-75.

were also introduced in Eastern Serbia.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, in 2014 a Vlach language textbook for the 1<sup>st</sup> year of study was approved, recognized by the Serbian state.<sup>46</sup>

Over time, a number of cultural and political organizations have been established with the goal to promote the rights of Romanians in the region. Several publications appeared, such as *Vorba Noastra* (Our Word) or *Curcubeul Timocean* (the *Timocean Rainbow*), without much impact, however, because the written Romanian language was not known, they had to be published in Serbian. The *Timoc Press* agency was created, which also produces some TV shows, news, as well as documentaries about the activities of the Romanian communities in the region. However, the radio broadcasts are limited to local Romanian folk and music programs, unfortunately the communication of the news between programs is also done in Serbian. The various cultural associations are currently under the auspices of the National Council of the Romanian National Minority in Serbia.<sup>47</sup>

At the youth level, the situation is even worse. Due to the assimilation policy, as well as in the absence of the cultural-educational facilities (study hours in Romanian, magazines and publications in Romanian, television, radio, etc.), young people, with small exceptions, give up speaking their mother tongue. Even if there is the possibility to study in Romania, through scholarships offered by the Romanian state, few young people choose this option, due to the linguistic inconvenience primarily. There are also more and more cases of parents (especially in the case of more and more mixed marriages)<sup>48</sup>, who opts for children to learn only the official language of the Serbian state, in order to better integrate them into Serbian society.

On the background of the fall of communism and the normalization of relations between the Serbian and Romanian states, as well as between the Serbian and Romanian Orthodox Churches, the issue of establishing a Bishopric for Romanians in Serbia became more and more acute. Thus, the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, updating an older decision, from October 23, 1933, in its working meeting of February 13-14, 1997, took the decision to establish the "Romanian Orthodox Bishopric from Yugoslav Banat", based in Vârșeț.<sup>49</sup>

In 2006, the title of the diocese was changed to "Bishopric of Dacia Felix", to indicate more precisely, from a historical point of view, the old Daco-Roman area. This was recognized by both the Serbian state (through the Ministry of Cults) and the Serbian Orthodox Church on April 28, 2009. The jurisdiction of the Dacia Felix Bishopric extended only to the historic Banat (Vojvodina), more precisely, to the Romanian

<sup>45</sup> SORESCU-MARINKOVIC, Annemarie, „Graiul vlah în școlile din Serbia răsăriteană: provocări și perspective”, în *Philologica Jassyensia* 2 (2015): 206.

<sup>46</sup> SORESCU-MARINKOVIC, Annemarie, HUȚANU, Monica, „Writing systems and linguistic identity of the Vlach community of Eastern Serbia”, în *Diacronia* 7 (2018): 1-14.

<sup>47</sup> DOBRESCU, Emilian M., „Comunitățile de români din afara granițelor țării”, în *RRS* 4, (2008): 285 – 286; HEDEȘTEAN Otilia, „Dilemele unei comunități uitate: vlahii din Timoc”, în *Dilema Europei Centrale: conviețuirea sau coexistența*, (Arad: Complexul Muzeal, 2004), 372-389.

<sup>48</sup> SORESCU-MARINKOVIC, Annemarie, „Foggy diaspora: Romanian women in Eastern Serbia”, în *Studia UBB Sociologia* 1 (2016): 37-57.

<sup>49</sup> DOBREI, Florin, „Episcopia Daciei Felix”, în *Autocefalie și responsabilitate*, (București: Basilica, 2010), 1025

Orthodox Vicariate from Vârșeț. The Romanian Orthodox communities from the Timoc Valley have not been part of the diocese since the beginning, and they further remain under the jurisdiction of the Serbian Orthodox Church. As a result, the Holy Synod took the decision, on October 29, 2009, to transfer the Dacia Felix Bishopric in direct dependence on the Romanian Patriarchate, in order to extend its canonical commitment to the mentioned territory, as well.<sup>50</sup>

At the administrative-organizational level, at the initiative of the local diocesan Bishop, starting with 2006, within the diocese, three other archdioceses were (re) activated, in addition to the three existing ones: Biserica Albă, Cuvin and Alibunar, thus raising their number to six: Vârșeț, Panciova, Toracul Mic, Biserica Albă, Cuvin and Alibunar.

In terms of household, most of the parish churches have been renovated and (re) painted, such as the Romanian Orthodox places of worship from Glogoni, Ofcea, Sân Mihai, Satu Nou, Petrovasâla (Vladimirovăț), Begheiți (Toracul Mare), Nicolinț, Duckling, Grebenaț and others.

The aspects of church life in these lands are therefore multiple.

In terms of culture, exhibitions of old documents and church art, symposia and concerts of church music were organized. In the editorial plan, the parish papers should be mentioned, some with a temporary appearance<sup>51</sup>, others, the oldest, with uninterrupted appearance until today.<sup>52</sup> To these are added several other cultural and Romanian Orthodox spirituality magazines.<sup>53</sup> We also note that since 2006, the teaching of religion in the mother tongue by Romanian clergy and teachers has been introduced in schools in Vojvodina. Regarding the training of the clergy, most of the future priests study at the Faculties of Theology from Timișoara, Arad and Caransebeș.

In accordance with the *Statute for the Organization and Functioning of the Romanian Orthodox Church* (republished in 2020), Article 2, the point XI, the Bishopric of Dacia Felix is under the direct jurisdiction of the Romanian Patriarchate, having its administrative headquarters in the city of Vârșeț, Republic of Serbia. The holder of this Episcopate is His Holiness Bishop Daniil Stoenescu.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Conform hotărârii Sfântului Sinod numărul 7303 din 29 octombrie 2009.

<sup>51</sup> Amintim aici periodicele *Libertatea* (Petrovasâla, 1993), *Foaia Sâmiailui* (Sân Mihai, 1993), *Sărcia* (Sărcia, 1993), *Făclia* (Alibunar, 1996), *Dealul Vârșețului* (Vârșeț, 2001), *Străjerul* (Straja), *Biruința* (Begheiți) ș. a.

<sup>52</sup> *Libertatea* (Vârșeț, 1945), *Bucuria Copiilor* (Vârșeț, 1946), *Lumina* (Vârșeț, 1947), *Tribuna Tineretului* (Novi Sad, 1972), *Almanahul Libertatea* (Novi Sad, 1988) ș. a.

<sup>53</sup> *Tibiscus* (Uzdin, 1990), *Cuvântul Românesc* (Novi Sad, 1991), *Cuvântul Românesc Torăcean* (Toracul Mic, 1992), *Gazeta de Seleuș* (1992), *Familia* (Voivodinț, 1994, din 1997 *Satul Voivodului*) ș. a.

<sup>54</sup> Până la data de 1 august 2017 a condus această episcopie în calitate de „episcop – locțiitor (administrator)”; în perioada 1 august 2017 – 1 august 2020 eparhia a fost suplinită (datorită retragerii temporare din motive medicale a chiriarhului) de Preasfințitul Părinte Siluan al Episcopiei Ortodoxe Române a Ungariei, iar de la această dată, va reveni Preasfințitul Părinte Daniil, în calitate de „Episcop al Daciei Felix” (conform dipticelor Bisericii Ortodoxe Române).

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