

## THE ROMANIAN COMMUNITY IN CHERNIVTSI: HISTORICAL LANDMARKS AND CURRENT ISSUES<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *This article presents the most important conclusions we reached following the research conducted within the project "Community of Romanians in Chernivtsi. Historical coordinates and identity reconstruction", implemented by the Center for Foreign Policy and Security Studies, with the support of the Ministry for Romanians Abroad. Through this project, we aimed to carry out a study that would present the Romanian community in Chernivtsi both in its historical dimension and in the context of contemporary local and global challenges. For starters, we will sketch the most relevant moments in the history of Northern Bukovina. Then, we will present the main conclusions from the survey based on a questionnaire, which identified the opinions, values and attitudes of Romanians in Chernivtsi and elucidate the dimensions and forms of manifestation of identity reconstruction in the Romanian community in Chernivtsi. We will also formulate some scientifically justified recommendations, which could be the basis for developing a policy for Romanians in Chernivtsi.*

**Keywords:** *the Romanians from Chernivtsi; ethnic group; identity reconstruction; ethnic minority; acculturation.*

### 1. Introduction

Discussions about ethnic communities and their place in the dynamics of the cultural landscape have become increasingly intense in recent years, amid the need to preserve identity, in the context of globalization, trends of cultural homogenization and increasing economic and social interdependencies.

The interethnic conflicts consumed in the eastern states, but also on the territory of the former Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, have led to the intensification of these concerns. In recent years, the massive migratory flow from war zones to Western European countries, perceived as a place of refuge and a source of well-being, has brought back into debate the issue of intersection and interference between ethnic groups that share different cultural mentalities and patterns.

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Ethnic groups are distinguished "by their own cultural tradition, they have a spiritual life that gives them specificity, a strong awareness of belonging to that ethnic group and a deep sense of attachment to it." (Otovescu, 2009: 338)

According to Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, "the ethnicity of a nation is the soul of the nation, as these influences are manifested under the influence of community consciousness among members of a society [...], ethnicity is therefore, in a more precise definition, the historical structure that it takes the life of a social group, which enjoys the consciousness of its own self." (Rădulescu-Motru, 1996: 47)

From a historical point of view, the crystallization of the Romanian ethnic group translated into a complex, multidimensional process, to which a succession of major historical events contributed over time through the consequences they generated: Romanization (106-274) and Christianity (249 - 867) Dacian territories; successive barbarian invasions (350-1200); Ottoman domination (1453-1878); the spread of Enlightenment ideas and the coherence of the collective feeling of belonging to a nation (1821-1866).

Dimitrie Cantemir affirmed the unity of language and nation of the Romanians since the beginning of the 18th century, anticipating the political actions of the next century, when the question of ethnic identity would guide the objectives of the Romanian elite in the old historical provinces (Cantemir, 2017/1717).

Arriving in the contemporary period, we find that the map of Romania is in no way identified with the political map of today's Romania, as it is recognized by international treaties. According to Eurostat estimates (2018), Romania's population reached 19.5 million inhabitants in 2018. In addition, according to data recently centralized by the Ministry for Romanians Abroad (2019), approximately 9,700,000 Romanians live outside the country's borders, including temporary emigrants, permanent emigrants and historical ethnic communities. The data is based on the centralization of the information provided by 70 Romanian diplomatic missions. Out of the total of approximately 9,700,000 "Romanians abroad", 5,600,000 form the Romanian diaspora, and 4,100,000 make up the historical communities.

## **2. Research methodology**

The need for an investigative approach results from at least two reasons. First, the shortage of recent data on the values, opinions and needs of Romanians in Chernivtsi justifies the need for research even within the community, based on methods and techniques related to sociological knowledge. Also, the research results will prove useful both for historians, ethnologists, sociologists, and especially for political decision makers, by exposing the most topical problems faced by Romanian ethnics in Chernivtsi.

The purpose of the project: to conduct a study on the social situation, cultural specifics and needs of Romanian ethnics in the Chernivtsi region.

Specific objectives:

- to know the main challenges faced by Romanian ethnics in Chernivtsi in the effort to preserve ethnic identity;
- to know how the ethnic element is perceived and historical memory is re-signified; cultural elements and institutional mechanisms to ensure identity preservation;
- to know the historical course of the Romanian community in Chernivtsi and identifying specific cultural elements and representative personalities;
- to identify the main programs and projects previously developed to improve the situation of Romanian ethnics in Chernivtsi and the way they are perceived by beneficiaries;
- to record and disseminate research results by writing a research report and a specialized book.

To achieve the objectives, the research team traveled to Chernivtsi on November 23-25, 2019.

The sociological study involved the use of the following research methods

- a) the survey based on a questionnaire, applied face to face to a number of 122 Romanians from Chernivtsi, in order to know the values, attitudes and problems they face;
- b) the survey based on a questionnaire, applied to the representatives of the Romanian institutions from Chernivtsi, in order to know and promote their activity in order to preserve and promote the ethnic identity;
- c) survey based on interview / focus group: semi-structured interviews were conducted with Romanians from Chernivtsi, in order to record and promote their testimonies.

### **3. Sequences from the history of Northern Bukovina**

Throughout history, the intersection between Romanian culture and Ukrainian culture have been constants of the space that we generically call Northern Bukovina and which, conventionally, is identified with the Chernivtsi region on the territory of today's Ukraine. (Constantiniu, 2002: 340-353)

Models of interethnic interaction and political relations have experienced a great variety throughout the socio-historical evolution of the region, experiencing the unprecedented amplification of cultural-political tensions and conflicts in the nineteenth century, with the rise of antagonistic nationalist currents - Romanian and Ukrainian - competing for the same historical and cultural space.

An incursion in the history of Northern Bukovina allows the delimitation of the following historical stages (Nacu, 2018):

#### **3.1. Upper Country of Moldavia (1346-1774)**

Ștefan cel Mare's Northern Moldova - the current Chernivtsi region - was for four centuries an integral part of the Romanian province, divided into lands as administrative-territorial units until its annexation by the Austrians.

### **3.2. Annexation of Bukovina by the Habsburg Empire (1774-1776)**

Taking advantage of a favorable international context, shaped by the weakening of the Ottoman Empire as a result of the war with the Russian Empire between 1768-1770, the Habsburg Empire annexed, in 1774-1776, the northern part of the Province of Moldova, particularly attracted by the development potential and the natural resources that this region offered. As a result, "according to the Balamutca Convention, the Habsburg monarchy annexed a territory of approximately 10,400 km<sup>2</sup>, with the cities of Chernivtsi, Siret and Suceava and over 250 villages and hamlets. However, the Austrians had to evacuate several dozen occupied towns in 1774-1775, especially from Suceava. The exact delimitation of the new border in the former county of Câmpulung-Suceava was finalized later, in July 1783. From this land remained within Moldavia the villages of Șarul Dornei, Păltiniș, Crucea, Holda and the hamlets of Gioseni and Chiril." (Nacu, 2018: 11)

The establishment of borders did not take into account the cultural or administrative realities on which the former Moldovan region functioned: "During the establishment of the new border, the administrative division of Moldova or the borders of the villages was not taken into account, several settlements being divided. Only in the area between the Prut and the Dniester, the border coincided with the border between Chernivtsi and Hotin. In addition, the cities of Siret and Suceava became border towns, which had important consequences on the subsequent evolution of the province." (Nacu, 2018: 11)

### **3.3. Austrian Bukovina (1775-1776)**

Austrian domination has translated into new opportunities for economic, social and cultural development. The accentuation of the commercial exchanges with the other states of the Habsburg Empire, the capitalization of the local potential, the appearance of the railways, the promotion of agriculture and the introduction of new plantations, the diversification of the inhabitants' diet, the urbanization, the modernization of the administrative structures were direct positive effects of the Austrian influence in this region.

Despite the economic and social progress that Bukovina registered between 1774-1914, we agree with the observations of the historian Ștefan Purici, who notes: "The higher level of socio-economic and political development of the Habsburg Empire and the positive consequences, in terms of economic and social evolution of Bukovina, cannot in any case justify, later, the annexation of a foreign territory, cannot and must not minimize the previous achievements of the inhabitants of the northwestern part of Moldova. [...] The level of development of the society in the annexed part was lower than

that registered in the German countries, however it is not possible to speak of a “barbaric” and totally illiterate population. The Austrian military administration managed to identify the expectations of Bukovinians regarding the new regime, appealing to the employment of locals in various positions, maintaining certain rules and customs of the Moldovan period, accepting the functioning of the Romanian language and the Orthodox Church. ” (Purici, 2015: 50-61)

In the context of the revolutionary movements of 1848, a group of Romanians from Bucovina, under the coordination of Eudoxiu Hurmuzachi, elaborated and sent to the Austrian Parliament the Country Petition, when Bucovina became Duchy, and from 1861, with the increase of autonomy, developed legislative structures and own executives, including the possibility of holding local elections.

In 1875, the University of Chernivtsi was established, which “represented the easternmost German-language higher education institution in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Initially, it operated with three faculties: Orthodox Theology, Law and Philosophy. Between 1875–1919, the University was run by 44 rectors, of which 22 Germans, 11 Romanians (mostly from the Faculty of Theology), 9 Jews and 2 Ukrainians. The vast majority of tenured professors were transferred from other universities within the empire. Only at the Faculty of Theology, all the professors were from Bukovina (13 Romanians and 2 Ukrainians).” (Nacu, 2018)

After 1879, the conflicts between the Ukrainian political groups, which sought to establish an independent Ukrainian state, became more and more virulent against the resistance of Romanian militants, interested in maintaining the territorial integrity and Romanian cultural specificity in the region. (Nacu, 2018)

### **3.4. Romanian Bukovina (1918-1740)**

The General Congress of Bukovina decides, on November 28, 1918, the union of Bukovina with Romania, in the context of the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It is thus reiterated “the unconditional and eternal union of Bukovina, in its old borders up to Chernivtsi, Colacin and Nistru, with the Kingdom of Romania” (Economu, 2011: 16-20). Until 1940, the city of Chernivtsi was one of the most important urban centers of Greater Romania. The connection to the western realities, the status of university center of excellence and the cosmopolitan cultural landscape made the city of Chernivtsi particularly attractive for the Transylvanian and Moldovan elite in interwar Romania. Between 1918 and 1930, successive administrative reorganizations of the region took place, gradually dissolving the institutional structures that originated during the Austrian domination.

According to the 1930 census, “Romanians formed a relative majority in the province (44.5%), while Ukrainians and Hutus (29.1%), Jews (10.8%), Germans (8.9%), Poles (3.6%) and Hungarians (1.4%) were the main minorities. 228,056 people lived in urban areas (26.7% of Bucovina residents),

but Romanians represented only 33% of the total. [...] Regarding the confessional structure, in 1930, 71.9% of the population of Bukovina was of the Christian-Orthodox religion (the vast majority of Romanians and Ukrainians), 11.5% were Roman Catholics (mostly Germans, Poles and Hungarians), 10.9% Mosaics (Jews), 2.4% Lutherans (some Germans), 2.3% Greek Catholics (some Ukrainians and Romanians) and about 1% belonged to other cults - in mainly old rite Christians (Lipovans), Reformed (a small part of Hungarians) and neo-Protestants. " (Nacu, 2018)

### **3.5. Northern Bukovina during the Second World War (1939-1945)**

In 1939, Romania lost Northern Bukovina to the U.R.S.S., following the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, but regained it for a short time (1941-1943). On September 12, 1943, Romania was forced to cede Bucovina again to the Soviet state, with the signing of the armistice with the Allies.

### **3.6. Northern Bukovina as part of the U.R.S.S. (1943-1991)**

The transfer of Bukovina to the territorial possession of the Soviet Union paved the way for Stalinization, with all the consequences that followed: collectivization, nationalization, restriction of civil rights, discouragement of the use of the Romanian language and mobilization of important institutional resources to suppress the ethnic element. Chapter IV presents a series of testimonies of the survivors of the period.

### **3.7. Northern Bukovina as part of Ukraine (since 1991)**

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Northern Bukovina is recognized as part of Ukraine, a state that, unlike Romania, did not know the direction of Euro-Atlantic integration in the post-Soviet period.

## **4. Conclusions and recommendations**

- 1) Most respondents (51%) rate their current life as the same as five years ago. This trend indicates the lack of major events, which, through the positive or negative impact, have significantly influenced (for better or worse) the evolution of the community in the last five years. The highest rate of optimism should be scored: 28% of respondents consider that their life is better, as opposed to 19% of respondents who evaluate as negative the trajectory of their own life in the last 5 years.
- 2) The respondents' perception regarding the community they belong to is part of the tendencies of the more general demographic phenomenon of population aging: 86% consider the community of Romanians in the locality where they live as being formed mostly by the elderly. The solution to this problem is primarily related to the demographic policy of the Ukrainian state, requiring further research to highlight a potential role played by the ethnic factor.
- 3) 65% of respondents state that they maintain permanent ties with other members of the community, as opposed to only 7% of respondents who

do not establish constant social relationships with their peers. The indicator, subsumed by the concept of social capital, reveals the relatively high density of the system of intra-community social relations, being in itself an important predictor for the preservation of cultural identity.

- 4) The criteria for establishing friendships are also included in the share capital register. They continue to be guided by the principle of similarity, so that 68% of respondents say they have the most friends among Romanians.
- 5) The events or occasions when the members of the Romanian community meet represent opportunities for communication and socialization of the cultural elements that define the identity profile of the community. These events and occasions are of great diversity, ranging from those mediated by religious institutions (Sunday services, religious holidays in general), to secular holidays and meetings organized by the community itself, to ensure systematic actions to preserve the identity.
- 6) Perceived intra-community solidarity has high values: 73% of respondents say that Romanians in their locality help each other when needed.
- 7) Regarding the preservation of Romanian customs and traditions, transmitted over generations, there are contradictory trends: 35% of respondents consider that they are largely respected, while 30% believe that their observance is only small. . The polarization of the answers may suggest the emergence of phenomena of identity reconfiguration, of abandonment of traditional cultural models in favor of the adoption of new ones.
- 8) The most valuable thing of the Romanian community in Chernivtsi, which offers identity and communication support in order to transmit the other cultural elements, is, undoubtedly, the linguistic factor. Asking to mention something specific to Romanians in Chernivtsi, the most evoked answer for the first position in the ranking was "language" (48%). Respondents easily referred to folk dances, dishes, folk songs or names of local folk orchestras as cultural elements specific to the historical community.
- 9) The sphere of identity reconstruction includes a diversity of elements taken from the Ukrainian ethnic groups. The most important is, and in this case, the linguistic factor. The Ukrainian language is the only language that makes possible the integration of the Romanian ethnic group in society, ensures an efficient schooling (except for Romanian schools, which in turn are subject to increasingly aggressive policies of linguistic and cultural assimilation), interaction with public institutions and integration on the labor market. From this point of view, language is - according to respondents - the most important cultural element "imported" from Ukrainian culture. The Russian-Ukrainian influences

shaped, in their turn, the phonetic, semantic and syntactic peculiarities of the Romanian language spoken within the community. Also as "imported" elements are mentioned several dishes, dances, songs and customs taken over by acculturation, which became part of the daily life of Romanians in Chernivtsi. Modalitatea de realizare a căsătoriei – indicator cu mare putere de discriminare a distanței sociale dintre comunitățile etnice – ne dezvăluie relativa conservare a caracterului endogam al acestei instituții, ceea ce în general corelează pozitiv cu un puternic sentiment de apartenență. Căsătoriile se realizează cel mai frecvent între români (72%), fiind de notat, totuși, și o anumită deschidere: 21% declară că cel mai frecvent căsătoriile se realizează cu etnici ucraineni, iar 7% opinează că nu este importantă etnia.

- 10) Naturally, most respondents have a very good command of the language of the society in which they live, which is mandatory for integration and social participation. Only 6% know little or 4% of the Ukrainian language. From the interviews, we found out that it is about the elderly population, who are more fluent in Romanian and Russian than contemporary Ukrainian. However, Romanian is the most frequently used language in the family: only 18% of respondents say they use Ukrainian for communication within the family group. This is another predictor of preserving cultural identity.
- 11) It is more common to read books / publications in Ukrainian than in Romanian. In their turn, the interviewees explained the difficulties they face in purchasing books in Romanian. They are difficult to obtain, have high costs and are rarely subsidized. Similar trends are found in the audio-visual area: only 32% of respondents watch a TV program in Romanian at least once a week, as opposed to 88%, the share of respondents who watch a TV program at least once a week in Romanian. Ukrainian. Another cause of the higher information consumption in Ukrainian is related to the need for information about the problems and transformations in the society in which they live, the texts / programs in Romanian having for Romanian ethnics rather a cultural purpose, to preserve ethnic specificity, than an informative one.
- 12) Ukrainian is the language most frequently used in interaction with local authorities (79%), health (80%) and religious (57%). We consider it opportune to develop alternative institutional structures or to make the necessary normative changes in the existing institutions, so that the use of the mother tongue becomes possible outside the family environment.
- 13) Religious identity is one of the constitutive dimensions of ethnic identity. According to the survey, 74% of respondents consider themselves religious. Self-positioning is complemented by the use of indicators aimed at objectifying religiosity in specific behavioral acts. We notice that 43% of the respondents go to church frequently (weekly



or several times a month), while the share of respondents who do not attend religious institutions at all is 17%. In most cases (62%) the relationship with the priest / pastor of the parish is one of friendship, the religious participation being in itself an important argument in favor of preserving the cultural identity in the contemporary community of Romanians in Chernivtsi. The interviews highlighted, as a phenomenon of identity reconstruction in this sphere, the increased influence of the old-style Orthodox rite and the abandonment of religious behaviors, such as observing fasting periods over the year. However, in the questionnaire-based survey, only 7% of respondents stated that they belonged to the old-style Orthodox Church. Regarding the abandonment of religious behaviors, this fact is more related to the more general processes of secularization and globalization, than to the interethnic relations in the studied communities.

**Table no. 1.** The extent to which respondents agree with some statements

<b>To what extent do you agree with the following statements?</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Irresolute</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>DK/NA</b>
Romanian students should benefit from education in Romanian.	98%	0%	2%	0%
The Romanian state should be more involved in supporting Romanian students (scholarships, textbooks, etc.)	89%	0%	11%	0%
The Ukrainian state should be more involved in supporting Romanian students (scholarships, textbooks, etc.)	65%	5%	30%	0%
The Romanian state should grant Romanian citizenship to Romanian ethnics from abroad.	86%	2%	12%	0%
Romanians in Chernivtsi continue to preserve their ethnic identity.	78%	5%	17%	0%
You can be a good Romanian even if you are not born in Romania.	98%	1%	1%	0%
The regions in Ukraine where many Romanians live should benefit from greater autonomy.	56%	14%	30%	0%
The Ukrainian state must take all necessary steps to join the European Union.	82%	5%	12%	1%

14) The self-representation of the interviewed Romanians includes generally positive elements (country lovers, honest, housewives, etc.) and some contradictory tendencies in the construction of the

representational field (Romanians are proud and fighting, but submissive at the same time, are united, but at the same time divided, etc.) . The psychocultural profile of ethnic Ukrainians - as portrayed by the interviewed Romanians - is dominated by elements with negative connotations (arrogant, hostile, vindictive, etc.), their main strong attributes being unity and solidarity, which allow them to exercise domination including culture.

- 15) Worrying is the very small share - only 16% - of respondents who maintain contacts with relatives or other people in Romania. In this sense, it is necessary to intensify the cross-border collaboration not only at the level of leadership, but even within the community, in order to mutually expand the capital of social relations of Romanians on the territories of the two states. Exchanges of experience, camps, mobility programs in schools need to be promoted and extended, to facilitate mutual knowledge and establish collaborative relationships between the historical community of Romanians in Chernivtsi and Romanians in the motherland, both interinstitutional and especially interpersonal. Despite the weak ties with Romania, 60% of respondents believe that there is no difference between Romanians living in the two states. Those who were able to mention differences, brought into discussion especially the dialect / language of the Romanian language spoken in Ukraine, enriched with elements specific to the Russian and Ukrainian languages.
- 16) The precarious connection with Romania is also manifested in terms of knowing the symbols of the Romanian state. Only 25% of respondents were able to correctly mention the name of the national anthem of Romania, as opposed to 68% of respondents who correctly mentioned the name of the state anthem of Ukraine.
- 17) The small percentage - 15% - of the respondents who think that the rights of Romanians in Ukraine are fully respected is also striking. At the same time, 45% say they have personally experienced a violation of their rights, recalling in particular the recent restrictions in the new education law in Ukraine, the transformation of the Ukrainian language into the only desirable language in the public sphere, the restriction of administrative rights and the possibility of preservation of traditions (edifying in this sense is the story of an interviewed woman, who drew attention to the ban on a Romanian artistic event by local authorities, under the pretext of the appearance of the Romanian flag on folk costumes).
- 18) Unfortunately, the programs / projects for Romanians in Chernivtsi, implemented or financed by the Romanian or Ukrainian state, are insufficient, and their efficiency is almost impossible to measure at the level of the perception of the members of the Romanian community. The rarity of these programs, as well as their low visibility in the community, require a rethinking of national policies for Romanians

abroad. Of the Romanians surveyed, only 8% could name concrete programs or projects implemented for the community they belong to, all of which take place with the support of the Romanian state.

19) The problems faced by Romanians in Chernivtsi, as they were identified by respondents and grouped into categories after data processing, can be classified as follows:

- structural problems related to the Ukrainian state: restricting the right to education in the mother tongue through the new education law, discouraging the use of the Romanian language in public space, policies to limit the media in the Romanian language by introducing compulsory programs in Ukrainian, including in institutions the average of ethnic communities, nationalist and assimilationist tendencies in Ukraine;
- structural problems related to the Romanian state: low capacity of national institutions with competence in the field of Romanians everywhere to encourage and develop cross-border links, lack of large-scale programs to address directly the members of the Romanian community in Chernivtsi;
- problems related to the precarious self-organization capacity of the Romanian community in Chernivtsi: lack of unity in action, solidarity and trust, low social capital and low association capacity, lack of strong leaders at community level.

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