

Aspects of the russification process in the Bessarabia Orthodox Church during the Tsarist Period (1812-1917)*

Lucian CORDUNEANU**

PhD Candidate

"Dimitru Stăniloae" Faculty of Orthodox Theology,
"Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi, Romania

Abstract:

This study covers the way that the russification process appeared in Bessarabia, after this region was annexed in the year 1812 and until the Union with Romania from 27th of March 1918. During the 106 years of tsarist occupation, in Bessarabia there was an attempt to impose the Russian model in the civil and church administration structures. The Orthodox Church from Bessarabia, during the period 1812-1918, was a component part of the Russian Orthodox Church. The hierarchical leadership faithfully followed the political direction and those decided by the Synod of St. Petersburg. Of the thirteen hierarchs who served in Bessarabia during the tsarist period, only the first hierarch, Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni, was Romanian. All the hierarchs that served after him were Russians. They reported differently to the problems and needs of Romanian believers from Bessarabia, and the Russian hierarchs activity could not be brought to the same denominator. In order to russify the Bessarabia region, the Russian hierarchs gradually imposed in churches and churches schools from Bessarabia the Russian language, excluded the Romanian language

* This article was written under the guidance of Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Ion Vicovan, who gave his consent for publication.

** corduneanu.lucian89@yahoo.com

from Theological Seminary in Chisinau in the second half of the 19th century. Furthermore, in all the other schools, was imposed education in Russian language, the Romanian language being totally excluded. In these conditions, the whole education system became a powerful tool for russification, their consequences being disastrous. Towards the end of the 19th century, in order to make the pastoral mission more efficient among the faithful, the need to print brochures and books in the mother tongue was increasingly felt. The founding of „The Brotherhood of the Nativity of Christ” hastened the opening of the diocesan typography and printing of books and publications in the mother tongue. During the Bishop Vadimir (1904-1908) and in the following period, Romanian books were printed. Through the work and involvement of secular and ecclesiastical personalities who played important roles in the national movement in Bessarabia in 1917-1918, it was possible to obtain the autonomy of the Church, as well as the Union with Romania.

Keywords:

Bessarabian Orthodox Church; Russian hierarchs; clergy; Russification; Bishop Jacob; Theological Seminary of Chisinau; “The Brotherhood of the Nativity of Christ”

I. Situation of the Bessarabia Orthodox Church after the annexation of 1812. The Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni

After the Russian – Turkish war from 1806-1812, the Tsarist Empire annexed Bessarabia. After signing the Treaty dated 16/28th of May 1812 at Bucharest, the Russian authorities applied the tsarist model of administration forms of the new annexed territory. The reactions to the annexation of May 1812 were very strong and energetic, both on the part of the great boyars and of the clergy, presenting the immense losses following the annexation (Cernovodeanu 1993, 50). Even the Metropolitan Veniamin Costachi of Moldavia (1803-1842) vehemently protested against the annexation of the territory between the Prut and the Dniester.

Seeing the “fear” of the boyars who did not make diplomatic efforts on the annexed territory issue, Metropolitan Veniamin said: “For Bucovina, Ghica Vodă lost his life, and we for Bessarabia do not even make a protest” (Nistor 2017, 191-192).

An immediate consequence after the annexation was immigration of many population “over Prut”. The desire to settle in Moldova was also expressed by certain clerics who asked for permission of Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni (as was the case with Archpriest Dimitrie from Hotin, or priest Vasile Anastasiu and other clerics) (I. Varta and T. Varta 2005, 30). In order to stop the population departure, Tsar Alexander I (1801-1825) offered certain facilities to the inhabitants and in 1818, granted local autonomy (Halipa and Morariu 1991, 14).

At the Bessarabia annexation in 1812, according to the data registered by Metropolitan Gavriil-Bănulescu Bodoni, there were functioning 749 churches for 755 villages and cities, 12 monasteries and 13 hermitages, being at the same time “centers of Romanian culture” (Moraru 1995, 29-30) [The “exact” number of Romanian Orthodox holy places differs in the presentation of some authors. Father Professor Mircea Păcurariu lists 775 parish churches, to which are added several other important monasteries]. In the period 1813 until 1918, în perioada 1813 până în 1918, in the diocesan seat of Chisinau they pastored 13 archiereus. Except for Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni, all were Russians, all hierarchs being true servants of the Russian state (Buzilă 1996, 46).

After the annexation, the leadership of the region was entrusted to a “provisional government”. Tsar Alexander I placed Scarlat Sturza at the leadership of the new province. But Scarlat Sturza's “earthly rule” lasted a year, after that being entrusted to I.M. Harting. Against the tendencies of Russification, the Bessarabian nobility and the clergy immediately pronounced themselves, the Moldavian boyars complaining to Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu Bodoni that their habits were being violated (Varta 1998, 27).

In April 1818, Tsar Alexander I promulgated the so-called “*Settlement or Regulation of the Bessarabian Oblast*” (Păcurariu 2012, 83). This settlement lasted until 1828, when it was repealed, and at the

suggestion of Prince Vorontsov on 29th of January 1929 (governor of Bessarabia in 1823), a new Regulation was promulgated (Păcurariu 2012, 84).

Within the period 1812-1821, the diocese of Chisinau was led by Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni. On 4th of November 1812, Metropolitan Gabriel asked the Russian Synod to establish a new diocese, mentioning in his project that local traditions should be taken into account, that priests should be exempt from donations to the land, to enjoy the rights as the Russian priests, and the secular domination to not be involved in the Church's affairs. The project was approved by Tsar Alexander I, and in 1813 the Archdiocese of Chisinau and Hotin was established, led by Metropolitan Gavriil himself (Bălan 2010, 26). The establishment of this diocese was contrary to the 34th Apostolic canon and the 8th canon of the Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus (431), which provided that the Church of one nation has the possibility of organizing itself ethnically and to lead itself independently of the Church of another nation, and the appointment of a new hierarch also violated canon 16 of Constantinople (Floca 2005, 81-82).

On 31st of January 1813, the Theological Seminary was opened in Chisinau - the first school opened after annexation. The studies at this Seminar were in Russian language, and the Romanian language was a compulsory subject. The first rector of the Seminar was Petre Cunițchi (Ețco 2002, 70). After the Theological Seminary opening, other parish schools were established in some localities (Chisinau, Dubasari, Tiraspol, Grigoriopol, Cetatea Albă, Orhei, Dobrușa), in 1838 primary church schools were opened, reaching between 1844-1850 at a number of 326, where 5177 students were studying (Moraru 1995, 33).

In the administrative organization of the Bessarabian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Gavriil introduced some characteristic measures of the Russian Church. He elected as his vicar Dimitrie Sulima (of Ukrainian descent), "Bishop of Bender and Akerman" (Tighina and Cetatea Alba) even since 1811. In 1813, the "Exarchic Department of Chisinau" (Păcurariu 2012, 95-96) was established, and the following year, following requests from Metropolitan Gavriil (Păcurariu 2012, 95-96), on 4th of May

1814, the Russian Synod accepted the request for the establishment of the diocesan printing house. The first book printed in this printing house was the *Liturgy* or the *Servant* (in 1815). During the diocesan printing house, during the pastorate of Metropolitan Gavriil, several church books were printed, as well as grammar books - "*Bucoavna ruso-română*" (1814), "*Short Russian grammar, with interpretation in Moldovan, for the disciples of the seminary from Chisinau*". The diocesan printing house operated with small interruptions until 1883, when it was closed by Archbishop Sergei Leapidevsky. Other Romanian books were printed in Petersburg.

In 1814, a library was opened, and the Seminary established in 1813 remained subordinate to the hierarch until 1823, when its reorganization took place. During all this period, 25 teachers were active in the Seminar (17 Ukrainians, the rest of other nationalities, only one Romanian, the Transylvanian Ioan Buta, son of a priest), so that, according to Father Mircea Păcurariu, "Russification began and through these teachers" (Păcurariu 2012, 97).

Metropolitan Gavriil was also concerned with the edification of an archbishop's cathedral in Chisinau, but the cornerstone was laid by his successor Dimitrie Sulima in 1830. Instead, during his archpastorate, the "Adormirea Maicii Domnului" church from the Capriana monastery was restored and several churches were built in Chisinau ("Holy Trinity", "Saint George"), in other villages or in rural areas. Metropolitan Gavriil died on 30th of March 1821, and was buried at the Capriana Monastery.

II. The situation of the Bessarabian Orthodox Church under the successors of Metropolitan Gavriil

The next to lead the diocese of Chisinau after Gavriil Bănulescu was Archbishop Dimitrie Sulima (1821-1844). Although he was of Ukrainian origin, he did not forbid Romanian culture, he was forced to do so due to the resistance of the Romanian boyars who opposed Russification. During the reign of Archbishop Dimitrie, the "unnatural phenomenon" of bilingualism in books published by the Diocesan Printing House appeared in Chisinau, the Slavonic influence being extended more and more on the

printing presses in Chisinau. In the immediate aftermath of the death of Metropolitan Gavriil, in Bessarabia were opened Russian primary schools, in Chisinau (1822), Balti (1824), Hotin and Tighina (1827), and in 1833 - a seven-grade high school was founded in Chisinau (Drăghicescu 2002, 3).

In 1825, Tsar Nicholas I (1825-1855), a great autocrat, ascended the imperial throne of Russia; In 1828 the limited autonomy of Bessarabia was liquidated, and on 29th of January 1929, the "Regulation" of Prince Vorontsov was approved, by whose provisions the leadership of the province was handed over to the governor; the Romanian language was expelled from the administration of the region, being established the absolute monopoly of using the Russian language within the state institutions and "a policy of Russification was started against the school, the church and all the Moldovan settlements" (Popa-Lisseanu 1924, 17).

The policy of Russification was also reflected in the church sphere from Bessarabia. During the divine service it was preached in both languages (Russian and Romanian). In a report towards the Diocesan Consistory, it was proposed that the "Moldovan priesthood" could continue to teach children their mother tongue (Ețco 2014, 677). Although he lived among Romanians and knew the problems in the administration and the church (given the dissatisfaction of the local population), the process of Russification begins to intensify during the pastorate of this hierarch. In 1823, the reorganization of the Theological Seminary in Chisinau took place, following the model of those in Russia (in three sections: rhetoric, philosophy and theology). Teachers were required to know the Romanian language, and "Moldovan" students were required to speak only Russian during classes and outside of them - Theological Seminary becoming in time the "main institution for the Russification of the Romanian clergy from Bessarabia" (Niță-Danielescu 2002, 116). It should be noted that some of the students of the Seminary came from certain regions of Russia (in 1828 from 54 de students, 45 were from Cherson, especially from Tiraspol county) (*cf.* Păcurariu 2012, 109).

In order for the Russian language teaching process to be effective, Archbishop Dimitrie proposed that teachers in parish and county schools know their mother tongue and explain to students all the lessons in both

languages at the same time and to be able to answer in Russian and Moldavian (Ețco 2014, 678).

In order to unify the administrative organization of the Church from Bessarabia according to the Russian model, the measure of abolishing the vicariate was taken and the “regional archpriests” were called “superior blagocini”, the Russian Synod asking Archbishop Dimitrie for a “detailed” instruction for them (Popovschi 1931, 38-39). In 1840, a new regulation of the Seminars was approved, which provided 32 hours per week for each class, with all subjects to be taught only in Russian (Păcurariu 2012, 109). In 1837, church primary schools came under the leadership of the state, which had in mind the organization of a new primary theological system, characterized by creation of a network of well-endowed schools with sufficient teaching materials and special curricula (Ețco 2014, 678). We can see that during the time of Archbishop Dimitrie Sulima, through some orders and regulations imposed by the Russian state, education became the “prerogative” of the tsarist leadership and in Church the Russian model of organization and administration became more and more imposed. Also during the time of Archbishop Dimitrie, censorship became harsher, foreign books could only be brought with ministerial approval.

Archbishop Dimitrie Sulima's successor was Irinarh Popov (1844-1858), considered to be a “typical representative of Russian centralism and bureaucracy” (Bălan 2010, 30). Prior to his transfer to Chisinau, he had been a bishop in Vologda County (Buzilă 1996, 48). During his time, “the organization of the Russian-style Bessarabian church was completed” (Bălan 2010, 30). Under the pretext that they did not know the Russian language, the Romanian archpriests were fired and replaced with Russian priests from the neighboring Russian governorates. Only Russian clerics were appointed to the administrative leadership of the diocese. Priests began to wear Russian reverence, and their names have been Russified since the seminary (Danilevschi, Florov, Vlaicov, Popovschi, etc.). Like Archbishop Dimitrie Sulima, he tried to bring in Seminary graduates from Kherson, Camenita, Vladimir counties, but to no avail (I. Varta and T. Varta 2005, 32).

Towards the end of year 1840, a group of Moldovan intellectuals asked permission to publish a newspaper in Romanian, significantly titled "The Romanian", and their request was rejected. The measures taken by Russia after the events of 1848, greatly weakened the contacts between the Romanians on both sides of the Prut, measures that would further isolate Bessarabia from the realities that were happening in the Principalities and from the unionist direction, more and more accentuated.

The second half of the nineteenth century meant a period of great turmoil for Russia, as a result of which Bessarabia would also suffer. A brief characterization of this period is presented by the Bessarabian researcher, Gheorghe Negru:

Politically and culturally isolated, distressed in its natural manifestations, Bessarabia could not experience phenomena of cultural effervescence, similar to those in the rest of Moldova, which gave birth to the national press and theater, impelled the development of modern Romanian literature (Negru 2000, 11).

At the church level, many of the measures taken by Archbishop Irinarh led to fulfillment of the goals pursued by the Russian civil administration in Bessarabia. This can also be deduced from the fact that Archbishop Irinarh invited graduates of the Seminaries from the neighboring dioceses to the churches where the divine service was celebrated in the Slavonic language - being "forced" by the Synod, many young graduates not wanting to come to Bessarabia, although this measure falls within the administrative provisions of Russian rule (the ordination of graduates from other dioceses was an effective means of Russification). Regarding the printing of books in Romanian at the diocesan printing house, the number was low.

Although attempts were made to impose the Russian language in churches, Russian priests often had to preach in Romanian - few of the Romanian priests knew Russian. Another radical measure during the reign of Archbishop Irinarh was to stop the influx of religious books coming from the Romanian Principalities; by different means these books entered in Bessarabia, being of real use for the priests in officiating the divine service (I. Varta and T. Varta 2005, 32).

During the pastorate of Bishop Irinarh, the diocese of Chisinau gets a “precise” direction where the powers of the archpriests are reduced, the effective leadership of the diocese passes into the hands of the hierarch, and the faithful are removed from participating in the affairs of the diocese (Popovschi 1931, 479).

III. The apogee of Russification and situation of the Orthodox Church at the end of the 19th century

The next hierarch to lead the Chisinau diocese was Antonie Shokotov (1858-1871). This hierarch proceeded to a new division of the diocese, abolishing the county archdioceses. During his pastorate, the administrative civil leadership took harsh measures regarding the use of the Romanian language. The union of the Principalities of 1859, which also caused the appearance of unionist tendencies among some Bessarabian boyars, led to intensification of the Russification policy in Bessarabia (Gulica 2014, 664). In these conditions, education in Bessarabia was placed within some conditions and mechanisms for which “exceptional measures” were required to be taken, the pedagogical component of education being subordinated to the political one.

From a memorandum of Governor Platon Antonovici to the Governor-General of Novorossia and Bessarabia in Odessa, Cotebu, we found out that publication of Romanian newspapers was forbidden; and those who wanted or subscribed to Romanian newspapers received them only with the approval of censorship (Negru 1994, 77). At the same time, Governor Antonovich underlined the importance of “political surveillance” of the border between “Russian Bessarabia and the United Principalities”, which was unsafe and flawed (Negru 2017, 223). During the pastorate of Archbishop Antonie in 1866, the Council of State suspended the use of the “Moldovan language” at Chisinau Gymnasium, and a year later - in 1867, it was removed from the curriculum of Chisinau Seminary, although the professors pronounced themselves in favor of teaching the Romanian language; in 1868, the Romanian language was removed in the county schools of Hotin, and in 1871 - in several regions of Bessarabia.

In 1864, Bishop Antony founded a Russian school for clerical girls, and in 1866 another spiritual school for boys. Also during the reign of Archbishop Antony, the number of Russian priests - invited to Bessarabia and coming from neighboring governorates - is increasing. In the Romanian parishes, an attempt was made to impose holding the divine service in both languages, but the ecclesiastical administration from Chisinau failed to obtain the followed "results". This is also clear from the statement made by the Minister of Public Instruction, Count D. A. Tolstoj, who visited Bessarabia in 1867 and noticed that most Bessarabians did not speak Russian, and in most churches the service was held in Romanian. Minister Tolstoy was determined to end the "separation of states", as the union of Moldova with Wallachia "produces an act of obvious attraction to the Moldovan neighbors from Bessarabia" (Boga 1993, 218-219).

The publication of the magazine "Bulletin of the Diocese of Chisinau" was the first and only church magazine published in Romanian in Bessarabia during the nineteenth century, being considered a small ephemeral "victory". Research has shown that regarding the bilingualism criteria, it was respected only in the first two years (1867-1869), and starting with numbers 3-4 from 1869, the Romanian language of some texts was gradually omitted, both from the official part, as well as the unofficial one (Danilov 2011, 48).

After Antonie Shokotov, Archbishop Pavel Lebedev came to lead the Chisinau diocese. During his time, absurd measures were taken to limit the Romanian language. In Chisinau, "already in 1873 - writes the historian Matei Cazacu - only in five boyar houses was it still possible to have a conversation in Romanian" (Bulei 2014, 585). The Chisinau Consistory, in a letter dated 8th of June 1873, demanded that the rector and leadership of the Chisinau Seminary to not admit students that did not know Russian language to classes and that the priests would teach the children Russian "before they were sent to school". The election of the Moldovan governor Galin as rector of the Seminary was not welcomed by the civil administration, as "it could develop the Moldovan element in the seminar" and "all actions taken by the leadership of the local diocese for clergy and the whole county Russification" could even be cancelled (Negru

1996, 44), as shown in a report of the head of the Bessarabian government gendarmerie, dated 27th of June 1875.

Archbishop Pavel is accused by posterity of pursuing a very harsh policy of Russification. An “unforgivable” accusation is the burning of numerous Romanian books and “he heated with them the stoves of his Metropolitan Church”; another measure was the exile of Moldovan clerics in certain Russian provinces from Pskov, Lutsk, Minsk and other remote areas for “the crime” of not “renouncing the ancestral language” (Pelivan 2012, 121).

Also, measures were taken regarding the administration and use of the diocesan printing house, being introduced a series of restrictions on liturgical books in Romanian, in order to remove them from the use of liturgical practice. During his visits to the parishes, Archbishop Pavel was interested in old books, which he noted in his travel journal. Archbishop Pavel banned the use of these books on the pretext that they were “damaged”, but the purpose was different - to replace them with new synodal editions in the Slavonic language. According to the researcher Maria Danilov, this form of censorship led to the withdrawal from the Bessarabian churches of a significant number of liturgical books from the Romanian churches (Danilov 2018, 116). By an order of the archbishop of 18th of May 1880, the Spiritual Consistory had the obligation not to print documents in Romanian, but to use only those that were printed in the diocesan printing house.

The drastic measures taken by Archbishop Pavel had a direct impact on the closure of the diocesan printing house in 1883. Pavel Lebedev showed a hostile attitude towards the Romanian cultural element in Bessarabia, in his opinion - the national school and the Romanian books were “harmful” to the spirit of the Bessarabians. As for the monasteries, most of them officiated the divine services in Romanian; The Russian hierarch ordered that in all the monasteries in Bessarabia to be established - in addition to the Moldavian pew, another Russian one. Between 1872 and 1878, 330 Moldavian churches were closed in Bessarabia; in many cases, Romanian priests were replaced by Russian or Ukrainian clerics, starting the disapproval of believers who began to stop

attending church services. The measures taken by Archbishop Pavel in order to suppress the national element in churches and monasteries, displeased the Bessarabian believers.

Archbishop Paul's successor was Sergei Leapidevsky (1882-1891), who had to work hard to calm the spirits. Although he allowed the people to pray in their mother tongue, in 1883 he asked the Synod for permission to close the diocesan printing house, arguing that the Russian language had been introduced in the churches and that Romanian books were no longer useful. This decision was a serious blow to Romanian culture. In 1884, "Rules for Church-Parish Schools" were published in Russia, and church education was directly subordinated under the strict guidance of the Synod's Procurator. Despite the restrictions, due to the commendable work of some personalities, in 1884 the first Romanian newspaper entitled "Messenger of Bessarabia" appeared in Chisinau, published by Riabcic and Drumaşcu, and in several churches the holy services were performed in Romanian, fact that emerges from notes in the diary of Archbishop Serghie, which mentioned that in some churches the registers of civil status were kept in the Moldavian language (although since 1872 the record in Russian was mandatory) (Ciachir 1992, 57).

During his pastorate, certain attempts were made to confer certain rights on the Romanian language, but they failed (Eţco 2014, 681). In 1884, all the schools near the monasteries were transformed into parish schools, being subordinated to the Diocesan School Council. In January 1891, Archbishop Serghie was transferred to the Odessa Metropolitanate, and after a brief archpastorate of Isachie Polozensky (21st of January 1891-21st of November 1892), for approximately six years will pastor Neofit Nevodcikov (1892-1898). At the 1894 Diocesan Congress, the idea was proposed that Moldovan students should be able to study in their mother tongue and that books should be bilingual (this measure was also in favor of the Russian language).

The next to succeed Bishop Neofit in the hierarch's seat in Chisinau was Iacov Peatnitsky (1898-1904). In 1898, the Society for the Orthodox Missionary Brotherhood of the Nativity of the Lord was established, which aimed to promote Christian morality and education among the clergy and

parishioners. Realizing the ineffectiveness of imposing the Russian language in churches, Archbishop Iacov sought permission from the Holy Synod to publish literature in Romanian as well, with or without the Russian text (I. Varta and T. Varta 2005, 36). On 5th of April 1900, the Russian Synod allowed the activity of the Brotherhood of the Nativity of Christ for the purpose of publishing spiritual reading books in the Moldavian language; the first text printed in Romanian (no. 1) appears on 12th of December, 1900, the sheets were printed with parallel text, in Romanian and Russian, with a circulation of over 5000 copies, then distributed to parishes. In 1904, the "Historical-Archaeological Society of the Church of Bessarabia" was established (Parhomovici 1929, 393).

After the 1905 revolution, important changes took place in Russia throughout society, which also affected church life. On 17th of April 1905, the Act of Tolerance was approved, granting religious freedom to all citizens of the Empire, and on 17th of October of the same year, Tsar Nicholas II published a Manifesto granting other civil rights (freedom of conscience, press, meetings and other matters). Against the background of the new transformations that took place within the Russian society, several Bessarabian leaders supported their national demands, initially in the pages of the Russian newspaper "Bessarabscaia Jizni" and then in the newspaper "Bessarabia" (founded on 24th of May 1906) (Varta 1996, 53) and in other subsequent publications ("Viața Basarabiei", "Moldovanul", "Luminator", "Făclia Țării", "Cuvânt Moldovenesc", etc.) (Varta 1996, 53), through which they demanded national, cultural and political autonomy for Bessarabia (Porumbescu 1932, 2).

In the autumn of 1904, Bishop Vladimir Sinikovski will take over the leadership of the Chisinau diocese. Being a missionary in the regions near the Altai Mountains and the Kyrgyz steppe for 18 years, Bishop Vladimir understood the needs of the Romanian faithful from Bessarabia and took several positive steps regarding the organization of the Bessarabian Church. At the priestly congresses of 1905-1906, the reopening of the diocesan printing house, the study of the Romanian language at the Theological Seminary in Chisinau, as well as the publication of a church magazine in the mother tongue were requested (Varta 1995, 50; Varta

2009, 22). On 26th of October 1906, the diocesan printing house was inaugurated, and following the requests of Bishop Iacov, by decree (decree) number 15441 of the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, it was allowed to publish the magazine "Luminatorul" (*On the occasion of His Majesty the Emperor, the sole ruler of all Russia, from the Most Holy Ruler of the Synod, to His Holiness Vladimir, the Bishop of Chisinau and Hotin, in the "Luminatorul", year LXVI, nr. 1, January, 1933, p. 9*). The first issue of this magazine will be published in January 1908, the magazine having editors - the hieromonk Gurie Grosu and the priest Constantin Popovici (Gurie 1933, 15).

Once with the arrival of Bishop Serafim Ciceagov at the head of the Chisinau diocese in the autumn of 1908, major negative changes would take place in church's life in Bessarabia. The rights gained during the reign of Bishop Jacob (1904) were severely violated by Serafim. As a prominent representative of Russian absolutism, he stood against national demands, especially against the "Luminator" group, which he called as "separatist gang" (Gurie 1933, 16), and took action against the use of language in divine services, which led Ion Pelivan to state that Serafim Ciceagov Zealagov prevented the Bessarabians from praying to God in their mother tongue (Pelivan 2012, 190).

In a secret report, presented to S.M. Lukianov (Deputy Prosecutor between 1909 and 1911), Serafim Szczecov mentioned the existence of a group (composed of 15-20 priests) that leaned towards "Moldophilism", considering them "our worst enemies" (Poștarencu 2014, 627). Several secular and church personalities were to suffer from the abusive actions of the Russian hierarch: Archimandrite Gurie Grosu (exiled in Russia), priests Constantin Popovici, Constantin Partenie, I. Ignatovici, Professor Grigore Constantinescu, etc. Other influential Bessarabians also suffered from the tsarist civil authorities. Ion Loghinescu (teacher from Hotin), is exiled in 1910 in Pernov, Ion Rădulescu - professor at the Theological Seminary in Chisinau is exiled in 1911 in Kameneț-Podolsk, Vasile Vasile Florov (teacher at the Diocesan School for Girls in Chisinau, exiled in 1911 in the Caucasus (Pelivan 1943, 504-505).

Pressure and demands from many civil and church figures for respecting the identity elements and use of the Romanian language in the education system and Church, the movement formed around the hieromonk Inochentie from Balta (who preached in his mother tongue), the proselytism of neo-Protestant cults and other factors, have determined that the Petersburg authorities to allow the use of the mother tongue in churches of Bessarabia in 1913 (Scutaru 2017, 399-400).

During World War I (1914-1918), more than 300,000 Bessarabians fought in the Russian army. Many Bessarabians were sent to the Romanian fronts, which led to the strengthening of their ties with Romanians from the Kingdom and from Transylvania. During the First World War until the Union with the Motherland on 27th of March 1918, the diocese of Bessarabia was led by Hierarchs Plato Rojdestvenski (1914-1915) and Anastasie Cribanovschi (1915-1918) (Bălan 2010, 37). These hierarchs were more concerned with involvement in social and humanitarian action in order to help those affected by the war (wounded soldiers, orphans, etc.). However, the tsarist authorities have taken drastic measures against those who show sympathy in a national spirit; doctor Elena Alistar spent 45 days in prison in Chisinau because she claimed “the union of Bessarabia with Romania”, from where she escaped due the intervention of Vasile Stroescu. Teodor M. Ciuhureanu, big landlord from Bălți, was imprisoned for seven months due his unfavorable opinions towards the Russian army and his conviction that the Romanian army “will enter Bessarabia”. For patriotic beliefs, during the First World War, also suffered because the tsarist authorities Iustin Frățiman (exiled in Siberia), C.V. Popescu, Mihail Vântu, Ion Bălțeanu and others (Pelivan 1943, 505-506).

The fall of the tsarist regime in March 1917 made possible the development of the national movement in Bessarabia. On 3rd of April 1917, the Moldovan National Party (PNM) was created, a political group that would lead political actions in the region and that would integrate many important political leaders, among them being famous clerics. Their work would success, especially by the happy event of 27th of March 1918,

when Bessarabia united with the Romanian Kingdom, being the first province to return to its motherland.

Conclusions

The Russification policy launched in Bessarabia had a strong impact on this region, which has been felt to this day. The annexation of Bessarabia in 1812 meant for the Romanian population an unfortunate event that would open the process of Russification and the erasure of the national identity. This policy of Russification in the nineteenth century led to the annulment of certain rights: the right to statehood and its own legislation, use of Romanian language in Church, school and state institutions, education of children in mother tongue in schools, and publishing books and publications in Romanian.

Russification took place in two main directions: in the city - through the school, in the villages - through the Church. After the annexation of the province, the tsarist authorities gradually took measures to limit the printing and distribution of worship books in Romanian, in churches, as well as in the parish and seminary libraries. The Russification of education had dramatic consequences: in 1912, of the 1,709 primary schools that existed in Bessarabia, none was in Romanian. Regarding the Orthodox Church in Bessarabia, except for Metropolitan Gavriil, all the other hierarchs who pastored after him until 1918 were Russians. They related differently to the needs of the diocese and their activity cannot be brought to the same common denominator.

The most drastic and restrictive measures for Russification took place in the second half of the 19th century, during the time of Archbishops Antonie Shokotov (1858-1871) and Pavel Lebedev (1871-1882). In 1866-1867, the Romanian language was almost completely banned in Bessarabian schools. The harsh measures taken by the tsarist regime did not have the desired effect, because in many localities priests officiated holy services in Romanian, and the percentage of Russian-speaking connoisseurs was low among priests and much lower among parishioners. The maintenance of Romanian books in the churches of Bessarabia, bringing of other books from the Principality (especially from Moldova),

had a fundamental contribution in preserving the national consciousness among the Bessarabians.

Towards the end of the 19th century, there was an increasing demand for students to study in their mother tongue, these issues being discussed in Diocesan Councils, with Russian hierarchs increasingly aware of the need to print books and brochures in Romanian. But the event that "hastened" the decision of the Russian Synod to allow printing books in Romanian was the establishment of the Brotherhood "Birth of Christ" in 1898, which - in the purpose of their mission among the parishioners, could not convey the message of faith in other way than in the mother tongue, through publications and other methods, which was to happen at the beginning of the twentieth century, by publication of the famous magazine "Luminatorul" in 1908.

Bibliography

- Bălan, Emanuel. 2010. *Bessarabian Orthodox Church. The Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia from the beginning until today*. Bacău: „Egal” Publishing House.
- Boga, Leon. 1993. *The struggle for the Romanian language and the idea of union*. Chişinău: Universitas Publishing House.
- Bulej, Ion. 2014. "The Old Kingdom of Romania and Bessarabia". In: *Bessarabia 1812. National problem, international involvements*. Bucharest: Romanian Academy Publishing House.
- Buzilă, Boris. 1996. *From the history of church life in Bessarabia (1812-1918; 1918-1944)*. Bucharest: Romanian Cultural Foundation Publishing House.
- Cernovodeanu, Paul. 1993. *Bessarabia. The drama of a Romanian historical province in an international context 1806-1920*. Bucharest: Albastros Publishing House.
- Ciachir, Nicolae. 1992. *Bessarabia under tsarist rule (1812-1917)*. Bucharest.

-
- Danilov, Conf. Dr. Maria. 2011. "Synodal censorship and the issue of the Romanian language in the pages of the magazine Kišiniovske Eparchial'nye Vedomosti. A few clarifications". In: *Luminătorul*, nr. 5 (116), September-October, 48.
 - Danilov, Maria. 2018. *Book and Censorship in Bessarabia (1812-1917)*. Chișinău: Epigraf Publishing House.
 - Drăghicescu, Dumitru. 2002. "School and Church in Bessarabia". In: *Cugetul'*, no. 3-4 (15-16), 3.
 - Ețco, Diana. 2002. "Petre Cunițchi, the first rector of the Seminary in Chisinau". In: *Cugetul'*, no. 2 (14), 70.
 - Ețco, Diana. 2014. "Problems and solutions within the Bessarabian theological school". In: *Bessarabia 1812. National problem, international involvements'*. Bucharest: Romanian Academy Publishing House.
 - Floca, Arhid. Prof. Dr. Ioan N. 2005. *Canons of the Orthodox Church. Notes and comments*. Sibiu.
 - Gulica, Ilie. 2014. "Russification strategies and practices applied in the Russian school in Bessarabia (second half of the 19th century - beginning of the 20th century)". In: *Bessarabia 1812. National problem, international involvements*. Bucharest: Romanian Academy Publishing House.
 - Gurie, Mitropolit, 1933. "Memories of the magazine's appearance «Luminătorul»". In: *Luminătorul*, year LXVI, nr. 1, January, 15.
 - Halipa, Pantelimon; Anatolie Morariu. 1991. *Testament for descendants*. Chisinau: Hyperion Publishing House.
 - Moraru, Anton. 1995. *The history of Romanians. Bessarabia and Transnistria (1812-1993)*. Chișinău.
 - Negru, Conf. univ. dr. Gheorghe. 2017. "The constitution of the modern Romanian state and the change of the paradigm of the national policy of the Russian Empire in Bessarabia. From the policy of «tactical concessions» to the exclusively restrictive national policy (years 1860)". In: *Country Council Centenary (1917-2017). Materials of the international scientific conference Chisinau, 21st*

- of November 2017. Coordinators Prof. univ. Dr. Gheorghe Clivetti, Prof. univ. Dr. Ioan Bolovan, Conf. univ. Dr. Gheorghe Cojocaru. Chişinău: Lexon Prim printing house.
- Negru, Gheorghe. 1994. "Some aspects of the tsarist policy of isolating Bessarabia. In: *Romanian Destiny*, nr. 1, 77.
 - Negru, Gheorghe. 1996. "Tsarist school - instrument of Russification of Romanians in Bessarabia (second half of the 19th century)". In: *Romanian Destiny*, year III, nr. 9, 44.
 - Negru, Gheorghe. 2000. *Tsarism and the national movement of Romanians in Bessarabia*. Chişinău: Prut International Publishing House.
 - Nistor, Ion. 2017. *History of Bessarabia*. Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House.
 - Niţă-Danielescu, Pr. Prof. Daniel. 2002. "The life of the Bessarabian priesthood during the tsarist rule (1812-1918)". In: *Theology and Life*, the year XII (LXXVIII), nr. 5-8, May-August, 116.
 - Păcurariu, Pr. Prof. Dr. Mircea. 2012. *Bessarabia - aspects of the history of the Church and of the Romanian people*. Bucharest: Basilica Publishing House.
 - Parhomovici, Iosif M. 1929. "Short historical sketch about the church historical-archeological society from 1904 to 1929. In: *Revista of the historical-archeological society from Chisinau*, vol. XIX. Chisinau: Diocesan Printing House "Cartea Românească".
 - Pelivan, Ioan. 2012. *History of the national liberation movement in Bessarabia*. Bucharest: Bucharest Library Publishing House
 - Pelivan, Ion. 1943. "From the sufferings of Bessarabia under Russian rule". In: *Luminătorul*, year LXXV, nr. 7-8, July-August, 504-505.
 - Popa-Lisseanu, G. 1924. *Bessarabia. Historical view*. „Jockey Club” Typography, Ion C. Văcărescu, 1924, p. 17.
 - Popovschi, Nicolae. 1931. *History of the Bessarabian Church in the Nineteenth Century under the Russians*. Chişinău: Diocesan Printing House „Cartea Românească”.
 - Porumbescu, C. 1932. "My memories". In: *Moldovan Word*, year VII, nr. 3, friday 15th of January, 2.

-
- Poștarencu, Dinu. 2014. "Contacts between Romanians on both banks of the Prut during the tsarist period". In: *Bessarabia 1812. The national problem, international implications*. Bucharest: Romanian Academy Publishing House.
 - Scutaru, Dr. Silvia. 2017. "Trends of national renaissance among the Bessarabian priesthood at the beginning of the 20th century". In: *Country Council Centenary (1917-2017). Materials of the international scientific conference Chisinau, 21st of November 2017*. Coordinators Prof. univ. Dr. Gheorghe Clivetti, Prof. univ. Dr. Ioan Bolovan, Conf. univ. Dr. Gheorghe Cojocar. Chișinău: Lexon Prim printing house.
 - Varta, Ion. 1995. "Some desideratums of the national movement of the Bessarabian Romanians in the middle of 1906". In: *Destin Românesc*, year II, nr. 5 (1), 50.
 - Varta, Ion. 1996. "The issue of the Romanian language and that of autonomy in the newspaper «Basarabia»". In: *Destin românesc*, year III, nr. 9, (1), 53.
 - Varta, Ion. 1998. "Aspects of the national movement in Bessarabia (1812-1918)". In: *Romanian Language*, year VIII, nr. 1-2 (37-38), 27.
 - Varta, Ion; Tatiana Varta. 2005. "Manifestations of resistance of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Bessarabia against the tsarist policy of denationalization and assimilation". In: *Revista de Istorie a Moldovei*, no. 3 (63), July-September, 30.
 - Varta, Tatiana. 2009. "Religious journalism in the pages of the Bessarabia newspaper (1906-1907)". In: *Romanian Journal of Press History*, year III, nr. 2 (6), 22.