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**George ENACHE**

Universitatea „Dunărea de Jos” din Galați

ORCID: 0000-0001-9389-993X

George.Enache@ugal.ro

## **THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN ROMANIA, FROM THE ABDICATION OF KING MICHAEL I TO THE EARLY 1960S**

### **I. THE GREAT CHALLENGES OF 1948: THE DENUNCIATION OF THE CONCORDAT WITH THE VATICAN AND THE ABOLITION OF THE GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH**

**Abstract:** This study provides an overview of the relations between the Romanian communist state and the Catholic Church from early 1948 through the mid-1960s. The first part of the study focuses on a brief yet eventful period, namely 1948 and early 1949.

During this period, the communist state amended legislation regarding the organization of religious denominations to the detriment of the Catholic Church, denounced the Concordat with the Vatican, and initiated the dissolution of the Greek Catholic Church. The study highlights the general context of these transformations, in which the influence of the Soviet Union played a decisive role, the strategies of the Romanian communist state in the realm of religious policies, the motivations behind the denunciation of the Concordat and the dissolution of the Greek Catholic Church, the role played by the Orthodox Church in the process of abolishing the Greek Catholic Church, the Catholic Church's acts of resistance, and the role of the Apostolic Nunciature in supporting these acts of resistance.

**Keywords:** Romania, communism, the Catholic Church, the Greek Catholic Church, the Apostolic Nunciature, the Orthodox Church

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King Michael I's abdication in December 1947 brought sadness and desolation to Romanian society as a whole. A symbol of "old" Romania, an institution around which the nation's energies coalesced, the "dynasty" had become an almost sacred concept, bound by countless threads to the rest of society. The new

regime's first priority was to sever all these ties and replace the king as the guiding leader with the Party, which had become the Workers' Party following the merger of the Social Democratic Party with the Romanian Communist Party. The year 1948, in fact, marked the moment of Romania's "transformation" according to the Stalinist model in a multitude of areas, among which religion and the various churches would take center stage.

However, the actions of the communist state during this period were not aimed at destroying religion at any cost, but primarily at taking control of the churches, limiting their autonomous presence in the public sphere and transforming them into instruments of party propaganda, following a strategy of "containment" and then emptying the churches of their content, while maintaining all the appearances of "socialist legality", as had been attempted in previous years. This was noted on 25 April 1949 by internuncio O'Hara, who stated: "The government of the Romanian People's Republic (RPR) was intelligent enough not to create 'martyrs', contenting itself with arresting priests who were dangerous to the regime".<sup>1</sup> Thus, although it may seem strange, what happened after 1948 in the religious sphere can be defined as a process of "negotiation" between the churches and the communist state, but an unequal process, because the communist power would stop at nothing to impose its own well-defined point of view, ultimately resorting to the most brutal methods. From the state's perspective, these "negotiations" ensured the supremacy and political control of the religious organizations, while from the latter's perspective, the aim was to ensure the survival of religious life by practising a dual strategy of compromise and resistance. Obviously, the content and manner of these "negotiations" varied greatly, depending on the particular circumstances.

While in the case of other religions this complex negotiation process is much harder to see, in the case of the Catholic Church things are more obvious. While the state had sufficient leverage over most religions even before 1944, in the case of the Catholic Church, the provisions of the 1927 Concordat blocked any possibility of interference, and the representatives of Catholicism in Romania, supported by the Vatican through the Nunciature in Bucharest, refused to accept the loss of their rights. Wanting to impose its own vision on the Catholic Church, the communist state would "negotiate" more and more harshly with the representatives of Catholicism, adopting increasingly radical measures to convince them, leading to the abolition of the Greek Catholic Church and the arrest of the hierarchs of both Catholic rites, so that later, when the situation allowed, it could make "concessions".

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<sup>1</sup> Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AMAE), Vatican collection, file no. 220 Vatican 2: 48.

Those who lived through that period believed that the communist authorities sought to dismantle the entire Catholic Church in Romania and incorporate its faithful into the Orthodox Church, with the main instigators being representatives of the Romanian Orthodox Church themselves, who were eager to achieve the country's long-cherished religious unity.<sup>2</sup> In fact, those who made decisions in the religious sphere were people in positions of political power, who did not allow themselves to be swayed by sentimentality, even though official propaganda suggested otherwise. Given the ethnic, religious and political realities in Romania, the abolition of Roman Catholicism was impossible, if only because of the existence of a large Hungarian Catholic community. The government wanted, first and foremost, an obedient church that it could easily control, and if this had been achieved from the outset, many tragic events would probably not have occurred. Undoubtedly, there was a government plan, inspired by the Soviet model, but this plan was indicative and was constantly adjusted to the reality "on the ground". The political powers took into account the reaction of Catholic leaders in order to adopt new measures of "persuasion" in a relationship that was as "dialectical" as possible, involving an "if" and then a "consequently". For reasons that we will detail later, Catholics initially adopted a firm stance towards the regime's demands, but the devastating blows they received ultimately led to the idea of negotiations and acceptable compromise, marking a tragic dilemma faced by all religions, namely to be firm and risk destruction or to make compromises with the regime that were not at all convenient in the long term.

### **1. The issue of taking the oath of allegiance to the Romanian People's Republic and the Catholic Church's attitude towards the draft of the new Constitution**

Shortly after the abolition of the monarchy, on 20 February 1948, the government discussed amending certain provisions of the The Law on the General Regime of Religious Denominations (1928). The Minister of Religious Affairs, Stanciu Stoian, justified the need for these amendments as follows: "We need to bring several articles of this law into line with the new form of government. This is necessary because there are appointments to be made and there are some recognitions of religious leaders that can no longer be made under the old law. The investiture, which was carried out according to a medieval protocol, has also been

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<sup>2</sup> Marius Bucur, Lavinia Stan, *Persecuția Bisericii Romano-Catolice din România. Documente din arhiva Europei Libere, 1948-1960 [Persecution of the Roman Catholic Church in Romania. Documents from the Free Europe Archive, 1948-1960]*, 2nd edition (Bucharest: Galaxia Gutenberg Publishing House, 2005), 59–70.

abolished. Now, metropolitans and bishops take an oath before the High Presidium and the Minister of Religious Affairs".<sup>3</sup> The proposed changes were enshrined in Law No. 60 of 2 March 1948, with Articles 12, 18, 27, 34 and 51 of the old law on the organisation of religious affairs of 1928 coming to the attention of the legislator. The new Article 18 stipulated that "all religious organisations are obliged to perform religious services both at national ceremonies provided for by laws or journals of the Council of Ministers and at occasional ceremonies communicated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs".<sup>4</sup>

The text of the oath that the bishops were required to take upon their installation was amended as follows: "Before God, I swear to be faithful to the people and to defend the Romanian People's Republic against enemies from outside and within. I swear that I will respect and ensure that my subordinates respect the laws of the Romanian People's Republic. I swear that I will not take any action that could undermine public order or the integrity of the Romanian People's Republic. So help me God".<sup>5</sup>

On 31 March, representatives of the Romanian Orthodox Church<sup>6</sup>, the Greek Catholic, Mosaic, Muslim, Armenian-Gregorian, Baptist, Adventist and Evangelical Christian churches took this oath at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, followed on 1 April by representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, the Reformed Church, the Lutheran Church, and the Unitarian Church.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Central National Historical Archives (ANIC), Ministry of Internal Affairs (MAI) collection, State Administration Directorate, file no. 23/1948.

<sup>4</sup> "Monitorul Oficial", part I, year CXVI, no. 51 of 2 March 1948: 1899.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 1902.

<sup>6</sup> The statement made by Patriarch Justinian read as follows: "The covenant that the leaders of the Romanian Orthodox Church made today through the oath they took to support and defend the Romanian People's Republic is not only an act of legality towards our new form of state, but an act through which we recognise that we must collaborate and support the democratic regime in the new edifice, in the new settlement of our State, the Romanian People's Republic" ("România liberă", no. 1111 of 1 April 1948).

<sup>7</sup> "The solemnity of the oath taken to the Romanian People's Republic by members of the Roman Catholic, Reformed, Evangelical Lutheran and Unitarian high clergy on Thursday, 1 April 1948.

The oath is taken before Dr. Petru Groza, President of the Council of Ministers.

Participants:

Aron Marton, Roman Catholic Bishop of Alba Iulia  
 Augustin Pacha, Roman Catholic Bishop of Timișoara  
 Anton Durcovici, Roman Catholic Bishop of Iași  
 Scheffler Ioan, Roman Catholic Bishop of Oradea – Satu Mare  
 Ioan Vasarhelyi, Reformed Bishop of Cluj  
 Friedrich Muller, Evangelical Lutheran bishop of Sibiu  
 Argay Gheorghe, Evangelical Lutheran superintendent of Arad  
 Kiss Alexa, Unitarian bishop of Cluj

Therefore, at the beginning of 1948, all denominations, without exception, took the oath of allegiance to the new "people's democracy" regime, participating in the game of official declarations, which could offer them a possible respite and, at the same time, a form of legitimacy in the new society to which they had to adapt. It is equally true, however, that the Catholic Church was very reluctant to take this oath, which it interpreted as a first step towards the annulment of the 1929 Concordat, which, among other things, laid down specific rules regarding the taking of the oath. Under Article VI of the Concordat, Catholic bishops, before taking up their dioceses, had to take an oath in the following form: "Before God and the Holy Gospels, I swear and promise allegiance to His Majesty the King of Romania and his successors and, as befits a bishop, to respect and ensure that my subjects respect, together with their allegiance to the King, the Constitution and the laws of the country. Furthermore, I will not undertake anything that might be detrimental to public order or the integrity of the State. So help me God and these Holy Gospels".<sup>8</sup>

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L. Takats, Undersecretary of State for Nationalities

I. Vască, Secretary General of the Ministry of Religious Affairs

Ion Nistor, Secretary General of the Ministry of Religious Affairs

Zeno Draia, Secretary General of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers" (Archives of the National Council for the Study of the Security Archives – ACNSAS, Documentary collection, file no. 60: 388).

Augustin Pascha spoke on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church, stating the following: "The oath that we, the Roman Catholic bishops of the Romanian People's Republic, are called upon to take today before Your Excellency is a solemn act performed before Almighty God.

This God asks us to give him what is due to him, to give the faithful people, whom he has entrusted to us for shepherding, our service for eternal salvation, but he also commands us to give to Caesar, that is, to the worldly rulers, what belongs to Caesar.

We therefore wish to assure you, Mr Prime Minister, that we take our oath of allegiance to the Romanian People's Republic with all sincerity" (*Ibid.*).

After speeches by representatives of other religious organisations and Prime Minister Petru Groza, Augustin Pascha said: "I thank Your Excellency for receiving us so that, in accordance with Romanian law, we may take our oath [...] We are grateful that we have been given the opportunity to express our feelings and loyalty to the state not only through church sermons, but also through a sacred oath. For this oath is not a mere formality for us, but a covenant before God towards our people and towards those who invited us to take it [...].

We, the bishops and priests, know that those whose pastoral care has been entrusted to us, for whom we take responsibility, will truly be of service to the country and the working people if we fulfil our mission as best we can. This is also our desire.

May the Lord bless the father of this people, bless the working people, the poor people, bless those who lead this people.

<sup>8</sup> Nechita Runcan, *Concordatul Vaticanului cu România. Considerații istorico-juridice [The Vatican Concordat with Romania. Historical and Legal Considerations]* (Constanța: ExPonto Publishing House, 2000), 198, 209 (text in French).

The text of the oath in the Concordat was different from the one later adopted in the 1928 Law, which applied to all religious organisations.<sup>9</sup> Over time, representatives of the Catholic Church considered the oath in the Concordat to be truly relevant, as it was provided for in an international agreement, with greater legal value than an internal law of the Romanian state. For this reason, conflict between Catholics and the new regime of "people's democracy" was inevitable, as the latter opposed the Vatican's objections with the idea of "people's sovereignty". This is clear from the exchange of notes that took place between the Nunciature and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during March 1948. Thus, in its letter of 12 March, the Nunciature stated that: "On 31 December 1947, the Ministry of Religious Affairs invited all Catholic bishops to take an oath of allegiance to the Romanian People's Republic before the higher judicial authorities in their area of residence within three days at the latest and to receive the oath from their subordinates in turn.

The Apostolic Nunciature does not see how the Romanian government, without prior agreement with the Holy See, could impose on Catholic bishops an oath which, in accordance with Article VI of the Concordat, is to be taken only on the occasion of taking over the diocese and only on the basis of the formula established in the Concordat.

The change in the form of government cannot justify the actions of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. If the Romanian government wishes to renew the

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<sup>9</sup> Here is what the Report of the Council of General Inspectors of Religious Affairs says about the Concordat between Romania and the Holy See and the need to denounce it: "The terms 'swear' and 'promise' in the oath formula must be reversed, or at least the term 'promise' must be removed, which was missing from the oath formula proposed by the Holy See. In fact, the term 'promise' is not found in the oath formula in Article 27 of the Law on the General Regime of Religious Denominations.

Moreover, the term 'promise' is not found in the oath formula in Article 27 of the Law on the General Regime of Religious Denominations.

Likewise, the oath formula 'to ensure that my subjects respect, together with their faith in the King, the Constitution and the Laws of the Country' is less categorical than the formula in the Law on the General Regime of Religious Denominations.

In the Law on the General Regime of Religious Denominations, the Heads of Religions are obliged to swear allegiance to the King and to swear obedience to the Constitution and the laws of the country. Swearing respect is less than swearing obedience.

And the term "my subjects" is not appropriate for the oath of bishops. A bishop has no subjects; only the state has subjects. Subjects are understood to mean the people from a political point of view. The bishop swears for his subordinates – for his priests, for any clergy under his authority. The term subordinate is also found in the Italian Concordat.

The sentence in the Concordat's oath formula, together with the allegiance to the King, the Constitution and the laws of the country, must be supplemented with *the King of Romania* and instead of "the country" it should say *the Romanian State*, so that it is clear that it refers to the King of Romania and the Romanian State" (Nechita Runcan, *Concordatul Vaticanului cu România*, 252).

oath, it cannot do so unilaterally. This is also the meaning of Article XXII of the Concordat.

Moreover, the new text of the oath does not consider the formula established by mutual agreement and which has the force of law.

On 2 March 1948, the Official Gazette (no. 51, pp. 1092-193) published Law 62, which required bishops, under Article II, to take a new oath of allegiance, to be submitted within 30 days in the presence of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. In view of the above, the Catholic Church reserves the right to comply with the provisions of the concordat".<sup>10</sup>

The reticent attitude of Catholic leaders towards the issue of taking the oath irritated the communist leadership. At the first congress of the Romanian Workers' Party, held on 21-23 February 1948, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej delivered a speech denouncing the "furious reactionary and pro-imperialist activity of the Vatican".<sup>11</sup> The Nunciature's note of protest against these remarks, dated 3 March 1948, emphasised that "the spirit of obedience of Catholics towards the Holy See (for which they are now being blamed) can never be in opposition to their civic and patriotic duties". As for the Catholics in Romania, they professed "perfect loyalty to their country and its government." The Catholic Church in Romania was "painfully surprised to see that a member of this government despises its loyalty, causing turmoil in the consciences of the faithful, who will nevertheless continue to follow Christ's precept of 'rendering unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's'".<sup>12</sup>

The message of the protest note was very clear: the Catholic Church in Romania is loyal to the government and the country, but will not accept any

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<sup>10</sup> MAE, Vatican collection, file no. 220 Vatican 2, document 186: 328.

<sup>11</sup> "The Popular Democracy Front will be a weapon for forging the political and moral unity of the entire working people of our country. The reactionaries will stop at nothing to undermine this unity. I will give a characteristic example in this regard. Some of the faithful in our country belong to the Catholic Church. We are forced to note that Catholic clergy circles do not have an attitude appropriate to the democratic regime of Romania, to the interests of the country and the people. Throughout the world, the Catholic clergy obeys the orders of the Vatican, whose furious reactionary and pro-imperialist activity is well known. It is unacceptable for Catholic clergy circles to abuse their ability to influence believers in order to follow the Vatican's directives and use the church as a means of propaganda directed against the democratic order and intended to weaken the people's will to defend their independence against foreign imperialists. (*Raportul politic general făcut de tovarășul Gh. Gheorghiu – Dej la Congresul Partidului Muncitoresc Român din 21 – 23 februarie 1948* [*General political report by Comrade Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej at the Romanian Workers' Party Congress of 21–23 February 1948*], 42–43).

<sup>12</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *România-Vatican. Relații diplomatice* [*Romania-Vatican. Diplomatic Relations*], vol. I, 1920–1950, document no. 186 (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2003), 328.

limitation of the rights granted by the Concordat, a fact that is also highlighted in the verbal note of 10 March 1948, in which the Nunciature makes known its objections to the draft of the new Constitution, which had been published by the Popular Democratic Front on 6 March 1948. The most contested article was Article 28, paragraph 3 (which became Article 27 in the final version), which stipulated that: "No religious denomination, congregation or community may open or maintain general educational institutions, but only special schools for the training of religious personnel under the control of the State." Beyond the provisions of the concordat that guaranteed the Catholic Church in Romania the right to own schools, the "natural right" was brought into discussion, accompanied by historical arguments: "This paragraph takes away the Catholic Church's right to educate young people, a secular right that even Turkish rule did not question [...] we must remember the predominant role that the Catholic Church and its schools have played in Romania; the statistics must be studied, which certify that the vast majority of Catholic school pupils belonged, and still belong, to the category of peasants and workers; Finally, it must be borne in mind that prohibiting the Church from engaging in education is an attack on an institution to which a large number of eminent Romanians, many from illustrious families, owe their education".<sup>13</sup> As can be seen, representatives of the Catholic Church feared that the possibility of amending the 1927 Concordat might be opened up and, therefore, at the beginning of 1948, the tactic of defending the integrity of this treaty was adopted, so that essential aspects such as the existence of confessional schools and the Pope's right to appoint bishops would not be affected.

The fears of Catholic leaders were also expressed on 13 March 1948, when Internuncio O'Hara officiated a solemn liturgy at the Nunciature on the anniversary of the coronation of Pope Pius XII, to which Greek Catholic students were also invited. In his speech after the liturgy, the internuncio pointed out that "the Catholic Church has to endure heavy and increasingly frequent blows from 'the godless!'"<sup>14</sup> "At the end," says the summary report entitled *The Activity of the Papal Nunciature in the RPR*, prepared by the political police, "discussions took place, during which the arrival of former King Michael in the United States was discussed, where he would have received a warm welcome. Student Tică Marian, who participated in that service, stated that he was told on that occasion that the anti-Soviet war was inevitable, but that the date of its outbreak was not yet known".<sup>15</sup> This excerpt is noteworthy because it introduces an essential theme present in the documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Securitate, namely the role played by the

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<sup>13</sup> *România-Vatican. Relații diplomatice*, document no. 185: 327.

<sup>14</sup> AMAE, Vatican collection, issue no. 220, *Activity of the Papal Nunciature in the People's Republic of Romania*: 30.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

Nunciature in maintaining an attitude of resistance to the regime among Catholics in Romania, by spreading the rumour that the war against the USSR would soon begin and that the sufferings of the Church would therefore be short-lived. This is also attested to in other documentary sources and may be a form of propaganda by the regime to show the "instigative" attitude of the Nunciature, but if true, it sheds new light on the forms of "motivation" used by the Nunciature towards Catholics in the country.

The Foreign Ministry's responses to the Nunciature's observations were extremely dry and categorical. They emphasised the primacy of the principle of Romanian state sovereignty over all other principles. From this perspective, the Concordat did not, for the Romanian government, have anywhere near the value that the Vatican representatives attributed to it. Thus, in note no. 1535, responding to the Nunciature's note of 3 March, it was stated: "The Romanian government grants the greatest freedom of conscience and religious freedom, and the draft Constitution, which will be submitted for debate to the Grand National Assembly, elected on 28 March, expressly provides in Article 28 for the guarantee of these freedoms, but in specific, well-defined cases, the Romanian government has been forced to take measures against certain ministers of the Catholic Church who have initiated and led actions against the democratic order in our country.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is convinced that the majority of Catholic believers disapprove of the anti-democratic attitude of some leaders of the Catholic Church and finds a striking contrast, for example, between their desire 'to give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's' and some of the speeches of the leaders of the Catholic Church, in which they say, among other things: 'We must realise that we cannot serve two masters at once'.<sup>16</sup> In its note of 9 April, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, commenting on the Nunciature's objections to the draft Constitution, stated that: "undoubtedly, if some provisions of the draft Constitution were not in line with the aspirations of the majority of Catholic believers in our country – who actively participated in the discussions on the draft and in the election of the Grand National Assembly – the freely elected representatives of the counties with Catholic populations will have the opportunity to express their opinions and propose the amendments they deem necessary"<sup>17</sup>, reiterating a theme that would become dominant in the years to come, namely that of the dissociation between the representatives of the Vatican and the Catholic Church in Romania, considered reactionary, and the "mass of Catholic believers" with democratic convictions. This was a radically different perspective from that of the "symphony" between the

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<sup>16</sup> *România-Vatican. Relații diplomatice*, document no. 185: 327.

<sup>17</sup> *România-Vatican. Relații diplomatice*, document no. 190: 332.

hierarchy and the faithful, which the Nunciature accredited, with both sides wanting to prove the correctness of their own opinion at all costs in the years to come.

Along with these "clarifications," the Romanian government reiterated its request that Catholic bishops take an oath of allegiance to the Republic "since the Romanian government cannot discriminate between ministers of different faiths".<sup>18</sup>

In the end, the representatives of the Catholic Church took the oath to the new regime in the form I have already shown, with Alexandru Cisar, the leader of the Roman Catholic Church in Romania, absent from the event.<sup>19</sup> He had asked to take the oath individually, "wishing to avoid the speech he would have been obliged to give on this occasion," which led Groza, then interim Minister of Religious Affairs, to order that the Roman Catholic metropolitan no longer participate in the oath.<sup>20</sup>

The conciliatory gestures of 31 March and 1 April did not ease the tension, with disputes continuing over the provisions of the new Constitution, the text of which, voted on by the Grand National Assembly, was published on 13 April 1948. The main reason remained Article 27, which limited the right of religious denominations to maintain general education institutions. The vote on the new Constitution was considered a unilateral initiative of the Romanian Government, and "its provisions constituted a violation of a solemn pact and a renunciation of solemnly assumed obligations". The Nunciature "felt obliged, in view of the rights recognised by Romania to the Catholic Church, to formally invite the Romanian government to take effective measures to render inoperable the provisions of the third paragraph of Article 27 of the new Romanian Constitution: provisions that openly violate the rights of the Catholic Church".<sup>21</sup>

On the document cited above, Petru Groza wrote the following resolution: "Contracts are binding, but: *Salus Republicae suprema lex*. The development of the Romanian state from a monarchy to a more advanced form of people's republic, through the will of the sovereign people, cannot be impeded by commitments which, like all contractual obligations, have a tacit clause, i.e. an *a priori* condition: *rebus sic stantibus*. More clearly: the objective conditions at international level that led to the conclusion of the concordat with the Holy See must remain the same in essence, i.e. they must not have changed so fundamentally that it is logically acceptable that, if these changes had been foreseen, the parties would not have entered into the contract at all or would have contracted on different terms. However, regarding the

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<sup>18</sup> *România-Vatican. Relații diplomatice*, document no. 189: 331.

<sup>19</sup> ACNSAS, Documentary collection, file no. 59: 46.

<sup>20</sup> ACNSAS, Documentary collection, file no. 60: 387.

<sup>21</sup> *România-Vatican. Relații diplomatice*, document no. 191: 334 (the note with the resolution was sent on 4 June to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ana Pauker).

relationship between our State and the Holy See on the one hand, and between the Romanian State and the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of Romania on the other, the concordat concluded in 1947 is still in force. However, looking at the relationship between our State and the Holy See on the one hand, and between the Romanian State and the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of Romania on the other, it has changed fundamentally, firstly through the attitude adopted by the Holy See towards popular democracies worldwide, and secondly through the attitude of the clergy in our country, guided by the universal policy of the Holy See".<sup>22</sup>

For the "people's democratic" regime, the existence of this Concordat had become increasingly disturbing, as it was brought up every time it intended to change something in the regime of religious cults. Therefore, its denunciation on 22 July 1948 was a perfectly natural act in the logic of communist religious policy.

In the interval between the protests against the new Constitution and the denunciation of the Concordat by the "people's democratic" government, more precisely in May, another particularly interesting event took place: some representatives of the Orthodox Church made public appeals to the Greek Catholics to return to the fold of the "Mother Church".

## **2. Preparations for the abolition of the Greek Catholic Church in Romania, part of the anti-Catholic policy of the "people's democratic" regime. The authorities' "negotiations" with the Romanian Orthodox Church**

In the "Preface" to the volume of documents dedicated to Bishop Ioan Suci, Ion Gavrilă Ogoranu made the following statements: "The destruction of the Romanian United Church was decided in Moscow by Stalin. In 1946, Stalin ordered the destruction of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the annexation of its faithful to the Orthodox Church. It was to be expected that he would do the same in Romania. At a meeting with the Romanian government, Stalin entrusted Petru Groza with this mission. In May 1947, the Patriarch of Moscow visited Romania, accompanied by Petru Groza. Passing through Blaj, he ordered Groza: "Let this Church disappear, in two years I don't want to hear about this Church anymore!"<sup>23</sup>

Many people believe that the abolition of the Greek Catholic Church in Romania took place on the direct orders of Moscow, but there is insufficient

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Ion Gavrilă Ogoranu, *Brazii se frâng, dar nu se îndoiesc [The Fir Trees Bend, but Do Not Break] – vol. VI, Episcopul Ioan Suci în fața furtunii [Bishop Ioan Suci in the Face of the Storm]* (Cluj-Napoca, 2006), 7.

documentation to prove this. Only Cristian Vasile cites an article by Russian researcher Tatiana Volokitina, who “emphasised that, towards the end of 1946, decision-makers in the Kremlin formulated a programme of action against the Vatican within the Council for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs, which included the definitive liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church in the Soviet Union, as well as the preparation of similar actions in some states outside the USSR, primarily Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. We know today - Cristian Vasile continues - that Tito's schism spared the Greek Catholic Church in Yugoslavia, but that, broadly speaking, the scenario of the liquidation of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was repeated in Romania (October–December 1948) and Czechoslovakia (April 1950). *Magazin Istoric* magazine had the welcome idea of reproducing excerpts from the Russian researcher's study but inexplicably omitted the paragraph that clarified the answer to the pressing question: when was the decision made to abolish the Romanian Church United with Rome?<sup>24</sup> However, in an interview, Tatiana Volokitina recalls the Soviet decision to suppress Eastern European Uniatism, adopted by the Council for the Problems of the Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>25</sup> The text of the interview reads as follows: "In its programme of struggle against the Vatican, the Soviet (?) of the Russian Orthodox Church planned to liquidate the Greek Catholic Church in the USSR, as well as to carry out similar processes in other European countries."<sup>26</sup>

The excerpts quoted by the Romanian author do not clarify the existence of a clear, targeted order from Moscow to abolish the Greek Catholic Church in Romania. Was it an express order for Romania, or was it a general indication? Moscow's fight against the Greek Catholic Church in Ruthenia had two major goals: first, more generally, to limit the influence of the Vatican, and second, to liquidate the Ukrainian nationalist opposition in this territory. If we consider the evolution of the "Greek Catholic" issue in other communist Eastern European countries, we can see that for Moscow, between 1945 and 1947, the priority was to resolve the Ukrainian question, and it is no coincidence that Volokitina specifically mentions Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, because in these states "Greek Catholicism" was represented by numerous ethnic Ukrainians. In Yugoslavia, the process was halted because of Tito, and in Czechoslovakia it took place later than in Romania, given

<sup>24</sup> The article was published under the title “Stalin – Biserica Rusă: o relație interesată” [Stalin – The Russian Church: A Self-Serving Relationship], *Magazin Istoric*, new series, year XXXIV, no. 1 (406), January 2001.

<sup>25</sup> Cristian Vasile, *Istoria Bisericii Greco-catolice sub regimul comunist – 1945 – 1989. Documente și mărturii* [The History of the Greek Catholic Church under the Communist Regime – 1945 – 1989. Documents and Testimonies] (Iași: Polirom, 2003), 30 – 31.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

that in this country the "people's democracy" regime took much longer to establish itself.<sup>27</sup> In Hungary, where Greek Catholics were largely Magyarised, the abolition of the Greek Catholic Church was not considered.<sup>28</sup> In Poland, the Roman Catholic Church sought to keep the Greek Catholic rite alive, despite the territorial changes and population exchanges that took place between Germany, Poland and the USSR.<sup>29</sup>

Another school of thought considers that the abolition of the Greek Catholic Church in Romania occurred at the insistence of representatives of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Following the line of Greek Catholic historiography, Ovidiu Bozgan considers the Romanian Orthodox Church to be one of the main instigators of the act of "return", which had nothing else to do after 1944 but to campaign for the abolition of "Uniatism". His arguments are extremely weak, and none of them are clearly supported by documents; rather, they are conjectures based on events and assessments by French diplomats, which are extremely alarmist and unreliable in many respects. Bozgan insists in particular on the "missions" carried out in Moscow by Bishop Nicolae Popovici, which he considers to be stages in the fight against the Vatican and the abolition of the Greek Catholic Church. I have demonstrated on another occasion that Bishop Nicolae Popovici was sent to Moscow not to discuss the abolition of the Greek Catholic Church in Romania, but to be promoted by some

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<sup>27</sup> For the situation in Czechoslovakia, see Jaroslav Coranic, "The Liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church in Communist Czechoslovakia, 1948–50," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Volume 72, Issue 3 (July 2021); 590–610. The situation in Yugoslavia is more complex. There were Greek Catholics from among the indigenous population, but also a significant number of Greek Catholics of Ukrainian origin. Greek Catholics were a constant source of dispute between Croats and Serbs, as religion defines the identity of both peoples. The Serbian Orthodox Church sought to liquidate the Greek Catholic Church and bring its believers into the ranks of the "Serbs," while the Croats sought to develop the Greek Catholic community to the detriment of the Orthodox one. For this reason, things remained complicated even after the establishment of communism in Yugoslavia: Daniel Patafta, "Persecutions of the Bosnian Greek Catholics in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians / Yugoslavia According to the Contemporary Catholic Press," *Croatica Christiana Periodica*, Vol. 39, No. 75 (2015): 157-183, <https://hrcak.srce.hr/index.php/en/clanak/212545>; Filip Skiljan, "Faith Conversions from Orthodox to Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic Religion in Podravina in the Period 1941 to 1945," [https://www.academia.edu/93094112/Faith\\_Conversions\\_from\\_Orthodox\\_to\\_Roman\\_Catholic\\_and\\_Greek\\_Catholic\\_Religion\\_in\\_Podravina\\_in\\_the\\_Period\\_1941\\_to\\_1945?sm=b&rhid=37984001522](https://www.academia.edu/93094112/Faith_Conversions_from_Orthodox_to_Roman_Catholic_and_Greek_Catholic_Religion_in_Podravina_in_the_Period_1941_to_1945?sm=b&rhid=37984001522).

<sup>28</sup> Janka György, "Hungary's Greek Catholics," *ONE Magazine* (September – October 2000), <https://cnewa.org/magazine/hungarys-greek-catholics-30893/>.

<sup>29</sup> Roman Drozd, "An Attempt to Liquidate the Greek Catholic Church in the Polish People's Republic (1945-1956)," *European Journal of Science and Theology*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (June 2023): 103-117, [https://www.ejst.tuiasi.ro/Files/100/8\\_Drozd.pdf](https://www.ejst.tuiasi.ro/Files/100/8_Drozd.pdf).

of the Orthodox bishops as a possible candidate for the position of patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church.<sup>30</sup>

The documents available to date show that it was the Romanian communist state that ultimately decided to abolish the Greek Catholic Church in Romania. Moscow outlined a series of strategic directions for Bucharest but left the Romanian communists a great deal of freedom in resolving religious issues. The communist leaders in Bucharest also adopted anti-Catholic rhetoric and the idea that the Vatican was an enemy of the communist world, but the Greek Catholic Church in Romania was considered a threat to the Romanian communists because it was perceived as having close ties to the National Peasant Party and its leader, Iuliu Maniu. The Securitate compiled numerous lists showing that, in Transylvania, priests and lay representatives of the Greek Catholic Church supported the National Peasant Party. The Romanian communists sought to find collaborators within the Greek Catholic Church and impose them as bishops, but the plan failed. On 16 March 1946, Alexandru Rusu, considered a close associate of Iuliu Maniu and the fiercest opponent of the communists among all the Greek Catholic bishops, was elected Metropolitan of the Greek Catholic Church.<sup>31</sup> Under these circumstances, the communist authorities in Bucharest considered that the strategy applied by Stalin in the case of the Ukrainian Greek Catholics could also be applied in Romania. The Romanian Orthodox Church was taken on as a partner in the implementation of the project. After the death of Patriarch Nicodim and the enthronement of the new patriarch, Justinian Marina, the Romanian Orthodox Church showed itself willing to collaborate with the state in abolishing the Greek Catholic Church.

The first public attack on the Catholic Church was made by Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej in the aforementioned "General Political Report" delivered at the Romanian Workers' Party Congress on 21–23 February 1948. After condemning Catholic "subversive" actions, Dej continued as follows: "We believe that this attitude of the Catholic clergy, contrary to the interests of the entire people, including Catholic believers, cannot leave indifferent either the clergy of the Orthodox Church or the believers belonging to the Catholic Church"<sup>32</sup>. Through this approach, Dej attempted a double division: on the one hand, the Orthodox against

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<sup>30</sup> George Enache, *Ortodoxie și putere politică în România contemporană [Orthodoxy and Political Power in Contemporary Romania]* (Bucharest: Nemira, 2005), 165-181.

<sup>31</sup> Ioan Bota, „Pagini din istoria suferințelor Bisericii Române Unite cu Roma, Greco-Catolică, în perioada 1945-1989” [Pages from the History of the Suffering of the Romanian Church United with Rome, Greek Catholic, in the Period 1945-1989], in *Experimentul Pitești - Reeducarea prin tortură [The Pitești Experiment - Re-education through Torture]*, editor Ilie Popa, volume II (Pitești: Memoria Cultural Foundation, 2003), 94.

<sup>32</sup> *Raportul politic general făcut de tovarășul Gh. Gheorghiu – Dej la Congresul Partidului Muncitoresc Român din 21 – 23 februarie 1948*, 43.

the Catholics, and on the other hand, the Catholic faithful against their own clergy, accrediting an ideological pattern that would remain in place for a long time, based on the distinction between "democrat" and "reactionary". The first category included Orthodox Christians and Catholic believers, while the other camp included the Catholic clergy (later, for strategic reasons, Catholic priests would also be integrated into the ranks of the "democrats"). It was primarily a warning to Catholics that the situation in the USSR could be repeated and a first test of the Orthodox Church's willingness to participate in a possible action to abolish the Greek Catholic Church. However, this was not possible during the lifetime of Patriarch Nicodim, given his good relations with the Catholic side. His death triggered an extensive negotiation process aimed at bringing the Orthodox Church over to the government's side. Initially, "democratic" priests were used as a means of pressure. Thus, on 4 March 1948, at 6 p.m., after Patriarch Nicodim's funeral, a meeting of clergymen was held, during which priest Ioan Vască, secretary general of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, spoke of the Vatican's attacks against the Romanian People's Republic, emphasising that "the duty of the clergy is to stand by the Government and fight together. This fight, said Vască, is not sectarian and is purely defensive, therefore legitimate".<sup>33</sup> "The clergy - says the author of the informative note - did not seem very enthusiastic about Vască's speech or his proposal, and applauded sporadically and very weakly".<sup>34</sup> For the time being, there was no mention of the "return of Greek Catholics to the Orthodox Church," but merely a call for all "democratic" forces to resist the reactionary onslaught. However, in a private conversation between the former metropolitan Nifon Criveanu and Dudu Velicu, former private secretary to Patriarch Miron Cristea, Criveanu said that he was "very satisfied that the Government had proposed to resolve this issue (the return of the Uniates to Orthodoxy), regardless of how it would be done".<sup>35</sup> We cannot be sure that Nifon Criveanu actually said these words and that they are not the product of Dudu Velicu, who attributed them to the former Metropolitan of Oltenia. What is certain is that the final decision to adopt the Soviet model regarding the Greek Catholic issue was taken in the second half of February, and it belonged to the government. It was probably initially intended as a form of pressure on Catholics, which soon turned into a firm decision, due to the maintenance of a "hostile" attitude towards some measures of the "people's democratic" power. However, for the plan to be carried out, it was necessary to convince the Orthodox hierarchy to get involved in the

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<sup>33</sup> Dudu Velicu, *Biserica Ortodoxă în anii regimului comunist. Însemnări zilnice. II. 1948-1959* [*The Orthodox Church during the Communist Regime. Daily Notes. II. 1948-1959*] (Bucharest, 2005), 30.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

actions that were to take place. The authorities took advantage of the vacancy of the patriarchal seat to negotiate this, with the future patriarch also having the mission of patronising the return of the Uniates to the Orthodox Church, which is another explanation for the long period that elapsed between the death of Patriarch Nicodim and the election of Justinian (almost three months). Three people will play a prominent role in these negotiations: Petru Groza, Justinian Marina and Nicolae Bălan. The two hierarchs would make themselves known through public speeches in which they would affirm their intention to "call" the Greek Catholics to "return" to the Mother Church, but the question remains as to how they could have been convinced, as the documents are extremely few and ambiguous. It was clear that Nicolae Bălan, who had fought for years for the ideal of unifying the two Romanian churches, could not be omitted from the whole equation of the "return". But could the Transylvanian metropolitan have been so opposed to the Greek Catholics that he accepted, or even sought, the help of the communist authorities to resolve this issue? Some historians, especially Greek Catholic ones, have answered this question in the affirmative.<sup>36</sup> It seems that this is not quite the case, because church policy and the pressure exerted on him played an equal role. Thus, two informative notes from the end of February 1948 recorded the opinion of the Transylvanian hierarch on the relationship that the Orthodox Church should establish with the communist state, an opinion that was in some respects forced, a sign of the metropolitan's awareness that he was talking to a possible informer, but which reflects a certain style, a certain philosophy of approaching this delicate issue, with the discussions revealing the advantages the Church would have if it adopted a cautious policy: "Regarding the separation of Church and state, Bălan said that churches are fuller than ever with believers and that the current communist regime in Romania will not have the time necessary to implement this reform, as war is knocking at the door and Western democracy will emerge victorious. Regarding the adoption of a consistent policy in the Church towards the democratic regime (...), Bălan stated verbatim: 'Church policy also has its diplomacy. And in due course we will know how to justify the teaching that: until you cross the bridge, you befriend anyone, as Marina herself said.' "And, above all, I have no ambition to play the martyr, when I know that opportunism brings more real benefits to the Church," concluded Metropolitan Bălan".<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Cardinal Iuliu Hossu himself insists on this idea in his memoirs *Credința noastră este viața noastră. Memoriile cardinalului dr. Iuliu Hossu* [*Our Faith is Our Life. Memoirs of Cardinal Dr. Iuliu Hossu* (Cluj-Napoca, 2003), 52–53.

<sup>37</sup> ACNSAS, Informative collection, file no. 533, vol. 2: 167. Another note details the content of the discussions between the informant and Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan. Thus, the informant incited him by stating: "the government insists on interfering in church affairs and,

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what is more serious, the Groza government is exercising a kind of state absolutism over the Orthodox Church, mercilessly subjecting religious authority to secular communist power, almost as in pagan times, when the state decided which gods were to be worshipped.

The Metropolitan replied that he saw no danger, for the time being, from the communist government, and that Prime Minister Petru Groza and Minister Gheorghiu-Dej, whom he had just visited, had shown themselves to be friends of the Church, receiving him beyond all expectations, with great attention and kindness.

To this, I replied that he would soon see how this socialist goodwill would logically lead to the removal of the Church from the state budget and the definitive suppression of religion in our country, arguing that religion is a purely private matter. And it will come to pass that church education will be replaced by the state, church teaching by schools and universities.

However, the metropolitan shows me that this will not happen in our country, on the one hand because our churches are not empty, but are more frequented by believers than ever before, and educated people are not indifferent to the church with all the modern support of the times, and on the other hand, the government will not have time to carry out its unspoken programme today, with war knocking at the door and Western democracy emerging victorious.

But I insist on showing them that this is not a dignified attitude for the Orthodox Church, which has no unified spirit or programme, whether ethical or political, and that even they, the bishops, do not know what I want and are embarrassingly hostile to each other, which is not the case with Catholics.

Thus, Orthodoxy lives on the mercy of the state and on considerations of political expediency, so it is no wonder that we are seeing so many conversions to Catholicism (but not the other way around), which alone has the courage to confront communism through open struggle.

Metropolitan Bălan gives me the following answer, which I reproduce in brief:

"You know very well that our Orthodoxy has never been a follower of clericalism as Catholicism has been and continues to be, which seeks – through Vatican diplomacy – to rule the state and the world through religious authority.

Our Orthodoxy needs the financial support of the state and the benefits that are granted from all points of view. And when this support is denied by the state, it is not impossible that so many heresies or divisions will arise that the church alone could not overcome them without the benevolent support of the political regime.

But I interrupt him and tell him that these are preferable to the sickly and sluggish state that persisted in our church.

The Orthodox Church, says the Metropolitan, has today, with the communist government of Prime Minister Groza, all the means to develop freely in spiritual terms. And in terms of legislation, the Groza regime has given us so many good solutions, which our Church approves wholeheartedly, such as monetary stabilisation and the republic, which is a form of government superior to the monarchy.

But just as easily, I can refute the other thesis you put forward.

So, for some of the less spiritually gifted representatives of our Church, Orthodoxy, which is eternal, cannot be condemned, while patriarchs, metropolitans and bishops are temporary.

Unworthy metropolitans and bishops will eliminate themselves, through their own operetta-like behaviour or their schemes, which the current regime records and punishes" (ACNSAS, Informative collection, file no. 533, vol. 2: 169–171).

The above statements are quite strange for someone who gave a very critical pastoral letter on the occasion of Easter 1947 against the communists, who showed a dignified attitude during the Maniu trial, who on New Year's Day 1948 declared in connection with the abolition of the monarchy: "we will nevertheless remain grateful to the past" and on the occasion of the Metropolitan officials taking the oath to the people's republic, he stated that "the clergy should not think about better forms of government, but should be guided by the principles of the Gospel, which recognises no other rule than that of heaven".<sup>38</sup> Nicolae Bălan's change of attitude came after the launch in January 1948, in the newspaper "România Viitoare" in Sibiu, of a violent press campaign accusing the metropolitan of unfairly distributing Christmas gifts intended for the poor of Sibiu. It was a clear sign that the regime intended to stop treating with kid gloves an extremely troublesome hierarch who had defied it until then. Faced with increasing pressure, Nicolae Bălan travelled to Bucharest in February, where he held talks with his old friend Petru Groza, "to whom he allegedly gave explanations regarding the accusations made against him. Returning to Sibiu, he stated that the Prime Minister had asked him to enrol all the priests under his leadership in the Peasants' Front, offering him the position of patriarch in exchange [...] Recently, according to a report by the repressive authorities dated 29 March 1948, Metropolitan Bălan had a meeting in Bucharest with Minister Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej, after which, upon returning to Sibiu, he stated that the Minister had made a very good impression on him and that he had therefore decided to follow Minister Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej's suggestions to replace a number of archpriests from their positions [...] During the Orthodox Clergy Congress held in Sibiu in March this year, which was attended by Minister Stanciu Stoian, the report also states that Metropolitan Bălan spoke in a purely democratic spirit, assuring the government of the full support of the Orthodox clergy in Transylvania for the elections (the elections of 28 March 1948)".<sup>39</sup>

Thus, although he would continue to make gestures of defiance towards the regime in the following period, Metropolitan Bălan would generally accept the party's tasks and the idea of collaborating with Justinian Marina, ultimately agreeing to his election as patriarch, although, as the documents show, his motivations were more profound. In the case of the office of patriarch, he personally could not risk running for office, because he could have been easily attacked because of his past and the Church would have suffered.<sup>40</sup> For this reason, he preferred to leave it to Justinian, who enjoyed the trust of the party, and to collaborate with him in order to

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<sup>38</sup> ACNSAS, Informative collection, file no. 533, vol. 2: 134–135.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, he received 40 votes in the election, a sign of the trust he enjoyed, even though he had not announced his candidacy.

save the Church. As for collaborating with the regime, he accepted it conditionally, following assurances from political figures that the Orthodox Church would be able to express itself within society, considering that for the time being it still needed the support of the state. Only then did he finally agree to support the abolition of the Romanian United Church, saying on 15 May 1948, on the 100th anniversary of the adoption of the proclamation on the Field of Liberty, in a speech from which we quote: "Our national unity is still missing something. We must achieve our ecclesiastical unity in the Church of our forefathers from before 1700, in the Church and ancestral faith of our country [...] As a descendant of the ancient metropolitans of Bălgrad [...] I address to you, those whom foreign interests have separated from our good mother, the Orthodox Church, a warm fatherly call to return home!"<sup>41</sup>

Two documents suggest who was actually behind this action. One refers to Nicolae Bălan and is exceptionally important in terms of the attitude that the Metropolitan of Transylvania had towards the issue of return, especially since the information comes from his close associates. Thus, Nicolae Bălan's secretary is said to have stated: "The metropolitan would be happy if the return of our brothers to the ancestral Church could still be accomplished under his leadership, but he views the government's plans for doing so with considerable distrust. He was very embarrassed by the appeal he had to make in a tense atmosphere in Blaj, after a hundred years, that is, since the great national assembly of 3/15 May 1848, no Orthodox bishop had passed through there. But even more unpleasant was the fact that the newspapers added to his speech in Blaj a passage – probably on the orders of the authorities – containing an attack on the Anglo-American world, with which His Holiness has long-standing and excellent relations [...] In the same vein, says the informant, Father Mladin also spoke to me[...] Mladin told me that the metropolitan wants the Uniates to return to the Orthodox Church, but he is saddened that this long-held desire of his must happen under the rule of a communist regime, which he detests in the depths of his soul. However, if this difficult trial – which is today's communist government – could bring us church unity, it is a good thing that we should not despise. Both the metropolitan's secretary and Father Mladin are members of the Peasants' Front. The metropolitan's secretary is also a protégé of the prime minister".<sup>42</sup>

From the Greek Catholic side, we have an account by Bishop Ioan Suciu, made on 17 June 1948 at a meeting of the Greek Catholic Episcopal Synod in Oradea. Ioan Suciu "gave a detailed account of the events surrounding the centenary

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<sup>41</sup> S.A. Prunduș, Clemente Plăianu, *Catholicism și ortodoxie românească. Scurt istoric al Bisericii Române Unite [Catholicism and Romanian Orthodoxy. A Brief History of the Romanian Greek Catholic Church]* (Cluj-Napoca, 1994), 139.

<sup>42</sup> ACNSAS, Documentary collection, file no. 60: 99 (note dated 28 July 1948).

celebrations of the 1848 Revolution [...] He mentioned that he was seated to the left of the first president of the Council of Ministers and that during Metropolitan Bălan's speech he was taken by the hand by Dr. Petru Groza, who at one point told him that a very unpleasant part for the Uniates was about to follow. This referred to the union of the Greek Catholic Church with the Orthodox Church. He also pointed out that at the festival that took place after the celebration, Dr. Petru Groza allegedly said to him: "I don't know what political juggling I could do to save you," to which Suciu replied: "We will save ourselves, at most you can stop the interference of politics in the Church." Suciu went on to say that Orthodox Bishop Nicolae Popovici of Oradea was supposed to speak on behalf of the ASTRA organisation but was forced to give up his speech because he was asked to censor it".<sup>43</sup>

Here are two perspectives from within both churches, which, when taken together, show who the instigator really is, namely the communist regime, as well as the double game played by Petru Groza, whose gesture on the Blaj Plain was rather strange. It can only be understood as a final warning to the Greek Catholic hierarchy, showing them what could happen if they refused to collaborate with the regime, but also as a test of the reaction of Greek Catholic believers to such a possibility. It must be reiterated, however, that the policy towards Greek Catholics was only one aspect of the general policy towards Catholicism. Documents from the former Securitate from March to June 1948 record the regime's deep dissatisfaction with Catholics and the attitude of the Nunciature, namely the difficulties raised by the oath of allegiance<sup>44</sup>, the calls not to vote for Communist candidates in the elections of 28 March 1948<sup>45</sup>, the continuing protests against certain decisions concerning religions in the Constitution and the general situation in the country<sup>46</sup>,

<sup>43</sup> Cristian Vasile, *Istoria Bisericii Greco Catolice sub regimul comunist*, document no. 7: 71.

<sup>44</sup> ACNSAS, Documentary collection, file no. 60: 374, 379, 387.

<sup>45</sup> A note dated 9 April 1948 showed that Márton Aron had instructed priests not to vote for the government in the elections of 28 March 1948 (ACNSAS, Documentary collection, file no. 60: 363).

<sup>46</sup> "On 26 April this year, Bishop Alexandru Rusu attempted to publish an article entitled *Un document istoric [A Historical Document]* in the Diocese Bulletin. The article aimed to inform the masses of believers of the opinion and position of the Greek Catholic Church regarding the provisions of Article 28 of the Draft Constitution, allowing believers to appreciate that the Church had spoken out in time, but that its suggestions had been taken into consideration. On 2 May this year – the first day of Easter – Bishop Dr. Rusu Alexandru delivered a sermon from the pulpit in which, among other things, he stated: "Yes, I have spoken and I will speak, even though I know what is coming. I will always speak the truth and fight against the powers of darkness, against terror, and for an end to prisons. Perhaps today, 88 agents of the 'democratic' regime have been sent to listen to me and denounce me again, because that is how 'free speech' works in this country. We do not have freedom. The prisons and concentration camps are full of priests and other good Romanians, and they can

the ban on Catholic priests joining left-wing parties and trade unions<sup>47</sup>, and the Nunciature's involvement in the affairs of Catholic churches in Romania, which was disturbing to the authorities<sup>48</sup>. The political authorities took a "firm" stance on these

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stay there for six months, just to be interrogated, because that's what individual freedom means in the RPR. Confessional schools are being abolished so that we talk less about God, and our Romanian youth and those of other nationalities are raised without religion, in the "progressive spirit". During May, Bishop Suciú instructed all parishes to collect from the faithful a kind of standard letter to be sent to the Pope, asking for his blessing for "these times of darkness, oppression and trouble for some parts of the world [...]". On 2 May 1948 – the first day of Easter – Bishop Suciú, in a veiled sermon, attacked the measures taken by the government against reactionary elements, stating: "Where are you, those who want to lay the foundation of fear and terror in the world [...] There are people who, when we speak of the devil, think we are speaking of them [...] Those who judge today will also be judged" (Cristian Vasile, *Istoria Bisericii Greco Catolice sub regimul comunist*, document no. 6: 69-70).

<sup>47</sup> "In a consistorial meeting in the first half of May this year, Bishop Hossu categorically forbade Greek Catholic priests from joining left-wing parties and trade unions, stating that 'in this regard there are no precise orders from the Holy See'" (*Ibid.*). Similar recommendations had been made before 1948, by Marton Aron and Valeriu Traian Frențiu.

<sup>48</sup> This is why the Nunciature in its report "The Activity of the Papal Nunciature in the Romanian People's Republic" for the period March-May 1948: "At the beginning of March 1948, the Nunciature sent a new sum of 7,500 Swiss francs to Bishop Rusu Alexandru of Maramureș, as 'liturgical offerings'. On 13 March 1948, O'Hara officiated a solemn liturgy at the Nunciature on the anniversary of the coronation of Pope Pius XII in the presence of several Greek Catholic students, who were specially invited to this ceremony. After the liturgy, the internuncio gave a speech, saying, among other things, that the Catholic Church had to endure heavy and increasingly frequent blows from "those without God." At the end, discussions took place, during which the arrival of former King Michael in the United States was discussed, where he would have received a warm welcome. Student Tică Marian, who attended the service, stated on this occasion that the anti-Soviet war was inevitable, but the date of its outbreak was not yet known.

After the service, a cocktail party was held in O'Hara's private rooms, attended mainly by American diplomats led by Rudolf Schonfeld. According to the latter, it was like being on the "brink of war".

In April 1948, Louis Barral, returning from France with a voluminous diplomatic courier, handed John Kirk a series of Romanian monarchist manifestos, which Kirk immediately distributed to the faithful through trusted priests from the chapels of Saint Vincent de Paul and the Assumptionists.

On 14 April 1948, Greek Catholic priest Petru Luțiu handed over 280,000 lei to Traian Valeriu Frențiu in Oradea to be distributed not only to devoted priests, but also to the families of priests detained for anti-democratic activities.

At the end of April 1948, O'Hara sanctioned the election of the Franciscan monk Anton Bișoc from Săbăoani as head of the province of Franciscan monks in Moldova, who had obtained only one extra vote, which was contested, over his candidate, the monk Alois Herciu. The only reason Bișoc was preferred was that he had written a series of violent anti-communist pamphlets during the anti-Soviet war, while Herciu had "compromised himself". Because Anton Bișoc, who was being pursued by the authorities, was afraid to return to his

events, which had the effect of tempering "reactionary zeal", as stated in a report dedicated to Greek Catholic hierarchy<sup>49</sup>, but the situation required more radical measures from the authorities, the first concrete step being the denunciation of the Concordat with the Vatican.

### **3. The Pan-Orthodox Conference in Moscow, the denunciation of the Concordat and the amendment of the legislation on religions (June-August 1948)**

Nicolae Bălan's speech and the programmatic statements made in early June by the new Patriarch Justinian caused much agitation in church circles, which had to clarify their position on this issue in one way or another. The reaction of the Greek Catholic hierarchs was unequivocal. Immediately after Metropolitan Bălan's speech, "on the orders of the Nunciature, Ioan Suciu, apostolic administrator of Blaj, summoned all the archpriests to a meeting, threatening to excommunicate any Greek Catholics who would even agree to discuss the issue of returning to Orthodoxy".<sup>50</sup> Then, "before leaving the country at the end of May 1948 for a longer period of time, O'Hara visited Iuliu Hossu in Cluj to discuss with him the possible chances of a government action to convert to Orthodoxy, giving categorical instructions that all orders received by Greek Catholics from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, contrary to the instructions of the Nunciature received from the Vatican, should be considered null and void".<sup>51</sup>

During the aforementioned meeting in Oradea, it was decided to draft three memoranda, namely: the first, signed by all the bishops and drafted by Dr. Iuliu Hossu, was to be addressed to Greek Catholic believers, in order to inform them of the United Church's attitude towards the tendencies to impose union with the Orthodox Church. The second and third memoranda were also to be drafted by Bishop Hossu and sent officially to the President of the Presidium, C. Parhon, and Prime Minister Petru Groza. These memoranda were to show that, in order to avoid

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commune, O'Hara gave orders to create "defence guards" on the spot, recruited from among the wealthy members of the Csángó ethnic group to "defend the priest" [...]

On 10 April 1948, O'Hara sent a circular to all Catholic bishops, allowing and requiring them to hold a second service every Sunday at 6 p.m. so that those Catholics who were "prevented by pagans from attending Mass on Sunday morning" could also attend.

At the end of April 1948, the Nuncio gave instructions that all dioceses should inform him of arrests made among the population and the clergy, spreading the slogan "everyone on pilgrimage" (AMAE, Vatican collection, issue no. 220/1948 – 1956: 20-21.).

<sup>49</sup> Cristian Vasile, *Istoria Bisericii Greco Catolice sub regimul comunist*, document no. 6: 69.

<sup>50</sup> AMAE, Vatican collection, issue no. 220/1948-1956: 31.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

a war between brothers, politics should not interfere with the Church. They were also to draw the government's attention to the need to cease its terror against the Catholic Church, as the bishops were determined to bear all the consequences.

The repressive authorities concluded that "the united bishops are determined to prevent the union of the two Churches at all costs, in accordance with the instructions received from the Vatican. Moreover, it is reported that during the bishops' conference, the secretary of the Papal Nunciature in Bucharest, Father Guido del Mestri, a subject of the Papal State residing in Bucharest, appeared in Oradea [...] He was hosted in the Greek Catholic Diocese of Oradea, with everyone around him pretending not to know him, saying that he was a canon from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Iași".<sup>52</sup>

As can be seen, on every occasion the authorities emphasised the role played by the Nunciature in shaping the resistance of the Catholic faithful to the government's measures. Some historians have minimised the role played by this institution in the life of Catholic denominations in Romania and the extent of its "hostile" activities, in order to emphasise that the denunciation of the Concordat and the later trial of the Nunciature were acts of a totally arbitrary nature. However, if we leave aside for the moment the idea that the Catholics' struggle was just and that of the Communists unjust, and analyse things from the cold perspective of a power struggle, we can see that the Communist regime had a clear objective of excluding from its sphere of domination those forces that would have undermined its authority, and the Catholic Church was, from this point of view, a formidable competitor. The intense conflict between the two sides was mainly due to the maximalist project of Pope Pius XII, who refused to compromise with the "people's democracies" and opted for the full defence of the old rights of the Catholic Church prior to 1944. Since it was clear that persecution would follow, the role of the Nunciatures was to keep the episcopate and the faithful alert and to mobilise them to endure what was to come. In addition to the directives it issued, the Nunciature was also a centre for gathering information about the state of the Catholic Church and a treasury that distributed various sums of money to those involved in resistance activities.

Despite the subjectivity of the documents drawn up by the repressive organs, the role of the Nunciature as a mobiliser and coordinator of the actions of the Catholic Church in Romania seems to us to be beyond doubt. A big question mark remains over an extremely delicate issue, namely how the spectre of war between the Anglo-Americans and the Soviets was used in this mobilisation. There are numerous documents suggesting that many people had the courage to openly oppose the regime in the belief that the repression would not last long and that the defeat of

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<sup>52</sup> Cristian Vasile, *Istoria Bisericii Greco-Catolice sub regimul comunist*, document no. 7: 72.

communism was near. In the case of the Nunciature, there are some documents that suggest that this idea was used to keep people in a state of mobilisation and to avoid "defections" as much as possible, but this aspect remains to be studied. Unfortunately, the hoped-for conflict did not break out, and the communist regime had plenty of time to act to drastically limit the Catholic Church's ability to express itself in Romania.

It was clear to the communist authorities that denouncing the Concordat with the Vatican was the first decisive step that had to be taken in reconfiguring relations between the Romanian state and the Catholic Church. The significance of this denunciation was very clear: from that moment on, the Nunciature ceased to represent the interests of the Catholic Church in Romania before the Romanian authorities, becoming a mere diplomatic representation of the Vatican State. The measure, adopted on 17 July, was communicated to the Nunciature in a verbal note dated 22 July 1948, which stated: "By Decree No. 151 of the Presidium of the Grand National Assembly of the Romanian People's Republic, published in the Official Gazette No. 164 of 19 July 1948, the Concordat concluded between Romania and the Holy See on 10 May 1927 and ratified by the law of 12 June 1929, as well as the subsequent agreements and conventions entered into in application of the Concordat, are denounced. On the date of publication of this law, the application of the Concordat and subsequent agreements and conventions cease. This measure was dictated by the principle of equality and freedom of all religions enshrined in the Constitution of the Romanian People's Republic"<sup>53</sup>.

Although this communiqué sent to the Nunciature sounded so trivial, the authorities prepared themselves extremely well to deal with any legal reproaches by making use of all the works that had attacked, in one way or another, the content and manner of adoption of the 1927 Concordat. An extensive document was drafted summarising all the elements that could have been used as arguments in favour of denouncing the Concordat<sup>54</sup>. This document, as well as other summaries<sup>55</sup>, were

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<sup>53</sup> AMAE, Vatican collection, issue no. 220, vol. 1/1948–1956, unpaginated.

<sup>54</sup> In summary, this material stated the following: "The justification for denouncing the Concordat must be made, if necessary, by pointing out the political, economic and cultural privileges granted to the Catholic Church and clergy on the basis of the Concordat", namely:

I. Political privileges:

1. The privilege of extraterritoriality of the Papal State in the countries that signed the Concordat, which "was a powerful means of undermining the national sovereignty of these states";
  - a. the process of undermining the sovereignty and authority of the state was achieved, among other things, by the appointment of bishops, heads of orders and congregations, leaders and teachers of Catholic schools, etc., directly by the Papal See, leaving the state with a platonic agreement.

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- b. Article V, paragraph 1 provided that even foreign citizens could be appointed to the positions of hierarchs, priests, teachers, heads of orders and congregations (Articles XI, XII, XVI). "No other concordat state has agreed to make this concession, which diminishes its sovereignty."
  - c. Direct communication between bishops, clergy and the people with the Vatican and vice versa "in church matters" was "absolutely free", with no possibility of control by the state.
  - d. Disregard for the sovereignty of the Romanian state: "the Catholic hierarchy in Romania went so far that during the last war, official correspondence with the state authorities was transmitted through the Apostolic Nunciature and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In this way, the Catholic hierarchy clearly demonstrated its tendency to escape from the political community of the Romanian state, asserting itself as a state within a state."
  - e. "The oath of allegiance to the Romanian state provided for in Article VI is null and void because the Catholic hierarchy is obliged to take another oath to the Pope, whereby they undertake to fight against all non-Catholic denominations, even if these represent the absolute majority of the state's believers, as is the case with the Orthodox in Romania. This ambiguous oath implies a lack of loyalty to the state in which they live. The wording of the oath in the concordat with Romania is unique in the world. No other concordat state has accepted such an ambiguous oath as the one accepted by the Romanian state."
2. The Catholic hierarchy in Romania, protected by the concordat, has undertaken, contrary to the conscience of the people, certain political actions against the interests of the state and popular democracy:
- a. Marton Aron issued a circular prohibiting membership in democratic organisations;
  - b. The Roman and Greek Catholic bishops instructed their priests not to join the Union of Democratic Priests in Romania;
  - c. During the Constituent Assembly elections on 28 March 1948, Catholic hierarchs urged the clergy and the faithful not to participate in the elections;
  - d. Metropolitan Al. Cisar declared in 1945: "Any church that identifies with the aspirations of a country or with the politics of a people loses its soul and purpose and alters its directives [...] The Pope is the moral arbiter of the world, so the union of all churches with Rome is the only formula for the salvation of peoples."
  - e. Bishop Al. Rusu, through his statements on 23 August 1945 in Baia Mare and on 8 September 1945 in Sisești, prohibited collaboration with the regime and the acceptance of public office. At his suggestion, Fr. Virgil Suran of Șurdești "uttered serious words against the agrarian reform";
  - f. People wanted by the state authorities were hidden: Camil Demetrescu, a defendant in the Maniu trial, was hidden at the Institute of Oriental Studies;
  - g. The "reactionaries" Pamfil Șeicaru and Horia Cosmovici were taken in by Catholics;
  - h. Bishop Ioan Suciu banned the dissemination of propaganda material in favour of Romanian-Hungarian brotherhood in schools in Blaj;

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- i. Propaganda was spread among reactionary intellectuals and anti-democratic university students through a series of conferences held at the Foundation, Suci's conferences, and Vladimir Ghica's conferences for university students.
3. Monarchy and Catholicism: the harmful role played by Iuliu Maniu and King Ferdinand in the process of adopting the Concordat.

#### II. Economic privileges:

The material assets of the Catholic Church in Romania were acquired by dishonest means and used for purposes contrary to the interests of the Romanian people:

- a. Creation of the Sacred Heritage – through Article XII of the Concordat: "the Romanian state enshrines in law the Catholic Church's right of ownership over immense wealth that had never belonged to it in the past. These are the large estates owned by bishops, dioceses and chapters, solely on a usufruct basis, the undisputed owner being the Romanian state as successor to the Austro-Hungarian state. When the agrarian reform of 1921 was implemented, these large estates were considered church property, and the usufructuaries were paid enormous expropriation prices. All the expropriation income, amounting to over half a billion lei, was concentrated in a single fund, the Sacred Heritage. The Concordat itself establishes "free" administration, i.e. without the state having any right of control over this fund. Article XIII gave the religious fund and the study fund, which they had been requesting for decades from Catholic Hungary without success, to the Catholics for administration. In other concordats, the state reserved the right to intervene in the patrimonial management of church benefits and in all acts deriving from their administration.
- b. Although the institution of patronage was abolished by Article XXXII of the Law on Religions, "Article XV of the Concordat, written in a Jesuitical manner, created the possibility of acquiring all the property that Catholics had as usufructuaries. In this way, the Roman Catholic Church became the owner of large tracts of arable land and forests in our country." In addition to these assets, the hierarchy personally owned large estates. For example, Bishop Valeriu Traian Frențiu owned 140,000 hectares in Bihor County, in addition to the property of his diocese: "He has a bishop's palace, a salary as bishop, senator and member of the Synod, he receives all his maintenance from the state, but he presented himself before the expropriation commission and asked to be exempted. 40,000 people could have been given ownership of the land in question. Only a small part was eventually expropriated";
- c. Agricultural land was exploited by the working peasantry;
- d. The Catholic Church benefited from preferential financial treatment, with a higher number of positions within the Church (bishops, councillors, archpriests) subsidised than the Orthodox Church, in relation to the number of believers.

#### III. Cultural privileges:

- a. The practice of recruiting students from the wealthy bourgeoisie;
- b. Subversion of state control, through the provisions of the Concordat, of the control of the curriculum. The orientation towards the social life of future citizens bore the mark of "the aggressive imperialism of Catholicism, permanently

used in an intense press campaign that began after the denunciation of the Concordat, aimed at justifying the government's decision to the public. From the multitude of articles, we quote the following: I. Manea and A. Bratu, *Vaticanul, agentură a imperialismului american* [*The Vatican, an agency of American imperialism*] ("Scânteia", 28 July 1948); Constantin Olaru, *Denunțarea Concordatului. Un sprijin adus democrației și păcii* [*Denouncing the Concordat. A Support for Democracy and Peace*] ("Universul", 25 July 1948); Archimandrite Valerian Zaharia, *Repudierea Concordatului* [*The Repudiation of the Concordat*] ("Universul", 24 July 1948); Andrei Băleanu, *Un act de interes național* [*An Act of National Interest*] ("Universul", 21 July 1948); Haralamb Ionescu, *Restabilirea egalității cultelor* [*The Restoration of Equality of Religions*] (Universul, 18 July 1948); Al. Cerna – Rădulescu, *Politica anticreștină și antinațională a Vaticanului. Ultimul act al trădării s-a jucat în 1929* [*The Vatican's Anti-Christian and Anti-National Policy. The final act of betrayal took place in 1929*] (Universul, 1 August 1948). At the same time, the Catholic Church representatives' freedom of expression was drastically restricted, preventing them from publicly responding to the accusations levelled against them.

The denunciation of the Concordat in Romania coincided with the Pan-Orthodox Conference in Moscow, held from 7 to 18 July 1948. This was the "opportunity" and not the cause of the denunciation of the Concordat, as some historians tend to claim, because the decision to denounce it had been taken beforehand, waiting for a more significant moment that would give greater weight to the Romanian government's action. The themes of the conference had been well known for almost a year: "1. The Vatican's attitude towards Orthodoxy in the last 30 years; 2. The possibility of the Orthodox Church recognising Anglican ordinations; 3. The Orthodox Church and the ecumenical movement; 4. The church calendar".<sup>56</sup>

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subservient to the monopolistic imperialism of trusts around the world" (ACNSAS, Documentary collection, file no. 60: 109-114).

<sup>55</sup> During this period, alongside the report dedicated to the issue of the Concordat, several summaries were drafted on the situation of the Catholic Church, from which we quote: "The suffering of the Romanian people and the Romanian Orthodox Church at the hands of Catholics" (ACNSAS, Documentary collection, file no. 60: 17-39); "Catholic Orders and Congregations in Romania" (*ibid.*, 40-81); "The Roman and Greek Catholic Churches" (*ibid.*, 11-17), which aim to provide an overview, from a historical and legislative point of view, of the "harmful" role played in the life of the Romanian state and other religions by the Catholic Church and representatives of the Vatican. As mentioned above, these were developed based on anti-Catholic literature existing in the interwar period, in some cases even by authors of that time, who agreed, for various reasons, to write these summaries (see below).

<sup>56</sup> "Biserica Ortodoxă Română" [Romanian Orthodox Church], year LXVII, no. 7-10 (1949): 65.

It should be emphasised, however, that the main concern of the representatives of the Romanian Orthodox Church regarding this conference was to avoid the annexation of Romanian Orthodoxy to Moscow, as was insistently rumoured in the early years of the communist regime<sup>57</sup>, and to this end, all necessary precautions were taken, with the delegation of the Romanian Orthodox Church presenting itself as the envoy of a sister church, which shared common ideals with the other Orthodox churches, but which at the same time had a distinct personality. The purpose of this conference was defined in an extremely neutral manner in church publications: "to get to know the heads of the Orthodox Churches up close, with a view to exchanging views on certain issues that are equally important to all Orthodox Churches".<sup>58</sup>

The Romanian delegation managed to avoid some solutions that were inconvenient for the Romanian Orthodox Church, especially regarding the delicate issue of the calendar, but at the same time, it adopted, along with the other participating Churches, the principle of the "struggle for peace", one of the main missions that the Soviet power had set for the religious cults in its own sphere of domination, with its two components: denouncing the "warmongers" and mobilising the "healthy" and peace-loving forces of the world through appeals for solidarity.

The first aspect concerned primarily the Catholic Church: "The Moscow meeting represents a happy beginning of direct contact between the Primate of the Orthodox Churches for the examination of common problems, with the aim of creating a front of Orthodoxy that can fight more successfully and with greater prestige against the incessant attacks of papism".<sup>59</sup> "Roman Catholic propaganda, according to a paper presented at the conference, exploits their national-political separation (of the Orthodox Churches) and seeks to isolate and divide them in order to subjugate them more easily. Against Roman Catholic proselytism, the Orthodox churches must form a united and solidary common front"<sup>60</sup>.

Therefore, precisely as an expression of this grandiose manifestation of Orthodox solidarity and capitalising on the works relating to the Vatican's actions, drawn up during this period, the communist power in Romania decided to denounce the Concordat during this period. The way in which the communist leaders saw the

<sup>57</sup> See Dudu Velicu, *Biserica Ortodoxă în perioada sovietizării României. Însemnări zilnice. I. 1945-1947 [The Orthodox Church during the Sovietisation of Romania. Daily Notes. I. 1945-1947]* (2004), 76.

<sup>58</sup> "Biserica Ortodoxă Română" year LXVII, no. 7-10 (1949): 65. Nicolae Bălan had also stated: "This Council in Moscow is intended to establish contact. Therefore, its conclusions are not binding, as would be the case with the resolutions of an Ecumenical Synod" ["Biserica Ortodoxă Română", year LXV, no. 10-12 (1947):425].

<sup>59</sup> "Biserica Ortodoxă Română", year LXV, no. 10-12 (1947): 67.

<sup>60</sup> ACNSAS, Documentary Collection, file no. 60, 145.

need to denounce this Concordat can be found in the transcript of the Council of Ministers meeting of 17 July 1948. Emil Bodnăraş, member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party and Minister of National Defence, asked for a distinction to be made between the Catholic hierarchy, considered "Truman's foremost agents", and the faithful: "Our attitude towards the mass of believers must be totally different from the one we will take towards this clergy. With or without the Concordat, this clergy with red caps on their heads, that is, the leaders of the churches [...] will continue their nefarious mission, and that is why I believe that there can be no détente with them. On the contrary, we must make them understand the purpose of this measure we are taking, we must make them tremble to their very core and know that any of them who continue to grumble and twist things as they have done until now will feel our firm hand upon them tomorrow".<sup>61</sup> Petru Groza had a more nuanced position. He did not want to liquidate the Catholic hierarchy, but saw it as collaborating with the regime in achieving its interests: "I am convinced that the mere announcement of this denunciation of the Concordat will deeply influence the leaders of the Church in Transylvania, especially the prospect of losing all benefits and income from the state will frighten them and lead them to a compromise. On the other hand, we must also take into account the fact that we have very valuable Catholic and Uniate bishops, especially in Cluj, and that we can use the latter in particular, who are people of great value, for our action to bring the Uniates back to Orthodoxy[...] If they continue to resist, that is their business. We have given them enough time to think, we have done our duty, and we have not struck any bishop in the back [...] It depends on the attitude they will take. If they come loyally to collaborate with us, so much the better. If not, we will prepare a law to do what is necessary, so that not only the Minister of Internal Affairs will protect us from their intrigues and sermons [...] We must be careful not to alarm the masses of believers for now. And then, with the law we will draft, we will apply a very simple recipe: first of all, we will hit them in the pocket, and in this way, we know that many will refrain from unnecessary actions that might give them the desire to be martyrs[...] By indirectly and patiently striking those bishops who are our enemies, we also free Catholic and Uniate priests from a guardianship that is probably not to their liking. But for now, I don't think it's appropriate to declare war on everyone".<sup>62</sup>

Personal files had been created for Greek Catholic bishops since the end of 1946, assessing their degree of hostility towards the communists and their loyalty to

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<sup>61</sup> ANIC, Presidency of the Council of Ministers Collection – Stenograms, file no. 7/1948: 17.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

the Pope. Alexandru Rusu, Ioan Suciu and Vasile Aftenie were considered the most dangerous, while Valeriu Traian Frențiu and Ioan Bălan were classified as "lukewarm", with Bishop Iuliu Hossu being considered the most "suitable" for an agreement.<sup>63</sup> It is precisely him that Petru Groza refers to in his speech when he talks about "people of great value" from Cluj, and his intention to attract him to Orthodoxy was put into practice in September 1948. Cardinal Hossu recounts the event in his memoirs as follows: "[...] closely followed by agents the whole time, I fly to Bucharest for an audience with the Minister of Religious Affairs, Stanciu Stoian; I submit the request for the evacuation of the Theological Academy; after he tells me that he will intervene, he moves on to something else, for which he seems to have insisted that I come in person; he shows me what a great and beautiful role I could play in these historic days. Although his words and thoughts struck me painfully at first, I did not respond, as if I did not understand what he was aiming at, and, continuing in the same vein, I replied: 'Minister, our faith is our life.'

He did not dare to suggest that I renounce my faith directly, but pointed out the great, historic role I could play in these historic times; I was hurt by his indirect but clear suggestion, and I replied again that our faith is our life; I asked him to intervene for the evacuation of our Academy, as we are approaching the beginning of the new academic year. He agreed to give me his answer the next day; I told him that I wanted to go to an audience with Prime Minister Groza to ask for his support in the same cause of evacuating the Academy.

On 21 September, I had an audience with Prime Minister Groza, with the same request; he promised me that he would intervene; then he asked me: 'What did Stanciu Stoian tell you?'; I told him that he promised me he would intervene with the Ministry of Education; 'And what else did he tell you?'; I replied: 'Only this,' not making an open proposal, I did not know how to respond to Mr. Stoian's allusion to the 'great role' I could play, nor did I take it in this form, but as a word spoken in conversation about the unrest among our faithful, and even the intensification of their terrorisation, as I told him on another occasion mentioned earlier; then the Prime Minister replied with a smile: 'Do you want to be Metropolitan of Iași?'; surprised, I did not understand what he was alluding to and replied: 'Durkovicci is there, he is Roman Catholic'; 'Ah,' replied Groza, laughing, 'not that!' Then I started, and from his gesture I understood that he was talking about the Orthodox Metropolis of Iași, which was vacant. So I replied: 'Prime Minister, our faith is our life.' To these decisive words of mine[...] he replied calmly and with a smile: 'If only it were just life!' He knew what he was saying and what would happen before

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<sup>63</sup> ACNSAS, Documentary Collection, file no. 58: 1-6, 58-61, 70, 148, 177.

'life' [...]".<sup>64</sup> We will find similar dialogues in the years to come, and this interest in Hossu is one of the explanations for his "longevity," despite the suffering he will endure, as the communist regime is interested in keeping him alive.

The warning given by denouncing the Concordat did not have the expected consequences. On 23 July 1948, the Apostolic Nunciature officially protested against the denunciation of the Concordat, pointing out that Article XXIII of the Concordat stipulated that it could only be denounced with six months' notice by one of the signatory parties. In addition, the Nunciature considered that the reasons invoked by the Romanian side for denouncing the Concordat were "non-existent and had no basis in fact or in law".<sup>65</sup> For their part, the Catholic bishops submitted memoranda to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, protesting against the denunciation of the Concordat and demanding "an end to the coercion of the conscience of our clergy and faithful (Greek Catholics) with a view to their conversion to Orthodoxy and abandonment of the (Greek Catholic) Church".<sup>66</sup>

The denunciation of the Concordat did not take the Catholic clergy by surprise. As Philippe de Luze, France's chargé d'affaires in Romania, reported to Robert Schuman, France's Minister of Foreign Affairs, on 28 July 1948, "The violent campaign against the Pope, waged for several months in the press, the provisions of the new Constitution providing for the abolition of confessional schools [...] the various appeals recently made to the Uniates to return to the Orthodox Church, were signs that pointed to a revision of relations between the Romanian People's Republic and the Holy See".<sup>67</sup> However, the immediate consequences of this measure could not be assessed, with some Roman Catholic hierarchs and foreign diplomats believing that the Romanian government would sever diplomatic relations with the Vatican in the shortest possible time and that Nuncio O'Hara would be expelled.<sup>68</sup>

This measure would be taken later, when the government decided that it no longer had any reason to tolerate the existence of the Nunciature, given the support it gave to the actions of the Catholic hierarchy, who had launched an intense campaign to maintain the solidarity of the church body in the face of increasingly frequent attacks. Greek Catholic bishops in particular, threatened with the spectre of the abolition of their own church, will strive hard to prevent intrusions and schisms within it. As the means available to the bishops were limited, this was compensated

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<sup>64</sup> Iuliu Hossu, *Credința noastră este viața noastră*, 80-81.

<sup>65</sup> AMAE, Vatican collection, issue no.220, vol. 1/ 1948-1956, unpaginated.

<sup>66</sup> Iuliu Hossu, *Credința noastră este viața noastră*, 60.

<sup>67</sup> O. Bozgan (ed.), *Studii de istoria Bisericii*, 2000, document no. 4: 123.

<sup>68</sup> ACNSAS, Documentary collection, file no. 60: 82-83.

for by an impressive campaign of visits to parishes, occasions on which the bishop's presence and sermons were intended to keep the faithful close to the Greek Catholic Church. Also, through the archpriests, strict control was established over the priests, so that there would be no traitors among them. Bishops Ioan Suciu and Iuliu Hossu, in particular, carried out veritable tours de force until their arrest in October 1948, managing to cover a large number of localities. The repressive authorities, always on their trail, conscientiously recorded the events that took place each time, so that we have a veritable collection of sermons from these pilgrimages, gathered between the covers of the security files. Here are a few examples from this campaign:

At a meeting held on 19 July after the religious service at the Strâmbu Lăpuşului monastery, Bishop Iuliu Hossu declared in front of about 20 Greek Catholic priests that, although "the Concordat had been denounced by the government of the Romanian People's Republic, this did not mean that the spiritual bond between the papal see and the souls of its faithful in Romania had been broken"<sup>69</sup>. During the traditional pilgrimages that took place on St. Mary's Day at the Nicula Monastery, the prelate from Cluj urged his parishioners: "Be strong in your faith, do not believe the whispers and rumours about the union of the Churches. No one can lead you astray from our path and your faith"<sup>70</sup>. As for Bishop Suciu, he "was in Galda de Sus on 26 July, where he was welcomed by priests Manu Augustin and Nistor Adrian and the schoolteachers with their children. Colourful carpets were placed on the fences. Here he said: 'The workers no longer believe in God, but only in their machines. Some peoples have cast Jesus aside and put their faith in their machines.

We Romanians have won Transylvania through faith. The Greek Catholic Church is threatened by grave dangers. Hold fast to your faith, no matter what happens, just as Jesus Christ suffered everything until His crucifixion on the cross."

From Galda, he went to Întregalde, where he was welcomed with love and 12 horsemen by the mayor and priest Nicolae Suciu.

In his sermon, he said: "Let us put our hope in Jesus and the Mother of God, let us not leave the altars, even though many priests are currently being persecuted for their faith and tortured in prisons"<sup>71</sup>.

An interesting event took place in Lugoj on 1 August, when the icon of the Mother of God was brought from Scăiuş. The procession gathered thousands of believers, which worried the prefect. He summoned Bishop Ioan Bălan, who had to clarify that it was a manifestation of faith and not a protest against the regime<sup>72</sup>.

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<sup>69</sup> ACNSAS, Documentary collection, file no. 74, vol. 1: 19.

<sup>70</sup> ACNSAS, Documentary collection, file no. 63: 574.

<sup>71</sup> ACNSAS, Documentary collection, file no. 2578, vol. 1: 201.

<sup>72</sup> ACNSAS, Documentary collection, file no. 63: 533.

Although the authorities continued to court some of the Greek Catholic hierarchy, their interest focused on finding supporters among the clergy and the faithful, but here too, their initial successes were modest, the first to arrive being Canon Emil Iuga from Cluj, a figure with a troubled past, if we are to judge by the portrait painted of him by Iuliu Hossu in his memoirs, recalling his collaboration with the Horthy regime.<sup>73</sup> According to a note from the Security Service dated 21 March 1948, Emil Iuga stated that he was "ready to collaborate with the regime in any form, but preferably in a less visible form, to inform the regime about the situation in the Catholic Church and for the union of the Greek Catholic Church with the Orthodox Church, in a way that would lead to an agreement between the parties called upon to do so. Iuga wants to come to Bucharest to talk to the right people. He wants to become a bishop. He has been promised full support".<sup>74</sup> Emil Iuga wrote an informative report in September 1948 in which he stated the following: "Bishop Hossu swore an oath in Oradea not to convert to Orthodoxy.

- The majority of the clergy will convert to Orthodoxy, being willing to do anything to escape the tyranny and misdeeds of Hossu and his people.
- The people will only resist where they are incited to do so by intellectuals.
- The best course of action would be as follows: the old and sick bishops should be removed through retirement: Ioan Bălan from Lugoj, Valeriu Traian Frentiu from Oradea and Alexandru Rusu from Baia Mare. Then Hossu should also be removed for fraud, theft and immorality. In fact, if confronted with these facts, Hossu, terrified, will withdraw on his own. And Suciu, left alone, would flee, knowing that he is an opponent of the regime. Hossu must be removed first because this will strike fear into everyone and things will go much more smoothly.
- The formula according to which the initiative would start from a group of priests is difficult and would complicate matters further, and this should be implemented after the field has been cleared of bishops, because then the clergy will naturally ask to be given "bishops" and thus Orthodox ones will be given to them".<sup>75</sup>

Unfortunately for him, Iuga did not prove to be a good strategist, and Petru Groza's particularly poor opinion of him was decisive in the regime's decision to

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<sup>73</sup> Iuliu Hossu, *Credința noastră este viața noastră*, 78–79, 92–94.

<sup>74</sup> *Cartea albă a Securității [White Paper of the Securitate]*, vol. 1, 23 August 1944 – 30 August 1948, document no. 353 (Bucharest, 1997), 437.

<sup>75</sup> Cristian Vasile, *Între Vatican și Kremlin. Biserica Greco-Catolică în timpul regimului comunist [Between the Vatican and the Kremlin. The Greek Catholic Church during the Communist Regime]* (Bucharest: Editura Curtea Veche, 2003), 135.

ultimately dispense with his services.<sup>76</sup> In August and September, the regime's efforts focused on limiting the freedom of expression of bishops, canons and archpriests and identifying the core group of clergy willing to bring about the union. First of all, it was necessary to perfect the legal mechanisms for control and intervention in the life of the churches, as well as to limit their influence in the social sphere. Consequently, on 3 August 1948, Decrees 175 and 176 were adopted, regulating the situation of religious education, and on 4 August, the Law on the General Regime of Religious Denominations (Decree No. 177) was approved, all of which reflected the spirit of Petru Groza's statements during the debates on the denunciation of the Concordat.

#### **4. The decrees of August 1948 on the general regime of religious denominations, the reform of the education system and the property belonging to religious denominations**

One of the most debated issues at the beginning of 1948 was Article 28 of the draft Constitution, which prohibited religious denominations from organising and owning educational institutions. The Nunciature protested against this issue and the Greek Catholic bishops drafted a comprehensive memorandum.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, the provision was retained in the text of the Constitution, and Decree 175 merely gave concrete form to the idea of unifying, nationalising and secularising Romanian education. Article 35 clearly stated that: "All denominational or private schools of any kind shall become state schools", and Decree 176 specified the concrete manner in which the property of churches, congregations, communities or individuals, which had been used for the operation and maintenance of general, technical or vocational educational institutions, would become the property of the state.<sup>78</sup> Religion has been removed from the school curriculum. It was a new and extremely effective way of removing religion from the public sphere, just as religion would gradually be removed from hospitals, asylums, barracks and prisons.<sup>79</sup> In September, an order issued by the Ministry of Education mandated the removal of religious symbols from schools. The effects of removing religion as a subject of study and religious

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<sup>76</sup> In his memoirs, Hossu records the discussion he had with Petru Groza about Iuga's complaints and the prime minister's contemptuous attitude towards the Cluj canon (Iuliu Hossu, *Credința noastră este viața noastră*, 92-94).

<sup>77</sup> Published in *Cartea albă a Securității the White Paper of the Securitate*, vol. 1, document no. 357: 440-444.

<sup>78</sup> "Monitorul Oficial," year CXVI, part I A, no. 177, Tuesday, 3 August 1948, 6322-6324.

<sup>79</sup> Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române [History of the Romanian Orthodox Church]*, vol. III (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 1997), 482.

symbols from schools would be felt from the end of October, when a wave of discontent against these measures arose, an aspect to which we will return.

Decree 177 of 4 August 19<sup>80</sup> replaced the 1928 Law on the General Regime of Religious Denominations. Although they are similar in many respects, with the affiliations often very clear, there are also significant differences. The 1948 law proclaimed full freedom of conscience<sup>81</sup> and treated church-state relations in a purely pragmatic manner, as between any other state institutions. The differences become more pronounced if we delve deeper into the specific intentions of the two laws. The 1928 law was primarily concerned with promoting religion as a factor of unity and stability in the newly unified Romania, attempting to harmonise a multitude of factors and elements that were quite difficult to harmonise. The 1948 law, on the other hand, is interested in avoiding an excessive role for religion in the life of the state, perfecting a series of mechanisms that allow the latter to interfere in church life and forcing all religions, which are clearly subordinate to state power, to come to a common denominator. To enable this standardisation, the 1948 law contains a series of provisions not found in the 1928 law, which will be exploited to give a legal appearance to the abolition of the Greek Catholic Church.

I have compared the 1928 and 1948 laws in detail in another article. Here I will mention only a few provisions that were to directly affect the Catholic Church.

Among the key points of the 1948 law were those relating to the patrimony of religious denominations, which was specifically designed to facilitate the dissolution of the Greek Catholic Church. Comparatively, the provisions of the two laws in the area of patrimony are as follows:

Law No. 54 of 22 April 1928 on the general regime of religious denominations	Decree No. 177 of 4 August 1948 on the general regime of religious denominations
Art. 11 Historical religious organisations, created and represented in accordance with their system of organisation and provided for in their statutes (communities, parishes, deaneries, monasteries, chapters, bishoprics, archbishoprics, metropolises, etc.) are legal entities.	Art. 28 Recognised religious denominations are legal entities. Their local constituent parts, which have the legal number of members provided for by the law on legal entities, as well as the establishments, associations, orders and congregations provided for in their statutes of organisation, are also legal

<sup>80</sup> Published in the "Monitorul Oficial" on 30 August 1948.

<sup>81</sup> See Articles 1, 3, 4, and 5 in this regard.

<p>Art. 37 The property of defunct religious denominations shall revert to the state by right.</p> <p>Art. 38. The institution of patronage with rights and obligations of any kind is and remains abolished without any compensation.</p> <p>Art. 39 The legal status (title of ownership) of immovable property (churches, parish houses and outbuildings) and church property which, until the promulgation of this law, were under patronage shall be verified and, if necessary, rectified in the land registers according to the following principles:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. If, upon verification, it is found that these properties and goods belong to local church communities, they shall remain in their full ownership and possession.</li> <li>b. If it is found that they belong to the patron – whether the state or one of its institutions (county, municipality, etc.), or a private individual – they shall remain their property, but in the possession of the local communities;</li> <li>c. If the private owner, who holds a personal right of patronage, has disappeared, the ownership of the properties and assets shall pass to the state, and possession shall remain with the local community;</li> <li>d. If the owner of church property and assets in a local community that has been legally dissolved or has disappeared due to the disappearance of its believers is the</li> </ol>	<p>entities, if the latter have complied with the provisions of the law on legal entities.</p> <p>Art. 29 The movable and immovable property of religious denominations, their various constituent parts, establishments, associations, orders and congregations shall be inventoried by their statutory bodies. The central bodies of religious denominations shall communicate all data relating to these inventories to the Ministry of Religious Affairs for the exercise of its right of verification and control.</p> <p>Art. 35 The institution of patronage, concerning personal property originating from private persons or institutions of any category, remains abolished.</p> <p>Art. 36 The property of religions that have disappeared or whose recognition has been restricted belongs by right to the State.</p> <p>Art. 37 If at least 10% of the number of believers in the local community convert to another religion, the local religious community of that religion or, in proportion to the number of believers who have left it, and this proportional part shall also be transferred by right to the patrimony of the local community of the religion adopted by the new believers.</p> <p>If those who leave the local community constitute the majority, the church (place of worship, house of prayer), as well as the annex buildings, belong by right to the local community of the newly adopted religion, the other property being due to the two local communities</p>
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<p>state, the state shall dispose of them freely; and if it is a private individual, in agreement with the Ministry of Religious Affairs, it shall allocate their possession for the general needs of the religion. The same principles apply in the case of other constituent parts and institutions of religions other than local communities.</p>	<p>in the proportion indicated in the previous paragraph. If those who have converted from one religion to another represent at least 75% of the number of believers in the local community of the abandoned religion, all property shall be transferred by right to the patrimony of the local community of the adopted religion, with the right of compensation for the abandoned local community, in proportion to the number of those remaining, without taking into account the church (place of worship, house of prayer) and the annexed buildings; this compensation shall be paid within a maximum of 3 years from its establishment. The cases provided for in this article shall be established and resolved by the local people's court.</p>
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Thus, the communist state "resolved" an issue that had been intensely debated during discussions surrounding the 1928 law. At that time, the Greek Catholic bishop of Cluj-Gherla, Iuliu Hossu, delivered a lengthy speech in Parliament, expressing his concern about Orthodox "proselytism" and demanding that it be clearly stated that the property would not be divided if part of the church community opted for another religion.<sup>82</sup> The legal situation remained ambiguous, but tacitly, the property remained in the possession of those who remained with the old faith. The new law took into account the wave of returns to the Orthodox Church that had taken place in Transylvania during the interwar period, creating a legislative framework conducive to the transfer of property to the Orthodox Church along with the faithful, thus contributing to the gradual disappearance of the United Church.

At the same time, the procedures for converting from one religion to another were greatly simplified under the 1948 law, with the lengthy details in Chapter III of the 1928 Law (see Articles 41-50) being removed. Article 38 stated that "Transfers from one religion to another or leaving a religion are free." Then there were some

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<sup>82</sup> See *Biserica noastră și cultele minoritare. Marea discuție parlamentară în jurul Legii Cultelor – 1928 [Our Church and Minority Religions. The Great Parliamentary Debate on the Law on Religious Denominations – 1928]*, edited, with an introductory study and notes by Constantin Schifirneț (Bucharest, 2000), 157-192.

clarifications regarding the specific procedure for leaving a religion: "The declaration of leaving a religion shall be communicated to the local branch of the religion left, through the local communal authority. Upon request, the respective municipal authority is obliged to issue proof of this communication." Finally, Article 39 specified that "No religion may register new followers unless the person requesting this proves that they have announced their departure from the religion to which they belonged." These procedures were followed to the letter in the autumn of 1948, when the process of converting Uniate believers to Orthodoxy was in full swing.

Given the secularisation of education, the provisions relating to religious education in the 1948 law referred strictly to the status of schools for the training of religious personnel. The cults were free to organise this education under the control of the State, with schools under the authority of the churches and the aegis of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, not that of Education. Theology faculties became university-level theological institutes, the number of which was clearly specified: two for the Orthodox religion and one each for the Catholic and Protestant religions.

Furthermore, the provisions of the law concerning the relations of religious denominations with the outside world directly concerned the Catholic Church. In the two laws, these provisions read as follows:

Law No. 54 of 22 April 1928 on the general regime of religious denominations	Decree No. 177 of 4 August 1948 on the general regime of religious denominations
<p>Art. 7 - No religion may have relations of dependence with any ecclesiastical authority or organisation abroad, except those imposed by its dogmatic and legal-canonical principles. Relations between the state and the Catholic religion, the only one in the country with such dependence, shall be established by a special agreement, which shall be submitted to the legislative bodies for approval.</p> <p>Art. 8 - The jurisdiction of the religious authorities of the religions in the country cannot extend beyond the territory of the Romanian state. Similarly, the religious</p>	<p>Art. 40 The relations of religious denominations with foreign countries shall be exclusively religious in nature. No religious denomination and no representative of any denomination may maintain relations with religious denominations or official persons outside the territory of the country, except with the approval of the Ministry of Denominations and through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.</p> <p>Art. 41 The jurisdiction of religious denominations in the country may not extend beyond the territory of the Romanian People's Republic, nor may</p>

authorities of foreign religions may not exercise any jurisdiction within the Romanian state. Similarly, the religious authorities of foreign religions may not exercise any jurisdiction within the Romanian state. Art. 9 – Religious denominations and associations may not receive material aid from abroad, either directly or indirectly, without informing the Government.	religious denominations abroad exercise jurisdiction over believers within the Romanian state. Art. 42 Aid or offerings received from abroad by religious denominations in the country or sent by them abroad shall be controlled by the state.
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The provisions of the decree on religious denominations ratified the denunciation of the Concordat and completely eliminated the privileged system of relations that the Catholic Church in Romania had established with the Vatican. This and other elements were pointed out by the Apostolic Nunciature in a verbal note addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 7 August 1948: "The Apostolic Nunciature has taken note of the new Law on Religious Denominations published in the Official Gazette No. 178 of August and feels obliged to draw attention to certain provisions contained therein which appear to us to be in flagrant contradiction with the principles of freedom and equality promulgated in the Constitution of the Romanian People's Republic, principles which are reaffirmed by the new law.

The Apostolic Nunciature has a duty to protest in particular, on behalf of the Catholic Church and its leader represented in Romania by the Nunciature, against the articles of the new law that clearly violate the inalienable rights of this Church.

The Nunciature complains about the provisions of Articles 13 and 14, which make the existence of the Catholic Church in Romania dependent on a decree of the Presidium of the Grand National Assembly, at the proposal of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, so that a refusal by this Ministry of Religious Affairs or by the Presidium is sufficient for the Catholic Church to be declared illegal. The right of the Catholic Church to exist in any country, whatever it may be, depends solely on its universal mission of divine essence and not on secular power, whatever it may be.

Similarly, under Article 21 of the law, the exercise of the spiritual mission of Catholic bishops, a mission that is revealed only by God and their Supreme Spiritual Leader, is subject to approval by the Presidium, at the proposal of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This interference by the state in an area that is outside its competence is in flagrant opposition to the independence of the Catholic Church in an area that is reserved exclusively for it. The head of this Church is the only one competent to appoint bishops and give them spiritual jurisdiction over the faithful.

Through Article 22, the State arrogates to itself the competence and power to judge the spiritual needs of citizens, seeking to limit diocesan territories to an average of 750,000 faithful. Through this unacceptable reduction, which endangers the souls of the faithful, the State assumes a great responsibility, making the mission of the diocesan bishops practically impossible, as they are no longer able to exercise their mission satisfactorily ...

Among other things, it can be seen that the new law restricts, even if it does not officially suppress, the freedom of religions that are declared to have full freedom, in that their congresses and general assemblies must receive prior approval from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and diocesan assemblies are at the mercy of local authorities, according to Article 24.

Furthermore, Article 25, which effectively suppresses all possible relations between bishops and believers in the administrative, cultural, educational, philanthropic, etc. spheres, makes all purely spiritual initiatives that a bishop might take in order to be faithful to his pastoral mission dependent on a simple ministerial decision, under the pretext of 'state security and public order.'

Article 28 undoubtedly recognises the legal personality of religions but refrains from specifying whether this personality is public or private. References to the 'legal number of members' required for recognition seem to place religion on the same level as a cultural or sports association. However, the Catholic Church, whose purpose is to assume the salvation of souls and the supreme good of the community, cannot abandon its right to be considered of public utility in the state.

It is certainly unnecessary to draw the Ministry's attention to the incalculable consequences of Article 37 of the new law. In the past, no Romanian legislator has dared to introduce this element into the regime governing religious denominations, as it could have serious consequences both now and in the future. Suffice it to say that the Catholic Church has never abandoned the principle that it is the Church, and not the community of believers, that owns ecclesiastical property, so the 'defect' of a part of the faithful does not give them the right to claim even the smallest part of this sacred heritage, so as not to encourage dissent, the reason for which is rarely spiritual.

Finally, the Apostolic Nunciature has a duty to protest against the provisions contained in Articles 40 and 41 of the new law: The Supreme Head of the Catholic Church, the Sovereign Pontiff, cannot renounce his divine right to exercise full spiritual jurisdiction over the territory where there is not only a Catholic, but any soul concerned with eternal matters. He cannot renounce the implementation of Christ's command, of which the Holy Father is the Vicar on earth, namely 'to teach and save all people on this earth'.

On the other hand, restricting the right and obligation of bishops to remain under the jurisdiction of the Pope and forcing them to accept state control attacks the intimate connection between Catholic religious bodies and the supreme authority. Between this authority and the organs of worship, doctrinal and disciplinary relations involve secrets of conscience that secular chancelleries have no right to know or manage".<sup>83</sup>

The Romanian government did not rush to respond to this document. It was not until October, amid turmoil over the return of Greek Catholics to Orthodoxy, that a draft response was prepared, which was never sent because by 30 October the issue was considered "outdated".<sup>84</sup> However, it is useful to know the text of this document, as it clarifies some of the Romanian state's positions on the issues raised by the Apostolic Nunciature. "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs," the document states, "considers that the new law on the general regime of religious denominations in the Romanian People's Republic, published in *the Official Gazette*, No. 178 of 4 August this year does not contain, either in its text or in its spirit, anything that contradicts the principles of freedom and equality of religions enshrined in the Constitution [...] as a result, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs considers the objections raised by the Apostolic Nunciature to be completely unfounded."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> AMAE, Vatican collection, Problem no. 220, vol. 1/1948-1956, unpaginated.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> The arguments put forward in support of the Romanian government's assertion are as follows: "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs would like to remind the Apostolic Nunciature on this occasion that it is sent to the Government of the RPR as a diplomatic representative of what is called the Papal State or the Vatican City, and not as a representative of the Catholic Church, which has other representatives in the Romanian People's Republic [...]"

With regard to the deliberate and forced interpretation of Articles 13, 14, 21, 22, 24, 25, 28, 37, 40 and 41 of the new Law on Religions, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reminds the Apostolic Nunciature that the authentic interpretation and application of these articles of law belong exclusively to the Government of the RPR, whose sovereignty cannot admit substitutions and interferences of the kind attempted in the verbal note in question.

1. With regard to Articles 13, 14 and 21, the undisputed right and constant practice of sovereign states, known in the history of relations between the Vatican and these states as "placet regium", should not be forgotten.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is surprised to note that assertions can be made whereby a foreign mission seeks to determine the competence of the Presidium of the Grand National Assembly of the Romanian People's Republic, or to assert a right over certain citizens and a sector of activity within the Romanian People's Republic.

2. In its Note, the Apostolic Nunciature discusses the provisions of Article 22 of the same law. In this regard, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs points out that this article of the new Law on Religions merely provides for one of the practical means necessary to translate the principle of equal treatment of religions into reality [...] Only a state that is unaware of its sovereign rights and is not

An analysis of the above documents shows that, at first glance, the dispute between the Vatican and the Romanian state boils down to the conflict that has existed since the dawn of the modern era between the Pope's claims to play a role above political power and the state's desire to consolidate its authority over its citizens, each side putting forward its own arguments, which essentially relate to the European debate in this area. Apparently, the state was doing nothing more than bringing all religious organisations in Romania under a common denominator, exercising its right of supervision and control over them, a right that every modern state claimed to have. Furthermore, as we have seen, the provisions of the law were not very different from those in the 1928 law, but the latter only affected the lives of other religious organisations, with the Catholic Church benefiting from the Concordat, which was extremely favourable to its interests. However, although the August 1948 note from the Nunciature clearly reveals the established attitude of the

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motivated by sincere democratic convictions can tolerate privileges for some religions to the detriment of others [...]

3. Articles 24 and 25 of the same law are then discussed, although it is clear that these articles do nothing more than naturally extend and ensure the State's legitimate right to control certain manifestations of religions, so as to prevent religions from committing acts that would prejudice good relations between religions and the State and cause harmful conflicts in relations between religions.
4. With regard to Article 28, it should be noted that, in general, the character of "public utility in the state" of an institution is acquired through the way in which it acts and cannot be imposed through theories or assertions [...]
5. With regard to the provisions of Article 37 of the same law, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs finds that the Apostolic Nunciature is attempting not only to substitute sovereignty, but even to superimpose papal sovereignty on that of the Romanian People's Republic, through the offensive claim that the Romanian People's Republic should subordinate its legislation to the Catholic Codex [...]
6. Finally, with regard to Articles 40 and 41 of the same law, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs wishes to reiterate that no jurisdiction of any kind from outside its borders can be admitted within the territory of the Romanian People's Republic over its citizens. Relations between religions and foreign countries can only be of a religious nature.

On the specific issue of state control over the external relations of the Catholic Church concerning what the Apostolic Nunciature refers to as 'secrets of conscience', the Ministry of Foreign Affairs considers that subjecting them to our state control could give rise to discussions and dissatisfaction on the part of those concerned, only if they were likely to prejudice the democratic order of the Romanian People's Republic [...]

In view of this, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Romanian People's Republic feels obliged to carefully examine the advisability of maintaining its diplomatic relations with the Papal State in the future" (*ibid.*).

papacy, what is much more evident is the fear that the communist state would use the mechanisms created to eliminate religion from people's lives, given the manifestly atheistic nature of the ruling party's ideology. From this moment on, a dispute began that would last until 1989 between the Romanian state, which demanded that the Catholic Church in Romania adapt its status to the provisions of the new law on religions, and the latter, which systematically refused to do so, considering the Codex to be the main element from which to start. Although there were ebbs and flows in relations between the Romanian state and the Vatican, they could never be definitively settled due to the Romanian state's constant refusal to accept a statute based on *the Codex Juris Canonici*. Thus, although several draft proposals were made over time, the Catholic Church remained the only religion in Romania that did not regulate its relations with the state through a statute.

## **5. The abolition of the Greek Catholic Church. From the adoption of Decree No. 177 to Decree 358 of 1 December 1948**

### ***5.1 The start of the unification process (September 1948)***

According to Article 56 of Decree No. 177, all religious denominations were required to submit their organisational statutes, brought into line with the provisions of the law, to the Ministry of Religious Affairs for approval within three months of the date of publication of the law. The new statutes were to be approved by decree of the Presidium of the Grand National Assembly, at the proposal of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Most religious organisations began working on the new statutes, while Catholics continued to express reservations that were considered by the authorities to be evidence of hostility.

On 26, 27 and 28 August, the Catholic bishops met in Oradea, where they drafted a new memorandum, which was submitted to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, practically reiterating the points raised by the Apostolic Nunciature.<sup>86</sup> The intelligence services reported that several issues were discussed in Oradea, which outlined a veritable plan of hostile actions against the people's democratic government, including the following:

" - Gathering material against abuses and submitting this material to the Nunciature in order to obtain the support of Western imperialism.

- Open resistance against the authorities, wherever possible, and preferably under the guise of Hungarian or German nationalism.

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

- Maximising the fanaticism of the population through visits, special prayer programmes and the activation of lay congregations.
- Sabotage of the nationalisation of schools by prohibiting priests and monks from remaining in education and by persuading parents to demand the reintroduction of religion in schools.
- Preparing a Greek Catholic resistance against attempts to return to Orthodoxy through agitation, the ordination of clandestine priests, and preparing for a possible transition to illegality by creating vicars, archpriests, and parish priests, and by authorising the renunciation of clerical attire.
- Training special couriers, recruited primarily from among monks, to ensure communication between the various dioceses and the Nunciature under all circumstances.
- Fighting the democratic tendencies of part of the Catholic clergy through spiritual threats, complaints to the Vatican, suspension from office, and influencing families, with the aim of achieving a common front of all clergy against the authorities.

Parallel to these decisions, the report says, the Nunciature appointed a trusted priest in each Greek and Roman Catholic diocese to serve as a special informant. Among these, the following were later identified: for the Roman Catholic diocese of Timișoara, Adalbert Boroș, and for the Greek Catholic diocese of Oradea, Gavrilă Stan".<sup>87</sup> The intelligence structures were quite well informed, as parts of the plan described above would be reflected in the later actions of the Catholic Church.

As can be seen, the meeting in Oradea focused on the Greek Catholic issue, which is now entering a new, decisive phase. Until then, the political authorities had not yet visibly set the state machinery in motion, preferring to leave it to representatives of the Orthodox Church to promote the idea in the public arena. Such articles were published especially after the statements made by the new Patriarch Justinian on the occasion of his enthronement. We mention here only the articles signed by Gr. T. Marcu and Dumitru Stăniloae in *Telegraful Român*. The former demanded that "the seals of 1700 be broken through the intervention of the state leadership," while Father Stăniloae noted: "Today things have changed. This is the first time since 1918 that the political leadership of the Romanian state no longer trembles before the Vatican, and the Patriarch of the Country is no longer prevented from expressing his pain that his flock is still forced to remain divided by paid guards. We are experiencing a uniquely favourable situation, when no power stands in the way of the Romanian people restoring their religious unity. We would be

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<sup>87</sup> AMAE, Vatican collection, Problem no. 220, vol. 1/1948-1956, 34.

unwise not to take advantage of it, just as our people took advantage of another favourable situation in 1918 to restore their political unity"<sup>88</sup> .

Among those involved in the debates on the return was Archbishop Emilian Antal. In one of his articles, he suggested a deadline for the return, namely 7 October 1948, which marked the 250th anniversary of the "Union of Bălgrad"<sup>89</sup> . This date was probably also taken into consideration by the political authorities, as they wanted to speed up events so that by the beginning of October everything would be resolved according to the wishes of those in power.

As mentioned above, throughout this period, attempts were made to attract representative figures from the Catholic community so that the process of return would have a stronger impact. However, with the exception of Emil Iuga, who would be abandoned, no one from the upper echelons of the Greek Catholic Church agreed to participate in the effort to return to the Orthodox Church; on the contrary, they consistently implemented the plan adopted in Oradea. For these reasons, the authorities turned to ordinary priests and lay people. To this end, on 29 August 1948, the leadership of the General Directorate of State Security sent a circular order to all Security Inspectorates in Transylvania and Banat, with the following content: "Within five days, communicate the following information regarding the speech given by Patriarch Justinian on the unification of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

1. The mood of the Greek Catholic population in relation to the above.
2. Which centres have reacted with hostility to this unification and how is this hostility manifested?
3. The centres where the proposal for unification was received favourably.
4. The priests who agree with this unification, indicating: their names, pronouns, locality and whether they have influence among the faithful, indicating how this influence is manifested and the results of this manifestation.
5. Priests who are hostile to unification, showing the same data as in point 4.
6. Priests who are indifferent or do not express their attitude, providing the information from point 4.

The reports shall be drawn up in detail and forwarded by special couriers to this General Directorate, the office of the Director General, by the evening of 3 September this year. No delays will be tolerated".<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> *Biserica Română Unită – 250 de ani de istorie [The Romanian Greek Catholic Church – 250 Years of History]* (Cluj-Napoca: Viața Creștină Publishing House, 1998), 140.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> ANIC, General Police Directorate collection, file no. 75/1946: 135.

Based on the analyses carried out, the decision was made to risk a "popular" action, which began in earnest on 27, 28 and 29 September, when each Greek Catholic priest received a form, printed and sent by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, through which he had to delegate two priests from the county where his parish was located to participate in a congress to be held on 1 October in Cluj, the purpose of which was to discuss the unification of the Greek Catholic Church with the Orthodox Church. The printed form referred to the fact that the appeals made by Patriarch Justinian and Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan had had a great impact among the Greek Catholic clergy. The delegates who were to participate in the congress were invested with full powers by the signatory priests to vote for the return of the Greek Catholics to Orthodoxy and to sign on their behalf the document that was to sanction this return. To give greater weight to this action, a rumour was spread that Bishop Iuliu Hossu himself was to participate in this congress. Prior to this, leading priests were summoned to the diocesan centres to set an example by signing these documents. At the same time, initiative committees for the transition to the Orthodox Church were set up in each county, composed of Greek Catholic lay people who were sympathisers of the regime.<sup>91</sup> Then the Securitate organs (newly established on 30 August) roamed the Greek Catholic parishes accompanied by a Greek Catholic priest or official.<sup>92</sup> Following this initiative, the authorities recorded that 430 canons, archpriests and priests had signed these forms (approximately 25% of the Greek Catholic clergy at that time), a figure contested by the authors of the 1952 Madrid document<sup>93</sup> but which can be taken with a grain of salt. Evidently, most of these were obtained through pressure, one of the most convincing means of persuasion being the threat of being left without a means of livelihood<sup>94</sup>, to which were added, when necessary, seizures, beatings or false signatures. The authors of the Madrid document<sup>95</sup>, as well as other Greek Catholic authors<sup>96</sup>, highlight a number of such cases, but it is difficult to assess the extent of the phenomenon based on these alone. In fact, the authors' interest was to emphasise it in order to highlight

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<sup>91</sup> Cristian Vasile, *Între Vatican și Kremlin. Biserica Greco-Catolică în timpul regimului comunist*, 140.

<sup>92</sup> André Kom, „Unificarea Bisericii Unite cu Biserica Ortodoxă Română în 1948” [The Unification of the United Church with the Romanian Orthodox Church in 1948], in *Studii de istoria Bisericii (sub redacția Lector univ. Ovidiu Bozgan) [Studies in Church History (edited by University Lecturer Ovidiu Bozgan)]* (Bucharest, 2000), 90.

<sup>93</sup> *Biserica Română Unită – 250 de ani de istorie*, 150-151.

<sup>94</sup> The authors of the Madrid document also state that most adhesions were recorded among married priests (*ibid.*).

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> See Alexandru Rațiu, *Persecuția Bisericii Unite [Persecution of the United Church]* (Oradea, 1994), 43-45. He estimates the number of those arrested during those days at 250.

the forceful nature of the "return" and the resistance shown by the Greek Catholic priests.

The Greek Catholic bishops only found out about this action when it had already begun. Iuliu Hossu, together with Alexandru Rusu, who was also in Cluj at the time, decided to send messengers to all the archpriests in the diocese to inform the priests that anyone who participated in the meeting in Cluj would be excommunicated.<sup>97</sup> After Bishop Rusu left for Bucharest on 28 September to attend the Episcopal Conference scheduled for 7 October, the building of the Diocese of Cluj-Gherla was closely monitored, and arrests were made among those who tried to enter it, while Iuliu Hossu was prevented from leaving his residence until 4 October.<sup>98</sup>

### ***5.2. The Cluj Assembly and the proclamation of unification (1-21 October 1948)***

On 1 October 1948, in the gymnasium of Gheorghe Barițiu High School in Cluj, located 200 metres from the Greek Catholic diocese, a meeting of 38 delegates was held in the presence of representatives of the authorities. Fr. Traian Belășcu, elected president of the assembly, delivered a speech expressing the desire of the Greek Catholics to free themselves from "the tutelage of the Vatican, which, contrary to the principles of the Gospel, has engaged in aggressive imperialism, inciting new wars".<sup>99</sup> He was followed by Archpriest Sabin Truția, who pointed out that the Greek Catholic priests had gathered in Cluj "to decide to break ties with the Church of Rome and return to the bosom of the autocephalous Romanian Orthodox Church. By thus restoring the spiritual unity of our nation, we are confident that we are serving both the cause of God and the major interests of the people and of our people's republic".<sup>100</sup> Then, priest Nicolae Geangalău stated that "today's union with the autocephalous Romanian Orthodox Church is not only a religious achievement but also a profoundly democratic one. For it starts from the bottom up, from the people and for the people, as everything is done in the Romanian People's Republic. Through today's historic act, we commit ourselves to putting an end to looking across the border and to joining the huge national effort to rebuild the country and

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<sup>97</sup> Iuliu Hossu, *Credința noastră este viața noastră*, 86.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Al. Cerna-Rădulescu, D.V. Sădeanu, *Reîntregirea bisericii românești din Ardeal. Biserica Greco-Catolică revine în sânul Bisericii Ortodoxe Române [The Reunification of the Romanian Church in Transylvania. The Greek Catholic Church Returns to the Romanian Orthodox Church]* (Bucharest, 1948), 8.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

ensure the happiness and well-being of the entire people".<sup>101</sup> Priest Virgil Moldoveanu, after noting that "by returning to Orthodoxy, we are forever freeing ourselves from the tutelage of the Vatican," added that "in the future, however, the church must become a living and active body within the life of the state, and priests must be pillars on which the government can rely in its work for the progress of our popular democracy and for the welfare of the working masses."<sup>102</sup> Finally, a "Proclamation" was adopted, prepared on the basis of the September delegation form, and an "Appeal" addressed to the Greek Catholic faithful in the country. The delegates (36 remaining in the meantime<sup>103</sup>) were transported to Bucharest, where on 3 October they were received at the patriarchal palace by Justinian and the following high-ranking hierarchs: Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan, Metropolitan Vasile Lăzărescu of Banat, Archbishop Firmilian of Craiova, Archbishop Sebastian Rusan of Suceava and Maramureş, and Bishop Antim Nica, locum tenens of the Lower Danube See. In honour of the event, a solemn liturgy was held at the Church of St. Spiridon Nou, during which the synodal act of reception into the Orthodox Church and the "Appeal" adopted in Cluj were read. The ceremony ended with speeches by Patriarch Justinian and Metropolitan Bălan and the ceremonial signing of the synodal document.<sup>104</sup>

In the following weeks, in order to finalise the unification process, local action committees will be set up to bring back non-signatory believers and priests. The mission of the sub-prefects, priests, mayors, notaries, gendarmes, priests and teachers in the mixed teams was to explain the fairness of the decisions taken in Cluj and to obtain, by 21 October, but preferably by 15 October, the signatures of the faithful converting to Orthodoxy. To make everything clear, the Ministry of Religious Affairs drew up a series of rules relating to the unification process, which were published in the press on 6 October<sup>105</sup>, while the party leadership directly supervised the unification process.<sup>106</sup> According to André Kom's classification, there were four ways of obtaining signatures of adherence: "a. free passage, b. exerting

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>103</sup> According to S.A. Prunduş and C. Plăianu (*Catholicism și ortodoxie românească. Scurt istoric al Bisericii Române Unite*, 118), the two clergymen who left the assembly were Clemente Plăianu and Iuliu Man from Reghin.

<sup>104</sup> "Scânteia", series III, year XVIII, no. 1241 (5 October 1948): 3.

<sup>105</sup> See Scânteia, series III, year XVIII, no. 1242 (6 October 1948): 3.

<sup>106</sup> On 8 October, at a meeting of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party, Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej asked Iosif Chişinevschi to take a closer interest in the progress of the campaign to suppress the Greek Catholic Church, as he had heard that there were some difficulties (ANIC, Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party collection, Chancellery, file no. 42/1948: 5).

pressure on the priest and the faithful by: temporary deprivation of liberty; threat of arrest, in the case of priests; giving the alternative: immediate conversion to Orthodoxy or handing over the church plus its inventory, the parish house, vineyard, land, etc.; sometimes the Orthodox Church offers the united priest an archpriest's seat in exchange for conversion; in Hârtoaga, Alba County, the Orthodox priest "disguised himself as an officer and forced the people of Silea, Heripea and other villages to renounce the Catholic faith and convert to Orthodoxy"; eviction of workers or civil servants from their homes (it is estimated that 5,000 people were evicted from their homes in the autumn of 1948 in the Teiuș area (Alba County) alone); c. fraud: tables for food rations, potato procurement, petitions for the establishment of a mill, etc., later used as lists for conversion to Orthodoxy; the unfulfilled promise that the signatures would be deleted after official inspection; d. forgery: signatures added *ex officio* (in Ceaba, Cluj County, the party secretary signs for all the villagers); in several parishes, those who signed *ex officio* are called to the town hall to request their removal from the lists; many do not go for fear; tables signed by children at school; signatures added by the visiting priest of the Greek Catholic community".<sup>107</sup> Obviously, it is extremely difficult to quantify the prevalence of these measures, as this depends on the reports drawn up by the repressive bodies and the testimonies of those involved in the events.

These signatures had to be obtained from Greek Catholic believers in order to formally comply with the provisions of Decree No. 177 (in particular Articles 36-39). Despite the clarifications provided by the ministry, there were still doubts about their interpretation. Thus, on 12 October, the General Administrative Inspectorate in Cluj asked the Ministry of Internal Affairs the following questions: "[...] whether it is in the spirit of the communiqué<sup>108</sup> : 1. To consider the Greek Catholic community to have ceased to exist as a result of the act of union with the Romanian Orthodox Church. 2. Is the local council that received the declaration of leaving the Greek Catholic Church obliged to notify the community of the Greek Catholic Church of the declaration, or 3. In the case of Greek Catholic parishioners who declare their conversion to another religion, the declaration should be submitted to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, considering that, through the act of union with the Orthodox Church, *de jure* and *de facto*, the Greek Catholic Church has ceased to exist".<sup>109</sup> The Ministry of Internal Affairs addressed the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which replied on 28 October 1948: "Conversions from one religion to another can be made individually and in groups (heads of families). In the case of Greek Catholic

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<sup>107</sup> André Kom, *Unificarea Bisericii Române Unite cu Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, 91-92.

<sup>108</sup> From 6 October 1948.

<sup>109</sup> ANIC, Ministry of Internal Affairs collection, General State Administration, file no. 63/1948: 92.

conversions to the Orthodox Church at the present time, they are made in groups. In many local Greek Catholic communities (parishes), they sometimes reach 100% and in most cases exceed 75%. This results in the dissolution of these parishes, and the property, together with the church and surrounding buildings, is to be returned to the Orthodox local community (parish) along with the faithful. Consequently, conversions to another religion cause the local Greek Catholic community to disappear, even if there are isolated believers. The act of union itself, as a result of a mass movement, may constitute a factual element in establishing the disappearance of the Greek Catholic religion. Local authorities are required in principle to communicate declarations of departure from the local Greek Catholic community. However, where conversions to the Orthodox Church represent at least 75% of the community, the local Greek Catholic community no longer exists and only isolated believers remain, the declarations can no longer be communicated and will be forwarded in accordance with the communiqué issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs".<sup>110</sup> This was a forced interpretation of the law, because Article 37 did not say in any way that if more than 75% of the members of a community converted to another religion, the entire community was considered to be dissolved; on the contrary, it suggested that those who remained could continue their activities. It was a way of speeding things up, so that the authorities would no longer strive to have 100% of returnees in localities. Precisely to facilitate the process, on 15 October, Decision No. 39,380 of 15 October 1948 was issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which stipulated that only the signatures of the heads of families were required for the community to return: "[...] in all cases of conversion to one religion or another, when these conversions occur in groups, in order to establish the proportionality between those who have converted and those who have remained, only the number of heads of families shall be taken into account".<sup>111</sup>

Administrative problems also concerned the leadership of the Orthodox Church, which was unable to take over the faithful and the property of the Greek Catholic Church due to non-compliance with legal provisions. This prompted Patriarch Justinian to personally address the Ministry of Religious Affairs: "Article 38 of the Law on the General Regime of Religious Denominations stipulates: "A declaration of withdrawal from a religious group shall be communicated to the local branch of the religious group from which the individual is withdrawing through the local municipal authority. Upon request, the respective communal authority is obliged to issue proof of this communication". Having been informed that some town halls have not complied with this legal provision, which causes confusion and

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>111</sup> "Monitorul Oficial", no. 242/10.1948, 8314.

prevents new followers of a religion from proving that they have left the religion to which they belonged, we kindly request that you intervene with the Ministry of the Interior to take measures to ensure that local town halls comply with the provisions of Article 38 of the Law on the General Regime of Religious Denominations".<sup>112</sup> As a result, on 20 November 1948, the Ministry of the Interior drew up a circular to put an end to the problems: "To the prefects of the counties of the country and the mayors of the cities and municipalities, we kindly request that you take measures to ensure compliance with the provisions of Article 38 of the Law on the General Regime of Religious Denominations of 4 August 1948".<sup>113</sup>

Although the reunification process was far from complete, 21 October 1948 was nevertheless chosen as the symbolic date for its celebration, as it marked the 250th anniversary of the union of part of the Romanian population of Transylvania with Rome. In Alba Iulia, in the presence of 20,000 participants, a solemn service was held in the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity, which was now renamed the Cathedral of the Reunification of the Romanian Church in Transylvania, instead of the Cathedral of the Coronation. During the Great Church Assembly that took place after the service, presided over by Fr. Traian Belaşcu, a motion was adopted stating: "Today, 21 October 1948, two and a half centuries after some of our ancestors broke the religious unity of the Romanians of Transylvania here in Romanian Bălgrad, uniting with papal Rome, we, the clergy and the people, representatives of all Greek Catholic Romanians in Transylvania, Crişana and Maramureş, obeying the command of our ancestors on the Field of Liberty in 1848, following the exemplary and eternal exhortation of all good Romanians; moved by the call of Metropolitan Nicolae of Transylvania in May 1948 and by the paternal appeal of the Primate of the Orthodox Church, Patriarch Justinian; understanding the profound significance of the Proclamation of Cluj of 1 October 1948, of the delegates of the 430 Greek Catholic clergy, as well as the purpose of the appeal of the same ministers on 3 October 1948, we declare that we sever forever our ties of any kind with the Vatican and papal Rome, that we incorporate ourselves with our whole being into the Romanian Orthodox Church; that we will submit with sincere love to all the decisions of the Holy Synod of our Orthodox Church. From this day forward, all Romanians are and will remain forever united in the Orthodox faith, united in steadfast service to our people, and united in loyal obedience to the commandments of new life of our beloved Romanian People's Republic. We offer our sincere thanks to Patriarch Justinian and the members of the Holy Synod for all the fatherly love

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<sup>112</sup> ANIC, Ministry of Internal Affairs collection, General State Administration, file no. 63/1948: 95.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

with which they have embraced our pure wishes and desires. We pay tribute to the members of the High Presidium of the RPR and the Government of the Country for the freedoms guaranteed to all the sons of the people, freedoms that have made possible the achievement of our ecclesiastical reunification. And for all these blessings, we give glory to God".<sup>114</sup> This text reflects the tension between the interwar period's ecclesiastical discourse on the religious unity of Romanians and the discourse promoting the new demands for religious loyalty to the people's democratic regime, providing an example of how the problems of the "old world" were exploited to give rise to the "new world".

### ***5.3 Resistance actions of Greek Catholic clergy and believers in the face of the unification process. The arrest of Greek Catholic bishops***

Parallel to the actions mentioned above, there was also a reverse reaction, namely the resistance of Greek Catholic hierarchy, priests, monks and believers to the phenomenon of "return". The attitude of the Greek Catholic hierarchs towards the new situation had two sides: on the one hand, they strongly condemned the abuses committed by the communist authorities, and on the other hand, they behaved as if nothing had happened, continuing to operate according to the same principles as before 1948, despite the measures taken by the authorities. In September, the authorities began to implement the provisions of Decree No. 177 on the organisation of dioceses. Given that there were 750,000 people per diocese, this meant that the number of Greek Catholic dioceses in Romania would be reduced to two. On 3 September, a government decree removed Ioan Suciuc from his position as Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Alba Iulia-Făgăraș, and on 18 September, Valeriu Traian Frențiu, Alexandru Rusu and Ioan Bălan were retired on the basis of Law 166. Only Bishops Iuliu Hossu and Vasile Aftenie were kept in office, as they were considered the most "flexible" of the Greek Catholic bishops. A similar process took place in the Roman Catholic Church. On 6 September 1948, the bishop of Satu Mare-Oradea, Iános Scheffler, was forced into retirement, and on 18 September, Archbishop Alexandru Cisar and Bishop Augustin Pacha were retired on the basis of Law 166 of 1947. The bishops who remained in office in the Roman Catholic Church were Márton Áron, Bishop of Alba Iulia, and Anton Durcovici, who was

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<sup>114</sup> D.V. Sădeanu, *21 octombrie 1948. Ziua reîntregirii bisericii românești din Ardeal. Adunarea bisericească de la Alba-Iulia. Clerul și poporul greco-catolic din Transilvania au revenit în sânul Bisericii Ortodoxe Române [21 October 1948. The day of the reunification of the Romanian Church in Transylvania. The church assembly in Alba Iulia. The Greek Catholic clergy and people of Transylvania returned to the Romanian Orthodox Church]*, (Bucharest, 1948), 19-22.

finally consecrated Bishop of Iași in April 1948, after numerous delays. However, the Catholic hierarchy continued to operate as if nothing had happened and acted consistently in the days before and after the Cluj assembly. While Iuliu Hossu sent a message warning those who were to participate in the assembly that they would be excommunicated, Bishop Suciuc issued a circular on 30 September asking the faithful to remain within the Greek Catholic Church.<sup>115</sup>

Immediately after the assembly, Bishop Hossu fulfilled his promise to excommunicate the priests from his diocese who had participated in the events<sup>116</sup>, a gesture followed by the other Greek Catholic bishops.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> "Beloved brother in Christ, behold the hour of oppression for the word of God, behold the hour of the Great Coming of the Romanian Church United with Rome. It is with unspeakable sorrow that I have learned that you have abandoned the Catholic faith, placing the fate of your soul in the hands of a priest who is not baptised in the true faith.

What have you done? Do you deny the word of God? You prove to the world that you have been hypocrites until now. You give the faithful reason to laugh at Christ and his apostles, who are we?

Are you signing your own eternal damnation? Consider the millions of soldiers who died for a human cause, think of the political fighters who endured so much for earthly things, and now, in the summer of mobilisation for the Church of Christ, are we to be cowards and deserters? In the name of Jesus crucified and the oath of faith made, return, repair, correct, and atone for the sin and shame caused" (ACNSAS, Informative collection, file no. 1, vol. 2: 358).

<sup>116</sup> The text of the decree of excommunication issued by Iuliu Hossu reads as follows: "In the name of the Most Holy, One in Being, Life-Giving and Indivisible Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, We, Iuliu Hossu, by the mercy of God and the grace of the Holy Apostolic See of Rome, Romanian Greek Catholic Bishop of Cluj-Gherla, make known to all those who are concerned, both now and in the future, that we have learned that today, 1 October, a number of priests from the clergy of the dioceses of our metropolitan province gathered in Cluj, our city of residence, to decide, as they unfortunately did, to separate themselves, through apostasy, from our one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, governed according to the divine order of our Saviour Jesus Christ, by the successor of Peter, the leader of the apostles and the foundation of His Church, we have decided in the Lord to issue the following decree, by virtue of which, with the power we hold as bishop of the place, we apply the punishment of excommunication to all priests who took part in the above-mentioned assembly held under the presidency of priest Traian Belaşcu, archpriest of Țihindeal, with all the consequences established in the holy canons. This decree of ours is to be published in all the churches of our diocese, guarded by God [...]" (cf. *Biserica Română Unită*, 155).

<sup>117</sup> Ioan Suciuc issued a decree of excommunication on 2 October, with the following content: "We, Ioan Suciuc, titular bishop of Moglena and Apostolic Administrator of the Archdiocese of Alba Iulia and Făgăraș. We make it known to all that, by virtue of the rights granted to us by the holy canons, we apply the canonical punishment of excommunication to the following priests: Zaharie Borza of Zagăr, Traian Belaşcu of Alțina, Nicolae Geangălău of Săcădate. Aurel Brumoiu of Râuşor, Ioan Cisteian of Tău, Laurențiu Pop from Moldovenești, Ioan Florea from Braşov, we apply the canonical punishment of excommunication, that is,

In turn, the Nunciature sent a protest to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 2 October, mentioning the "unacceptable attitude" of the Romanian Government.<sup>118</sup>

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excommunication, for the notorious fact that they have faithlessly abandoned their connection with the Holy Church of Jesus Christ, that is, with the Holy Catholic Church.

As a result of this punishment, we warn our beloved faithful that from now on they should no longer have spiritual ties with them, nor consider them priests of their souls, as they have become strangers to the flock of Christ" (*apud* Cristian Vasile, *Între Vatican și Kremlin. Biserica Greco-Catolică în timpul regimului comunist*, 144). The priests of the Diocese of Lugoj were not excommunicated by Bishop Ioan Bălan, who considered himself retired, so the mission of exclusion from the Catholic Church fell to Vicar Ioan Ploscaru (*ibid.*, 145).

<sup>118</sup> "The Apostolic Nunciature, presenting its compliments to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Romanian People's Republic, has the honour to inform him of the following:

Through the Peace Treaty signed by the Romanian State in Paris on 10 February 1947, Romania undertook to take 'all necessary measures to ensure freedom of worship for all persons under its jurisdiction' (Art. 3, para. 1). Furthermore, the Constitution of the Romanian People's Republic (Article 27) states that "freedom of conscience and freedom of religion are guaranteed by the State." In addition, the new Law on Religions of 4 August 1948 (Articles 1 and 2) also provides for full religious freedom for citizens, specifying that "no one may be persecuted for their religious beliefs."

However, these solemn commitments have been violated by a whole series of carefully planned and skilfully coordinated actions recently carried out in various provinces of Transylvania against the Greek Catholic Church.

The Apostolic Nunciature refers to actions taken not by irresponsible elements, but by the civil authorities themselves to force the Greek Catholic clergy to abandon their faith. These authorities circulated a form in various counties of Transylvania which the Greek Catholic clergy had to sign in favour of two priests from each county, who, while remaining unknown to the signatories, were nevertheless to represent them at a meeting organised by the Government in the city of Cluj on 1 October this year, the purpose of which was what the above-mentioned document called "the return of the Greek Catholic Church to the Orthodox Church".

This initiative by the civil authorities, which in itself clearly contradicts the principles of freedom and equality of all religions in Romania, revealed its true nature as religious persecution, especially through the means used to obtain signatures. Priests were often taken by force to prefectures and security offices, where they were intimidated and threatened with imprisonment, separation from their families, deportation or death. Those who resisted the first acts of violence were thrown into underground cells, tortured, subjected to gruelling interrogations and released only after they had been broken by these inhuman methods and agreed to sign.

News of these crimes quickly spread throughout the country and will inevitably soon alarm world public opinion. have been confirmed by officials from the Patriarchate in Bucharest and by members of the so-called Assembly in Cluj for union with the Orthodox Church, some of whom themselves bore visible signs of the coercion they had suffered.

In view of this unspeakable attitude on the part of the Romanian Government, which has repeatedly stated and continues to state that it wishes to respect and ensure respect for religious freedom in Romania, the Apostolic Nunciature, on behalf of the Holy See and on behalf of the entire Christian world, protests with all the energy that the circumstances

The Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent its reply on 21 October, which was a summary of the regime's ideological perspective on the phenomenon of "return": "1. The Romanian Government categorically rejects the protest of the Apostolic Nunciature against the return of the Greek Catholic population of Transylvania to the Orthodox rite, a protest which constitutes interference in the internal affairs of the Romanian People's Republic and an attempt to attack freedom of belief. The sovereign Romanian state does not accept any infringement of its national independence, nor can it allow foreign interventions intended to limit a right granted by the country's Constitution, such as freedom of religious worship.

2. The Romanian government rejects the obvious slander contained in the aforementioned Note regarding the alleged interference of the Romanian authorities in the movement to reintegrate Greek Catholic believers into the Orthodox Church. These defamatory statements are further proof of the hostile attitude that the Apostolic Nunciature systematically adopts towards the Romanian People's Republic, its reforms and its democratic achievements.

3. The slander and absurd fabrications used in this Note cannot divert public attention from the real and profound reasons that led to the return of the Greek Catholic population to the of their ancient faith. The movement that is now taking place is the conclusion of a historical process that began at the very moment when part of the clergy and peasantry of Transylvania were forced to renounce their faith[...] (And after giving a biased account of the history of religious struggles in Transylvania, the Government's response continues): It is therefore natural that now, in the conditions of complete freedom granted by the people's democracy regime, the descendants of those who suffered for two and a half centuries at the hands of the Catholic Church and its allied oppressors should return to their old faith [...]

4. The Apostolic Nunciature, being only the diplomatic representative of the Vatican City, cannot claim the right to speak in the "name of the entire Christian world," as the aforementioned Note does.

5. The Romanian Government also denounces the attempt at blackmail by threatening that the violation of religious freedoms in the Romanian People's Republic will soon alarm world public opinion. This attempt is in line with the campaign waged by imperialist circles and their agents against the democratic achievements of the Romanian People's Republic.

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require against these procedures unworthy of a civilised state" (AMAE, Vatican collection, issue no. 220, vol. 1/1948-1956, unpaginated).

6. In conclusion, the Government of the Romanian People's Republic rejects in the strongest terms the Note of the Apostolic Nunciature, both in substance and in form, considering it a provocative act against the Romanian State and people".<sup>119</sup>

This attitude led the communist leaders to discuss, at the 8 October meeting of the Secretariat, the possibility of arresting the Greek Catholic bishops and expelling the diplomats of the Nunciature.<sup>120</sup> In fact, as early as 2 October, Bishop Alexandru Rusu had taken refuge in the Nunciature, fearing the authorities. According to Securitate reports, O'Hara "consoled" the bishop of Baia Mare with the following remarks: "The suffering of Catholicism in Romania will be short-lived, as the events that will follow are beyond the power and wishes of the government, which will soon lose its head due to the course of events, which is entirely unfavourable to the communist cause. All priests and believers will soon receive special regulations from Rome. Considering that no one is better informed than the Nunciature about what is happening and about the true balance of power between the great powers, we can hope for an improvement in the situation within six months".<sup>121</sup> This optimistic outlook led many to adopt a decisive attitude, in the hope that the difficult times would be short-lived.

Between 6 and 9 October 1948, a conference of all Catholic bishops was held at the Nunciature and then at the Roman Catholic Archdiocese in Bucharest. Although the main topic of discussion was initially intended to be the drafting of the operating statute, the debates focused on analysing those actions of the regime that were considered persecution of the Catholic Church. As a sign of protest, two letters were drafted, one addressed to the President of the Council of Ministers<sup>122</sup> and the

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> With this, Alexandru Moghioroş referred in particular to Bishop Iuliu Hossu (ANIC, Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party collection, Chancellery, file no. 42/1948: 5).

<sup>121</sup> AMAE, Vatican collection 2, Issue 220: 35.

<sup>122</sup> "Your Excellency, Mr President,

We, the undersigned Bishops of the Romanian Greek Catholic Church, have the honour to bring the following to your attention:

For several months now, the administrative bodies and State Security authorities have been conducting an investigation among the priests of the Romanian Greek Catholic Church in order to find out their opinion on the transition to the Orthodox Church. At the same time, some political organisations have attempted in various places to abusively and illegally replace members of parish councils with individuals belonging to the ruling political parties, thereby seeking to remove priests from the administration of Church property.

Meanwhile, the appeals for a return to Orthodoxy, launched by His Eminence the Patriarch and the Orthodox Metropolitan of Transylvania, began to receive increasing publicity, accompanied by threats against the hierarchy of the Romanian Greek Catholic Church, which was denied any means or opportunity to respond to these appeals or to make known to the faithful its thoughts on this religious issue. As this unrest, which nothing could

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stop, began to grow, we decided to send a collective pastoral letter to our faithful to strengthen them in their faith. However, the censors stopped it from being printed, even though it contained nothing controversial, let alone political. During this same period, the security forces abducted Bishop Ioan Suci, who was visiting his faithful on a routine canonical visit, preventing him from fulfilling his religious mission.

In this atmosphere of turmoil and opposition to our religious and administrative activities, just as we were working to meet the requirements of Decree No. 177 on the regime of religious denominations, feeling secure under the protection of laws that guaranteed freedom of belief and religious freedom, we suddenly found ourselves in the midst of a campaign launched and supported by the administrative and security organs, which through threats and intimidation, through violence and deception, forced the united priests to convert to the Orthodox Church.

Mr President, the immediate agents of this campaign, which aroused the indignation of the entire faithful population, did not hesitate to declare that this action was initiated by the Government with the aim of abolishing the United Church. This would have seemed unbelievable if they themselves, deputies, security inspectors, etc., had not proven it both by the coercive measures they took and by the immunity they enjoyed in the midst of countless illegalities committed in order to carry out the action. The evidence we have at our disposal fully proves this.

During this campaign, which lasted from 26 September to 4 October, Iuliu Hossu, Bishop of Cluj, was kept under house arrest from 30 September to 4 October so that he could not contact the clergy and prevent the action taken against the Church. All the priests and believers (28-30) who, unaware of the measures taken against the Bishop, tried to enter the bishop's palace, were arrested. The same was true for those who were in the palace when the measures were taken and wanted to leave. On the morning of 27 September, Bishop Ioan Suci, who was on a canonical visit after the consecration of the church in Copăcel (Făgăraș County), was picked up by the Security forces, taken to an unknown location, and held for two days in a basement so that he could not communicate with priests and believers.

We can easily imagine the means used against the priests if the bishops were treated with such unscrupulousness and without any consideration, either for the laws that protected them or for their persons. The circumstances in which Ioan Suci was arrested prove this abundantly. For reasons of prudence, we do not consider it appropriate to list all the abuses and violence committed against archpriests and priests in order to obtain their signatures, abuses which, as in the case of Bishop Suci himself, went so far as to force them, through threats, to remain silent about everything that had happened.

It is with sorrow that we bring these facts to Your Excellency's attention, and we take the liberty of expressing our utter indignation at such persecution of the clergy and the United Church. It was carried out in violation of the Constitution of the Romanian People's Republic, despite the guarantees that the Government is obliged to enforce, and in disregard of the Law on Religious Denominations, which in Article 23 condemns hatred and religious strife. But the Government – circumstances compel us to say this – not only tolerated but even patronised this crime against religion. Therefore, Mr President, we express our desire to see Your Excellency intervene decisively, or mediate such an intervention, in order to put an end to the campaign that has been unleashed, so that priests and believers can return peacefully to the Church and their mission.

Finally, we wish to declare solemnly and decisively that the Romanian United Church has never been guilty at any time, either in the past or in the present, of any act harmful to the nation, the country, or public order. The pages of its history are a monument

other to the Ministry of Religious Affairs<sup>123</sup>, which were submitted to the Minister of Religious Affairs, Stanciu Stoian, by Bishop Vasile Aftenie on 11 October<sup>124</sup>. The

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of pride for the country and the Romanian people. That is why we cannot understand why this flood of hatred and hostility is aimed at its destruction. We would like to believe and hope that Your Excellency will take the necessary measures to put an end to this campaign.

And on this occasion, we, the Bishops of the Romanian United Church, on behalf of the priests and faithful gathered around us, wish to declare that we are firmly determined to remain the shepherds and sons of the same Church of Jesus Christ, inseparable from Catholic unity, following the order of God who created the Universe and entrusted us with this mission, fully convinced that within this Catholic Church, in whose service we are for life and death, we serve the people and the country, as we have done unwaveringly until today.

Please accept, Mr. President, the assurance of our highest consideration. Bucharest, 7 October 1948" (*Biserica Română Unită*, 156-167). The letter was signed only by the Greek Catholic bishops.

<sup>123</sup> "Your Excellency, Mr. Minister,

We, the undersigned Bishops of the Catholic Church in the Romanian People's Republic, finding ourselves in the midst of an atmosphere of hostility created by countless government measures designed to make it increasingly difficult to fulfil the divine calling of the Catholic Church, consider it our paramount duty to present the following to you:

In view of the guarantees of religious freedom, reinforced by law and publicly manifested, the Bishops of the Catholic Church have sworn an oath of loyalty to the country and its laws. But since then, at short intervals, through provisions, laws and decrees, the freedom of the Church and its ability to fulfil its mission have been constantly restricted to the point of completely eliminating certain branches of its activity.

Numerous priests have been mistreated. Others have been kept imprisoned for months and years, either continuously or at various intervals, without any legal procedure. The periodical press - and in some dioceses even official circulars - was completely suppressed, confessional and religious education was completely removed, and school textbooks were confiscated without the slightest legal basis. The decree regulating religious life then created an almost impossible situation for the Catholic Church, supported incessantly by a campaign of slander and denigration from which even the Head of the Catholic Church was not spared.

At the time, we protested both verbally and in writing against these things and against other measures that foreshadowed an orderly action against the Catholic Church in the Romanian People's Republic; to which neither the Honourable Government nor the competent ministerial departments deigned to respond. Meanwhile, without any consideration for the Church and its organisation, respected by written law, the Honourable

Meanwhile, showing no consideration for the Church and its organisation, which is respected by written law, the Honourable Government has taken further steps to undermine the Catholic Church in the Romanian People's Republic.

The government decreed a reduction in the number of dioceses, removing several bishops from office, whose acts were to no longer have legal value. All these measures taken by the Honourable Government were intended to overturn the administrative structure of the Catholic Church and systematically prevent it from carrying out its divine mission.

In addition to all this, a violent campaign was launched about ten days ago, which did not shy away from falsehoods or the use of violent means, aimed at separating priests and

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believers from the Romanian Greek Catholic Church. This is yet another demonstration of hostility towards the Catholic Church.

And so, almost three million citizens of the Romanian People's Republic, sons of the Catholic Church, find themselves treated by the laws and authorities as if they were enemies of the country, guilty of crimes against the people, they who are the sons of this land, which they have worked for centuries with the sweat of their brow. Turmoil, unrest, insecurity and mistrust have been sown among them by the very authorities of the State, whose duty it is to create peaceful and just living conditions for the people, respecting their religious beliefs, guaranteeing them the means to uphold them and placing them in conditions that contribute to the prosperity of the country.

We believe, Mr President, that from now on we must no longer restrain ourselves, out of patriotic considerations, the deep sorrow we feel in the face of these measures, which are extremely harmful to the people of the RPR; nor can we fail to protest strongly against what has been done to the Catholic Church in Romania; and again, we cannot fail to express our indignation at the measures currently being implemented, through which the state authority itself is mercilessly striking millions of citizens, wounding them in the most intimate fibres of their human being. This authority is called upon, before the nation and the whole world, to watch over the people, not to stir up strife, filling the country with tears through the injustices committed, and opening wounds that can only be healed by revoking and removing the measures that have struck and continue to strike the Catholic Church in the Romanian People's Republic.

In conclusion, we make an urgent appeal to the sense of justice and humanity that the Honourable Government cannot fail to have towards all citizens of the Romanian People's Republic. We therefore ask it to order the removal of the measures that strike our Church and its institutions and to cease the action begun for the purpose stated above. Only in this way will the peace necessary for the life of a State return to the souls of millions of citizens, to the satisfaction of those who govern and for the good of those who must be led, through peace and justice, to prosperity.

Please accept, Mr President, the assurance of our highest consideration.

Bucharest, 7 October 1948" (*Biserica Română Unită*, 157-156). This letter is signed by all the Catholic bishops.

<sup>124</sup> According to Vasile Aftenie's recollections, his meeting with Stanciu Stoian took place as follows: "On 11 October, I presented the Minister of Religious Affairs with the two letters of protest signed by all the bishops. When I gave him the letters, I expected the Minister to say something, but he remained silent. Then I said to him: 'Minister, I would like to know what you think about these letters'. The Minister, after telling me that he would read them carefully, added: 'We all love you, Your Excellency, and we want you to join all the faithful in the Orthodox Church'. I replied, 'It is impossible for me to renounce the faith in which I was born, in which I was raised, and which I have preached for 23 years.' Then the Minister insisted that converting to Orthodoxy would be good for me, but then, seeing my determination, he exclaimed: 'I am very pleased with the union of all Romanians in a single Orthodox Church. You, Catholics, keep looking to the West and wait for the atomic bomb, but nothing will happen to your liking.' When I asked him how the government's current attitude could be reconciled with the religious freedom guaranteed by the Constitution and the Law on Religions, the Minister replied that freedom can be understood in many ways. And as we parted, he insisted again: 'I beg you, in the interest of Your Holiness, to make the transition to the Orthodox Church as soon as possible.'" (*Biserica Română Unită*, 159). This

Securitate noted that during the meeting at the Nunciature, materials were collected concerning “alleged pressure exerted by the authorities on priests and believers to induce them to convert to Orthodoxy. The material collected on this occasion was handed over by Vicar General Edmund Barcicovski to the Nunciature for dispatch; this time, in order to speed up the process, Del Mestri used the diplomatic courier service of the American Legation”<sup>125</sup>.

In the days that followed the Assembly of Cluj and their arrest, the Greek Catholic bishops carried out continuous pastoral activity, consisting of holding services, preaching and issuing circulars in order to maintain the cohesion of the Church and prevent conversions to Orthodoxy. Although they all acted decisively, Bishop Ioan Suciuc stood out during this period. Although prevented from making his usual visits to villages, he held daily liturgies in the cathedral in Blaj, delivering sermons on each occasion in which he reminded priests and believers to remain with the Greek Catholic Church.<sup>126</sup>

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paragraph explains why Vasile Aftenie was left in office, alongside Iuliu Hossu, in the hope that he would agree to return to Orthodoxy.

<sup>125</sup> AMAE, Vatican 2 collection, Issue no. 220: 35.

<sup>126</sup> The bishop’s style is evident in the text of the circular dated 5 October, 1948, which states: “Beloved spiritual sons, Twelve years ago, during the persecutions in Spain against the Church of Jesus, when the magnificent cathedrals and monasteries were set ablaze and consumed by flames, when 16,000 priests and lives dedicated to God were killed, along with many thousands of the Church’s sons, the unbelievers brought a Christian girl before the court, and mocking her, they asked: ‘Why is your Jesus silent? Why does Christ let us do this to you and to His churches?’” The Christian girl replied: “Because Jesus was silent when He was spat upon, flogged, crowned with thorns, and crucified to death.” He is silent even now, when His Church—which is His body—is being tormented and imprisoned, so that we may be like Him on Good Friday. But soon He will answer, raising our souls and the Church from the dead.

For the Romanian Greek Catholic Church, now is the hour of Good Friday. Now, beloved faithful, it is revealed whether we belong to Christ or whether we follow Judas the Betrayer. Now the Lord Jesus gives us the opportunity to share in His sufferings for His Church. Blessed are you if you are reviled for His Name, for His holy Church, glorify God for this!

Do not be deceived by committees, words, news, lies, but stand firm, unshaken, steadfast in the faith for which our forefathers and ancestors shed their blood. Do not put your signature on any paper that asks you to renounce the law of your fathers.

They will threaten you; they will beat you, they will take you to court, but do not be afraid before the judges, for God is with each of us and will not let us be tempted and suffer more than we can bear. The world is watching us, the faithful of the United Church. We are a spectacle to the world. O beloved believers, let us be a flock of confessors of the faith, determined sons of the Church of Jesus in the Romanian nation [...]

Let us fight hard in faith, through prayer and fasting.

Even if they take our churches away from us, for a time, we will make our homes into churches, waiting hopefully for deliverance, which will not be long in coming. Beware

Such an attitude clearly influenced the attitude of Greek Catholic priests and believers, increasing their resistance. This is also evident from the following letter from the Sibiu Regional Security Directorate to the Blaj County Security Service, dated 19 October 1948: "We have the honour to inform you that, according to information from the Sibiu Gendarmerie Inspectorate, the following events are taking place within the jurisdiction of the Târnava Mică Security Service: Regarding the mood of the population following the measures taken, there is a general sense of concern, with the population being uneasy about the unification process. Most of the Greek Catholic priests, and even their cantors, have refrained from signing the adhesion, invoking all sorts of reasons: old age, illness, etc., declaring that the people can do what they want, but they will not sign. As for the laity, most of them are waiting and confused, while a smaller number of them say they are somewhat satisfied, arguing that this will eliminate the hatred between Romanians.

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of priests who do not mention the Pope and who do not pray the Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin. Only with sacrifices for the faith can God be appeased. We will be healed of the physical and spiritual wounds received for the Church of Jesus. In them we will bury our sins and the enemies of the faith. Fight the good fight of faith, like the millions of martyrs! Fight with the Immaculate Heart of Mary, in the unshakeable hope of the Church's victory, even if Jesus Christ should raise her from the grave" (ACNSAS, Informative Fund, file 3692, 63). For his part, Bishop Hossu also addressed messages to his faithful, such as the one dated 25 October 1948: "For 11 days," writes Bishop Hossu, "I have been in forced isolation again, and all those who wish to visit me are arrested. In this situation, it is impossible for me to know what is happening in the diocese. However, I am convinced that this letter will find you at the place of duty entrusted to you by the Lord. Please fulfil your mission with all your strength, setting an example to your fellow clergy in the region, whom I also ask to be pillars of light and strength for the beloved faithful entrusted to their care. In this hour of trial for our Holy Church, I ask you with all my heart to remain steadfast in your faith. Confident in the power of God's gift, which is perfected in our weaknesses and under the protection of the immaculate heart of the Mother of God, keep the treasure of your soul untouched. No one can violate your conscience except by working against the Constitution and against the laws that ensure and guarantee full freedom. On this constitutional foundation, remain calm and undisturbed by anyone or anything. May you all have love and peace, asking for nothing in return but just peace within the limits of constitutional and legal rights.

My word is the same as I have preached in all the villages dear to my heart during my 31 years as bishop.

Inspired by the love of my soul for you, I therefore urge you to keep the faith, which is the most sacred treasure among God's gifts. Through your unblemished spiritual life, you will be able to be of service to our entire people, in whose service we are all called, priests and believers alike.

From this trial must come a fullness of life in the pontifical Church, which will become holier and stronger for the happiness of souls and the progress of the people towards greater light.

I conclude with the words of St. Paul: "Peace to the brethren, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The gift of the Lord be with all those who have endless love for our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Biserica Română Unită*, 163).

What is most regrettable is that, in addition to the Greek Catholic priests, even the members and leaders of democratic organisations are opposed to unification. Thus, we can mention that the following refused to sign: Mărgineanu Ioan, president of the Peasant Front in Şona, secretary of the Romanian Workers' Party in Lunca, who openly opposed unification, as well as political and administrative bodies in the commune of Iclod and other communes.

It is also clear that Blaj has an undeniable influence on the population's determination regarding unification. This is evident from the information gathered by the Gendarmerie Legion, as well as from the checks carried out personally by the Legion commander on site. In the immediate vicinity of Blaj, the population has shown such determination that they have stated that they would rather convert to the Baptist sect than to Orthodoxy.

Some of the priests who declared themselves against unification have disappeared from their homes, or in the worst case, are locked in their homes, as if they had disappeared, for fear of being arrested. The case of Father Gabor from Basna is cited.

There is also information that former Bishop Suciu gave orders to deliver template-like sermons alluding to the persecutions that befell the Greek Catholic Church. There is also information that while former Bishop Suciu was visiting the Vichiş region, he received a personal mandate from the Pope to resist and give instructions to priests in this regard, as salvation would come for them very soon and unification would fall.

There is also information that some of the Greek Catholic priests did not perform religious services on Sunday, 10 October this year, without any valid reason, wanting to demonstrate to the population what the absence of a priest means, and some of them, in isolated cases, began to perform religious services after midnight, wanting to pose as martyrs and simulate the times of the catacombs. It seems that lately, in Blaj, at the cathedral, any gesture related to religious service is done in an ostentatious and alarmist manner, wanting to give the impression of times of exile. Thus, at funerals, the bells are rung every half hour. In view of the above, take measures to verify the cases of particular importance, especially the cases of members of the Romanian Workers' Party who did not sign for unification".<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> ACNSAS, Informative collection, file no. 2578, vol. 1: 342. We also learn about the situation in the vicinity of Blaj from the following report by the Târnava Mică Gendarmerie Legion: "We report that, following the measures taken to unify the Greek Catholic Church with the Orthodox Church, the mood of the population seems to be becoming increasingly agitated. The agitation stems from the fact that the unification process is becoming increasingly intense, and the measures taken clearly demonstrate that the current leadership

Such attitudes on the part of priests and believers are not unique<sup>128</sup>, but here we mention only the extremely interesting sermon delivered by priest Liviu Pandrea

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is not willing to do things by halves but is persevering in seeing the process through to completion by implementing each point in its entirety.

While the number of signatures collected from employees in Blaj was surprisingly low, the situation in rural areas is not very encouraging. It seems that 10 October this year was a turning point for those who oppose reunification, both priests and lay people. This is certainly related to the pastoral letter written on 5 October by Metropolitan Suciul.

In general, the collection of signatures in rural areas is difficult and yields few results. Greek Catholic priests are wrongly urging the population to refrain from unification. Some are no longer performing religious services for petty reasons (such as the case of Father Oțoi in the commune of Seuca, who did not hold a service, wanting to signify religious persecution).

Even if there is no overt propaganda as in the commune of Veseuș, the mood is becoming more and more agitated with each passing day. In this commune, the population has begun to agitate and cause disorder, which, if severe measures are not taken, will tend to spread.

Lieutenant Moldovan from the Securitate in Blaj went to Veseuș on 11 October this year to take priest Jidveian Nicolae to the Securitate. The population, gathered at the church between 3 and 4 p.m., recognised the Securitate car and initially showed hostility. When Commissioner Moldovan entered Father Jidveian's courtyard, the residents of Veseuș, led by Hodgea Achim and Comșa Ioan, assaulted the officer, attacking him with sticks and alerting the rest of the population by ringing the bell. Commissioner Moldovan, with all due tact, had to retreat without completing his mission.

The case is quite serious, and in order to prevent it from becoming widespread, draconian measures will be taken, measures that are currently being implemented. The priest has disappeared from his home" (ACNSAS, Informative collection, file no. 2578, vol. 1: 3).

<sup>128</sup> Here are some other examples of resistance to unification: In the commune of Curitău-Sălăjeni (Sălaj County), parish priest Leontin Sălăjeanu spoke in his sermon on 10 October against priests who had converted to Orthodoxy, calling them "traitors to Christ" and advised them not to sign even if tempted by the authorities: "I have lived among you for 13 years and shown you the way of truth, and I have never lied to you, so today I ask you to follow the way of Christ and the Catholic Church. Perhaps your priest will be taken from among you, but for Christ, even a bullet does not frighten him." As a result of this attitude, the villagers did not attend the conference dedicated to the return to Orthodoxy and refused to sign the requested documents. The next day, the authorities intervened to arrest the priest, who was defended by the locals and managed to flee to the commune of Silvaș (ACNSAS, Documentary collection, file no. 60: 630-632). The active role played by priests is also recorded in other documents of the repressive organs (ACNSAS, Documentary collection, file no. 60: 629, 634, 636). Some priests, such as Augustin Cordeș from the village of Bulgari, went to other localities to urge resistance (ACNSAS, Documentary collection, file no. 60: 629).

For this reason, the process was difficult, with the Gendarmerie Legion of Sălaj estimating on 18 October that 80% of the population of the Cehu Silvaniei district was hostile to the return (ACNSAS, Documentary collection, file no. 60, 632). Similarly, on 19 October, it was reported that 70% of the population of the communes of Giurtelecul Hododului and Stremți did not want to convert to Orthodoxy (ACNSAS, Documentary

on 10 October 1948 in the University Church in Cluj, in which he calls on the Orthodox Church to show solidarity against communism<sup>129</sup>. The connection

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collection, file no. 60: 636). As in Târnava Mică, there were cases in Sălaj County where even the commune authorities refused to sign. One such case is recorded in the commune of Ciumărna, where neither the mayor nor the president of the Peasants' Front joined the Orthodox Church (ANIC, General Police Directorate collection, file no. 75/1946: 281).

Monks played a very important role in Greek Catholic resistance, an aspect to which we will return. For now, we will mention only the case of the Bixad monastery, where the authorities were driven away when they tried to take over the buildings, requiring the help of 15 trucks with armed soldiers (Alexandru Rațiu, *Persecuția Bisericii Unite*, 76-77).

<sup>129</sup> The full text is published in *Biserica Română Unită*, 164-166. Here we reproduce only the most significant fragment, useful for further analysis: "In these events, the position of the Orthodox Church is quite special and deserves our special consideration. While some of its leaders are guilty of conspiring to destroy our Church, we believe that most of them detest all the arbitrary measures that have been taken. Moreover, although the Congress was held in Cluj, it is said that the local hierarch knew nothing officially, but only what some of his subjects were able to glean from the talk and rumours on the street. That is why we do not confuse the sister Church, which we respect and love and which we know in turn respects and loves us, with that handful of people who plotted that campaign of violence. We believe that the sister Church, as a whole, not only disapproves, but on the contrary, at least in the secret of its conscience, condemns what has been done and is being done. But the sister Church owes us an answer at this moment! It owes us, because its honour, its creed and its very existence are at stake!

a) The honour of the Orthodox Church is at stake. If even among the Pharisees there was a Gamaliel who spoke up in defence of the Apostles after Pentecost, telling the Jews who were boiling with hatred against them to leave them alone "for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought; but if it is from God, you will not be able to destroy it, and you will find yourselves opposing God"; if even among the Pharisees there was a Gamaliel who weighed things calmly and judged righteously, if even a Pharisee had the courage to boldly oppose the plots of the others, then all the more so our Church has the right to expect - as, most holy justification and in fact expects - that in the whole Orthodox Church there may be found a single Gamaliel who has the courage of a manly attitude, denouncing the violence done to our priests and believers in order to forcibly wrest their allegiance. Let there be a single Orthodox hierarch who will raise his voice to tell us that the Orthodox Church dissociates itself from the terror being inflicted upon us, let him rise now before it is too late, now when speaking out can still be a worthy gesture. Yes, the honour of the Orthodox Church is at stake, because either a worthy man of character will be found who, when necessary, will denounce what has been done, or he will not denounce it, and then it will be a sign that they have no character!

b) The creed of the Orthodox Church is at stake. For the Orthodox Church either believes in the Gospel of Christ's gentleness and in the truth He brought to humanity, and then it must protest against the terror and lies that have been stirred up in its name, against us, or it does not protest, and then it becomes a participant and responsible for the violence of tools that do not belong to the Church, for the Church has no prisons or police officers. In saying this, we do not wish to strike at, nor can we strike at, the entire sister Church, for you yourselves, beloved faithful, remember and have so often applauded when, in public, here in Cluj, our Most Reverend Fathers embraced each other; and you applauded because the

established by the authorities between the attitude of the Greek Catholic hierarchy and the refusal of the masses of believers to return to Orthodoxy hastened the decision to arrest the bishops and other high-ranking clergy of the United Church. In the case of Bishop Suciu, we have a letter from the General Directorate of People's Security in Bucharest dated 16 October 1948 addressed to the Regional Security Directorate in Sibiu, which stated: "Please proceed immediately to compile a complete file, containing sufficient evidence and statements against Ioan Suciu, so that he can be brought to justice. These statements shall cover Suciu's entire anti-democratic agitation activity. [...] Please limit the time needed to compile the file to the minimum possible"<sup>130</sup> .

The harmful role of the Greek Catholic hierarchy was also highlighted in the speech given by Dr. Petru Groza at the meeting of the Holy Synod on 19 October 1948, during which the act of return was ratified. On this occasion, Petru Groza expressed his satisfaction that the "great mistake" of religious division among the Romanian people had been repaired and that the majority of Greek Catholic believers had taken this step willingly. According to the prime minister, the government refrained, as far as possible, from interfering in this matter, leaving complete freedom to the faithful and representatives of the Orthodox Church, who were to provide the necessary assistance to those who had returned.<sup>131</sup> The most

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outward gesture was nothing more than a symbol of the perfect harmony that dwelled in their great hearts, just as it was a symbol of the deep sympathy and mutual understanding between their flocks. But now, as in the past of our history, we were attacked by enemies who sought nothing more than to tear Christ from our souls, the enemies of Christ attack us not for the sake of destroying the four points that distinguish us, but they attack us with the aim of striking both the Orthodox Church and the ninety-six points we have in common with it! [...] For in the past, as now, our enemies wanted only one thing: to tear Christ from our souls, because beyond any reasoning they understood – through an intuition and lucidity that only a great passion can give you, which in our case is great hatred – that only in this way could they destroy us, our nation's destiny being a Christian one.

c) Not only the honour and beliefs of the Orthodox Church are at stake, but its very existence. Because the United Church is only the first stronghold to be stormed by those without God. They attack us not because we are just any religion, but because we are the "true religion." We wonder why you can be anything and with anyone in this country, except with Christ? You can worship the sun or other creatures, but not Christ! Why? Whatever happens, we must say that they attack us and close our places of worship not because they are passionate about Orthodoxy, but only because this is just the first step towards giving the churches another use! Here, from this church, they will perhaps make a warehouse, a theatre, a stable or a cinema. The same goes for the other Churches. But they are starting with ours so that they can finish with the Orthodox ones! That is why, at this moment, we are asking the hierarchs of the Orthodox Church if they can still remain silent!

<sup>130</sup> ACNSAS, Informative collection, file no. 3692: 291.

<sup>131</sup> Cf. Cristian Vasile, *Istoria Bisericii Greco-Catolice sub regimul comunist*, document 9: 75.

delicate thing was the dialogue he constantly had with the Greek Catholic hierarchs about the return. "I wasted days on these conversations," says Petru Groza, "but I got some understanding from some of them".<sup>132</sup> Nevertheless, they remained reluctant, due to their loyalty to the Holy See and because of the interventions and pressure exerted on the Greek Catholics to return to the Orthodox Church. "I asked them to specify, however, says the prime minister, and to substantiate the cases of abuse, because I will punish all such offences; and so I did. I even gave them an appointment and told them to come with specific cases so that I could take action. But what are my interventions and sanctions compared to what happened two and a half centuries ago, when part of the Romanian population of Transylvania converted to Catholicism! ... When I was told about the spiritual burden that some people face in abandoning their current faith, I invoked the reason that the Orthodox faith was once abandoned. So returning to it today means repairing a mistake of the past".<sup>133</sup>

Groza went on to speak of the "pressure" that believers were under not to return to the Orthodox faith: "I said: The Constitution guarantees everyone's religious freedom. Every person has the right to choose their faith according to their inner convictions. But the interventions that have been made or are being made by the Greek Catholic Church, the threats to apply this punishment against those who want to return to the Church of their ancestors, violate these principles. I told the Catholic prelates: 'This threat could be punished, because nothing entitles you to such an attitude. Why are you forcing the consciences of free citizens? Why do Orthodox Christians or Muslims or people of other faiths do not apply this sanction to those who, at some point, decide to leave their faith?'. Well, the Greek Catholic prelates put pressure on their faithful who wanted to return to the Orthodox Church, using all the moral and financial means at their disposal".<sup>134</sup>

To illustrate how the Holy See was involved in the life of the Greek Catholic Church and the "obedience" of the bishops of this Church to the Vatican, Petru Groza recalls the case of Bishop Alexandru Rusu, who had received a large sum of money in foreign currency by courier from the Nunciature. The scandal that ensued was settled in the bishop's case by the prime minister, Groza claimed, drawing the following conclusion: "I felt it necessary to tell you this story in order to reassure those of you (the Orthodox bishops) who sometimes listen to the complaints of the Greek Catholics [...] we must not be too impressed [...] when their Greek Catholic Holinesses, who do not want to understand the spirit of the times, complain that they are being wronged by the fact that we have severed their ties with the Holy See in

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<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

Rome. We are no longer inclined to admit that, in the name of Catholicism and under the guise of a certain faith, we should be disturbed in our work of building a country with a spirit of social justice, in our work of reintegrating the ancestral Church, after it had been disintegrated two and a half centuries earlier by foreign intermediaries from Rome and Vienna, whose interests were completely different from those of our people and our ancestral law".<sup>135</sup>

The arrest of the Greek Catholic bishops took place between 27 and 29 October 1948.<sup>136</sup> At the same time, vicars, canons, archpriests and priests were also arrested.<sup>137</sup> Some of the clergy were sent to Neamț Monastery, while the bishops were gathered in Bucharest, from where they were then taken to the patriarchal residence in Dragoslavele. Iuliu Hossu's memoirs allow us to learn more about his own arrest and about what happened at Dragoslavele. The bishop of Cluj arrived in the capital on 27 October to go the next day with Bishop Márton Áron to the Ministry of Religious Affairs to submit the Statute of Organisation of the Catholic Church of both rites.<sup>138</sup> On the 27th, "after lunch, at 3:00 p.m.," Hossu notes, "we went straight to the Catholic Archdiocese, where the statute was finalised, and where the secretary of the Nunciature came and invited us to dinner at the Nunciature that evening." Here, they discussed the proposals made to Hossu to convert to Orthodoxy, and the next day, after submitting the statute, the two bishops were to meet again with O'Hara. Upon arriving at the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Iuliu Hossu and Márton Áron entrusted the new statute to Minister Stanciu Stoian, who was dissatisfied with its content and dismissed the two bishops after only 20 minutes.<sup>139</sup>

After stopping by the Nunciature to report what had happened, Iuliu Hossu spent the night at his brother's house, waiting to be granted an audience with Petru Groza on 29 October. He did not get the chance, as he was arrested at 1:30 a.m. on 29 October. On the same day, at 8 p.m., he was taken by a Securitate crew to the headquarters of the Ministry of Religious Affairs for a new meeting with Stanciu

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<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 77–79.

<sup>136</sup> On 27 October, Ioan Suciu was arrested, and on the night of 28–29 October, Valeriu Traian Frentiu, Iuliu Hossu and Alexandru Rusu were arrested. Ioan Bălan was arrested on the morning of 29 October (*Biserica Română Unită*, 171).

<sup>137</sup> Many clergymen were arrested in Blaj, considered, thanks to Suciu, a major hotbed of resistance. The reverend canons Ioan Moldovan and Augustin Folea, theology professor Eugen Pop, Father Tecșa, an official at the metropolis, Aurel Rusu, secretary of the metropolis, and priest Ioan Cristea, secretary of His Eminence Suciu, were arrested. All of them were transported to Neamț Monastery (Iuliu Hossu, *Credința noastră este viața noastră*, 131).

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 110–112.

Stoian. Stanciu apologised, saying that he had not known about his arrest, then discussed the excommunications pronounced by the bishop, who was again asked to convert to Orthodoxy, whereby Iuliu Hossu would play a “great and beautiful, historic role”.<sup>140</sup> Iuliu Hossu refused, and as a result, he was taken back into custody, from where, on October 31, he was transported along with the other bishops to Dragoslavele, where they would remain until February 26, 1949. There, under the watch of guards, they spent their time in prayer, celebrating the Divine Liturgy every day. During this entire time, they were visited by Patriarch Justinian only twice: once on November 15, before the start of the Christmas fast, and a second time on December 3, when he brought them the text of the decree declaring the Greek Catholic Church dissolved. Patriarch Justinian evidently came to test the willingness of the united bishops to accept joining the Orthodox Church, but Hossu’s memoirs show that the patriarch refrained from applying pressure, preferring dialogue and understanding. All proposals were met with refusal; the arrested bishops even drafted a memorandum protesting the adoption of Decree 358.<sup>141</sup>

#### *5.4 The "official" conclusion of the unification process*

The authorities’ crackdown was beginning to bear fruit. Deprived of their hierarchs and the most outspoken priests, the faithful and the remaining clergy seemed, for the time being, to accept the act of unification. It must be said that, alongside repressive measures (arrests or various administrative measures), propaganda directed at the faithful also played a role, intended to make them believe that the Greek Catholic Church had been abolished, but that this would not happen to religion in general.<sup>142</sup> This is evident from the documents I quoted above regarding the situation in Sălaj County. Thus, the inhabitants of Cehu Silvaniei were said to be "not sufficiently clear" about the unification of the two churches, being convinced that religion would subsequently disappear from the life of the state<sup>143</sup>. To combat these attitudes, the Political Education Service within the gendarmerie

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<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 119-123.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 128-147.

<sup>142</sup> A note from the Cluj Gendarmerie Inspectorate summarises the situation on the ground, its causes, and the propaganda measures being taken: "The unrest that arose as a result of the measures taken by the government in connection with the transition from the Catholic to the Orthodox religion has created some discontent among the population, but the measures taken by the Security Services will lead to a resolution. The activity of Greek Catholic priests is still felt among the population, which is why it would be necessary for the central authorities to carry out clarification work. There is a noticeable lack of Orthodox priests" (ANIC, General Police Inspectorate collection, file no. 35/1948: 98).

<sup>143</sup> ACNSAS, Documentary collection, file no. 60: 632.

legion decided to carry out clarification work in the form of propaganda showing that the communist regime had no intention of removing religion from the life of the state, even when "socialism was perfected"<sup>144</sup>. The aforementioned unrest was also linked to the beginning of actions to remove religion and religious symbols from schools, which would ultimately force the Party to take certain measures. For now, sticking to the popular mindset, it can be seen that for many, the abolition of the Greek Catholic Church was only the first step in a broad anti-religious campaign. This was also the view of many priests and intellectuals. However, in the case of ordinary people, there is a nuance that shows very clearly that in the popular mind the differences between Greek Catholics and Orthodox Christians were not as profound as the leaders of the Greek Catholic Church tried to present them. Ordinary people were concerned that "religion" (in the sense in which they understood this notion) should remain a part of everyday life, because it was indispensable for the smooth running of the world. As many of the Greek Catholic priests were arrested or on the run, the faithful would eventually accept Orthodox priests to perform the "ordinances." This popular mentality best explains the strong initial resistance and eventual acceptance of integration into the Orthodox mass, as well as the extremely few returns to Greek Catholicism after 1990. Essentially, those who remained faithful to the union were people from urban areas, especially intellectuals who had theological arguments to distinguish between the two denominations, and this is still true today.

As the number of adherents grew, the provisions of the Law on Religious Denominations relating to heritage were activated, and the Greek Catholic Church gradually lost all its property. At the end of November, it was considered that the process was sufficiently advanced for the Greek Catholic Church to be considered dissolved. To confirm this, Decree 358 was issued on 1 December 1948, with the following content: "Art. 1 – following the return of the local communities (parishes) of the Greek Catholic religion to the Romanian Orthodox religion and in accordance with Art. 13 of Decree No. 177 of 1948, the central and statutory organisations of this church, such as: the Metropolis, the Bishopsrics, the chapters, the orders, the congregations, the deaneries, the monasteries, the foundations, the associations, as well as any other institutions and organisations, under any name, shall cease to exist. Art. 2 – The movable and immovable property belonging to the organisations and institutions referred to in Art. 1 of this decree, with the express exception of the property of the former parishes, shall revert to the Romanian state, which shall take immediate possession of them. An interdepartmental commission composed of delegates from the Ministries of Religious Affairs, Finance, Internal Affairs,

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<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

Agriculture and Domains, and Public Education shall decide on the destination of these assets and may assign part of them to the Romanian Orthodox Church or its various components"<sup>145</sup>. The aforementioned commission was established by H.C.M. No. 1719 of 27 December 1948, but its activity was prolonged and marked by ambiguities, given the consistent application of communist policies in the field of land and real estate since 1949. Thus, many of the properties that were to become part of the Orthodox Church's patrimony remained in state ownership, with the state taking over only the church building in most cases. At the same time, the Orthodox Church found itself deprived of most of its patrimony.

### ***5.5 An assessment of the unification process. Comparison with the Ukrainian case***

Formally completed on 1 December 1948, the unification process would undergo numerous twists and turns in the years to come. These aspects will be studied in the following chapters. We will now attempt to take stock of what has been discussed on this issue in order to answer the question with which we began: who initiated the act of unification and why?

To this end, we will refer to what is perhaps the best study available on the subject, namely André Kom's *Unificarea Bisericii Greco-Catolice cu Biserica Ortodoxă Română în 1948* (The Unification of the Greek Catholic Church with the Romanian Orthodox Church in 1948)<sup>146</sup>. He studied the unification in Romania in comparison with that in Ukraine and critically evaluated the works of some Greek Catholic historians who exaggerate the role of the Orthodox Church in bringing it about. Summarising the roles played by institutions at different stages of the process, the Dutch author arrived at the following diagram<sup>147</sup>:

Stage	Period	Action	Executor	Second
1	Summer of 1948	Preparing for the union	The Romanian state	The Orthodox Church
2	27 September – 1 October 1948	Unification of the clergy	The Romanian State	Orthodox Church
3	2–3 October 1948	Reception of the clergy into the Orthodox	Orthodox Church	-

<sup>145</sup> Cristian Vasile, *Istoria Bisericii Greco-catolice sub regimul comunist*, document 10: 79-80.

<sup>146</sup> In *Studii de istoria Bisericii (sub redacția lect. univ. Ovidiu Bozgan)*, Bucharest, 2000, 88-124.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

		Church		
4	3-20 October 1948	The union of believers	The Romanian State	The Orthodox Church
5	21 October	Reception of believers into the Orthodox Church	Orthodox Church	-
6	From 22 October 1948	Ensuring union	Orthodox Church	The Orthodox Church

The author's conclusion is as follows: "From the above diagram, it appears that it was not the Orthodox Church that sponsored the unification of the Church, but rather the Romanian state".<sup>148</sup> In the above lines, I have provided numerous arguments to justify this statement. There are no documents that clearly attest that the Orthodox hierarchy asked the authorities to support it in obtaining the mass of Greek Catholic believers, and the existing documents clearly show that the scenario was conceived and coordinated by the authorities. The very process of consolidating the union after 1948 will be an area of greater interest to the political authorities, which will constantly draw the attention of the Orthodox Church to the need to focus more on the success of this action. On the other hand, the contemporary reactions of the Greek Catholics are very clear in attributing the main responsibility to the state, while only some Orthodox hierarchs are accused of an obedient attitude. Much later, the Greek Catholics will turn to the state authorities to obtain the legalisation of the Church. For this reason, in the memoirs written, the entire responsibility for the abolition of the Greek Catholic Church was attributed to the Orthodox Church, motivated by "envy" and a spirit of revenge.

At the same time, the question arises as to what extent the Orthodox thesis of the voluntary return of Greek Catholics to Orthodoxy is supported, a thesis supported by Mircea Păcurariu, who emphasises the minimal role of the state, obviously for other reasons, which is in line with the official discourse of 1948<sup>149</sup>. We can have a more balanced perspective if we take into account the fact that the Romanian Orthodox Church was suddenly entrusted with a very large number of new believers to care for and, as we shall see, in most cases it responded with understanding and patience. However, there were also Orthodox Christians who

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>149</sup> Mircea Păcurariu, *Uniația în Transilvania în trecut și astăzi* [The Union in Transylvania in the Past and Today] (Episcop Nicolae Popovici Publishing House, Oradea, 2006), 33-36.

believed that it was time for the "religious unity of the nation" to be achieved quickly and fully.

The "benevolent" aspect of the return can only be emphasised from the moment when the factors that held the Greek Catholic community tightly united, mainly the hierarchy, the archpriests and the rest of the clergy, were broken up. From that moment on, part of the "flock without a shepherd" would agree to participate in Orthodox services and accept the Orthodox priest or the returning priests as their religious leaders, with the emphasis being placed on the factors that bring them together rather than those that differentiate them. This gradual merger explains the durability of the unification even after 1989.

As for the similarities and differences with the Ukrainian model, these were also summarised by Kom in a synoptic table<sup>150</sup> :

	Ukraine (Galicia)		Romania
March 1945	Planning for unification; to be involved: Department of Religious Affairs, Department of Orthodox Worship, KGB, Initiative Committee within the Greek Catholic Church, Russian Orthodox Church	March 1948 (?)	Planning for unification; to be involved: Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ministry of the Interior, Romanian Orthodox Church
April	Launch of the anti-unification press campaign; Inventory of Catholic property; Pressure on the high clergy to convert to Orthodoxy; Arrests (including of bishops) and administrative measures Closure of the theological academy	May 1948	Launch of the anti-united press campaign; (inventory of ecclesiastical property was made as early as 1945); Pressure on some hierarchs to convert to Orthodoxy Some arrests (administrative measures in the previous period); the episcopate remains free; The theological academy remains open;

<sup>150</sup> André Kom, *Unificarea Bisericii Greco-Catolice cu Biserica Ortodoxă Română în 1948*, 107-108.

	Creation of an initiative committee under Kostelnyk; the committee plays an active role: propaganda, disciplinary proposals, two members consecrated as Orthodox bishops; (festive event and call only in the winter of 1945-46)		Attempts to co-opt Canon Iuga; negotiations with him fail; lack of an alternative jurisdiction body; The demonstration in Blaj; The paternal call;
Autumn 1945	Arrest of many monks; The KGB selects the delegates; Signatures obtained through pressure;		Monks remain free for the time being; Denunciation of the concordat, enactment of the law on religious denominations; The Ministry of Internal Affairs selects candidates; Signatures obtained through pressure;
January 1946	Mass demonstration		
one week before the congress	Announcement of the arrest and trial of the united episcopate;	2 weeks before the congress;	Announcement of the withdrawal of the united bishops;
10 March 1946	Ecclesiastical congress (duration: 3 days, execution one year after planning); The state provides transport for the delegates, who are appointed by the initiative committee; Programme: 1. Election of the presidium; 2. Speeches; 3. Proclamation of the break with the Vatican; 4. Signing of an	1 October 1949	Ecclesiastical Congress (duration: 1 day; execution 6 months after planning); The state provides transport for delegates appointed by the state; Programme: 1. Election of the presidium; 2. Speeches; 3. Proclamation of the break with the Vatican; 4. Signing of an appeal;

	appeal and several telegrams; 5. Disciplinary presentation		
After the congress	Reception of the presidium by the patriarch; (demonstration missing); Consolidation of unification by the Russian Orthodox Church	After the congress	Reception of delegates in the Orthodox Church; Demonstration for the faithful; Consolidation of unification by the Romanian Orthodox Church.

In conclusion, comparing the facts and observing the minimal differences, it can be said that the ecclesiastical unification in Romania seems to have been carried out according to the Ukrainian model, but in a faster and more summary manner, because the conditions in our country allowed for the reproduction of this model.

#### **6. The issue of the status of the Catholic Church and the activity of the Papal Nunciature in the latter part of 1948**

As already mentioned, the Catholic Church, like other denominations, drafted a statute of operation<sup>151</sup>, which it submitted on 28 October 1948 to the Ministry of Religious Affairs through Bishops Iuliu Hossu and Márton Áron. In his memoirs, Iuliu Hossu notes Minister Stanciu Stoian's dissatisfaction with the draft statute. Stoian had noticed that although Decree No. 177 clearly established that there would be only four dioceses for the Catholic Church, in the draft statute, the metropolitan provinces were marked as before. In his reply, Bishop Hossu pointed out that the Romanian episcopate could not adopt such a measure, as this was the responsibility of the Holy See, in agreement with the government<sup>152</sup>. The dialogue expresses the typical attitudes of the two parties, the communist government and the Catholic Church, which would remain unchanged for years and prevent a compromise from being reached: on the one hand, strict compliance with the provisions of Decree No. 177, and on the other, fidelity to the provisions of *the Codex Juris Canonici*. A simple reading of the draft statute shows that its authors

<sup>151</sup> The text of the draft statute in Ovidiu Bozgan, *Cronica unui eșec previzibil. România și Sfântul Scaun în epoca pontificatului lui Paul al VI-lea (1963-1978)* [Chronicle of a Predictable Failure. Romania and the Holy See during the Pontificate of Paul VI (1963-1978)] (Bucharest, Curtea Veche Publishing House, 2004), 396-404.

<sup>152</sup> Iuliu Hossu, *Credința noastră este viața noastră*, 111-112.

took full account of the observations made by the Nunciature on Decree No. 177 of August 1948, avoiding all points that would have conflicted with the Catholic legal view. Obviously, provisions such as maintaining the old division of dioceses, the direct link with the Holy See or those in Art. 44<sup>153</sup> aroused the deep dissatisfaction of the authorities, who would formulate a whole series of measures to counteract the new law. Scaun or those in art. 44 aroused the deep dissatisfaction of the authorities, who formulated a whole series of observations, which they summarised in a letter sent to Márton Áron, who had become the *de facto* most authoritative representative of the Catholic Church in Romania, asking him to make the necessary corrections. The Hungarian bishop's response came in letter 225/28 February 1949, the text of which reaffirmed the "exclusive" rights of the Holy Father, which the "people's democratic" state was trying to suppress.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> "If a component part of the Catholic Church ceases to exist (which is only possible following a decree by the competent ecclesiastical authority), the property of that part retains its sacred character and passes, according to the norms of the holy canons, to the immediately superior moral person. If the part that ceased to exist was a diocesan organisation, its property remains the property of the diocese, and the diocesan bishop alone has the right to assign it to another purpose, also for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. However, when a component part of a religious order or congregation ceases to exist, its property remains the property of the respective order or congregation" (*ibid.*, 404).

<sup>154</sup> "Mr. Minister, With reference to Your Excellency's letter no. 41428, I have the honour to request, on behalf of the Catholic Bishops of the People's Republic of Romania, that you kindly forward our petition to the High Government. The Catholic bishops were obliged by Presidential Decree No. 177/1948 to draft the Statute of the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of Romania and to submit it for approval. They did so and, on 27 October 1948, presented the Statute of the Catholic Church in the only form possible, based on the dogmatic and canonical principles of the Catholic Church, valid throughout the world. The above document was handed over to Your Excellency by representatives of all rites of the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of Romania. It is with the deepest sorrow that we note that, since that day, our brothers, the Greek Catholic bishops, have been unable to have their authoritative say in a matter of such great importance for our Church in the People's Republic of Romania. On 12 January of this year, we received letter No. 41.428/1948, in which Your Excellency informed me that the Department had examined the Statute of Organisation, Leadership and Administration of the Catholic Church in the People's Republic of Romania and returned it to us together with the observations made by that Department, requesting that we revise our Statute and bring it into line with those observations. It appears from the said observations that the Honourable Minister wishes to omit 9 articles and amend 34 articles of the 46 articles of the Statute submitted by the Catholic Bishops, accepting only 3 articles in their entirety with the original text. Firstly, the Honourable Minister wishes to remove from the text of the Statute all those provisions which in one way or another imply or announce one of the following four essential points of the organisation of the Catholic Church:

- 1.) The primacy and supreme power of jurisdiction of the Roman Pontiff;
- 2.) The exclusive right of the Holy See to appoint bishops;
- 3.) The exclusive right of the Holy See to establish, delimit and abolish dioceses;

4.) The right of bishops to communicate freely with both the Roman Pontiff and their own clergy and faithful, and vice versa.

With all due respect, we wish to inform Your Excellency that these articles show the divine basis on which the entire structure of the Catholic Church is founded and are therefore essential and necessary to justify the organisation as it stands. Moreover, the rights relating to freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, being codified and guaranteed by the constitution of the People's Republic of Romania, mean that every citizen can freely express his or her convictions of conscience and religion and has the right to conform his or her life to these convictions. Even the Presidential Decree stipulates this when it states that the statute of a religious denomination must take into account the religious nature of that denomination. This intention of the law is shown in Article 14, which requires each religion to indicate its own confession of faith, and Article 7 specifies: "Religious religions shall be organised according to their own rules in accordance with their teachings, canons and traditions." But the Catholic Church, being founded on immutable dogmas, is also necessarily organised on the basis of certain dogmas, without which it would have no consistency. Therefore, not to recognise even one of the above points means not to recognise the whole Church as it is and as it has always been.

1. The primacy of the Roman Pontiff is among the fundamental truths of the Catholic Church. It is also the first guarantee of the Catholic faith and the structural unity of the Church. It follows, logically and apodictically, that the supreme jurisdiction of the Pope extends over the Universal Church and encompasses all ecclesiastical power.

2. The logical consequence of the Papal Primacy and the Supreme Jurisdiction of the Roman Pontiff over the Universal Church is his right to appoint, exclusively himself, the worthy pastors to lead the various dioceses, that is, the Bishops of the Catholic Church. This is a spiritual matter, in which the state has no jurisdiction. And if the Supreme Pontiff has the right to appoint bishops, he alone, and no other power or person, can remove a bishop from office. The law of the Church on this point is clearly set out in canon 329 of the Code of Canon Law: "Bishops are the successors of the Apostles and, by divine institution, are appointed to preside over particular churches, which they govern with ordinary power under the authority of the Roman Pontiff. They are freely appointed by the Roman Pontiff."

3. Another logical consequence of Primacy is the Pope's right to determine the number and boundaries of Catholic dioceses throughout the world. Here we are again in a spiritual domain, in which the State has no competence. The obligation incumbent upon the Roman Pontiff to care for the spiritual needs of the faithful throughout the world necessarily implies the power to freely determine the modalities of this spiritual assistance in the various ecclesiastical circumscriptions; it also implies his competence to determine the concrete measure of ecclesiastical organisation below which religious life in a given territory would be compromised. This right of the Supreme Pontiff is clearly set out in canon 215 of the Codex Juris Civilis: "It is the supreme ecclesiastical power to establish ecclesiastical provinces, dioceses, abbeys or praelatures, apostolic vicariates, apostolic prefectures, to circumscribe them in a different manner, to divide them, to unite them, to suppress them."

4. A final consequence of the organic and unitary life of the Church and, at the same time, the fundamental postulate of religious freedom is that bishops, priests and the faithful enjoy free communication with the visible Head of the Church. It would be a restriction of the vital needs of the Catholic Church and an unbearable spiritual obstacle for its faithful if they were obliged to communicate with their spiritual Head through the mediation of persons or institutions that are completely foreign and incompetent in religious matters. This would be a violation of the religious freedom that the Constitution and the Law on Religious

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Denominations itself guarantees. The doctrine of the Catholic Church regarding the rights of the Supreme Pontiff to communicate freely with any member of the Church wherever they may be was clearly set out in the Vatican Council of 1870, which states: "From that supreme power of the Roman Pontiff to govern the universal Church, it follows that he has the right to communicate freely in the exercise of his office with the pastors and flock of the whole Church, so that they may be instructed and guided on the path to salvation." Bearing in mind these unchanging and universally valid principles of the Catholic Church, we also emphasise that this supreme jurisdiction of the Pope of Rome does not offend any legitimate natural right or interest, being a spiritual and supernatural power, not an earthly or political one. And the exercise of this supreme jurisdiction cannot constitute interference in the internal affairs of the State, which cares for the material welfare of its citizens. These two orders of things are not opposed, but help each other and complement each other harmoniously, for the common good of peoples and states. The principles set out above concern the relationship between the supreme ecclesiastical authority and the faithful throughout the world. Since the Supreme Pontiff has the right to govern the universal Church with full jurisdiction, all those who recognise this power have the right and duty to be subject to his jurisdiction. Since he is the Teacher and Supreme Shepherd of the Church, all believers have the right and duty to listen to him and obey him, to be taught and guided by him on the path to eternal salvation, in accordance with the dogmas and teachings of the Church. Moreover, our believers know that this jurisdiction does not affect their freedom and rights as citizens and that submission to the Hierarchy refers to the authority of Jesus Christ, from whose Gospel humanity has learned the concepts of human dignity and human rights. Indeed, this unified disciplinary attitude is not forced obedience or rigid capitulation, but a voluntary adherence of the faithful, for supernatural reasons, united in the same faith, the same holy sacrifice and the same Head. Since embracing Christianity, our faithful people have always gladly submitted to this supreme spiritual power and have felt deep sorrow whenever external factors have sought to hinder contact between the Head of the Church and the Bishops with their priests and faithful. They have gladly complied with the requirements of dogma and gladly accepted the guidance of the Head of the Church, knowing that these doctrines show the path that man must follow towards his supernatural destiny, and knowing that these doctrines also regulate in a salutary manner the relations of the individual to society and of subjects to their superiors, providing sure norms for clearly establishing the extent of rights and duties, as well as the origin, purpose and limits of freedom, authority and power. It is well known that the Supreme Pontiff, in exercising his rights, takes into account, as far as possible, the particular circumstances of different countries and peoples. In order to show goodwill and a spirit of conciliation and collaboration with different States, he has often made concessions in matters of common interest, but always with mutual understanding, so that the fundamental and essential rights of the Church and of the faithful remain intact. In this spirit of understanding and with a sincere desire to maintain religious peace in the People's Republic of Romania, I, the undersigned Roman Catholic Bishop of Alba Iulia, on behalf of the Catholic Bishops and Catholic believers in the country, respectfully request Your Excellency to kindly forward this request of ours to the High Government and, on the basis of the above, to give us the opportunity to draft the Statute of the Catholic Church in a definitive manner, in accordance with the fundamental religious principles of our Church. Please accept, Mr. Minister, the expression of my highest consideration.

Alba Iulia, 28 February 1949" (*Biserica Română Unită*, 124-126).

In fact, as we shall see, 1949 was marked by this dispute over the status of the Catholic Church, with the regime determined to regulate this issue according to its own wishes at any cost.

Amidst all the turmoil during the second half of 1948, representatives of the Apostolic Nunciature were deeply involved in supporting and coordinating Catholic resistance to the measures adopted by the government. One form of support was sending protests to the government against the measures it had adopted, either, as we have seen, on the occasion of the denunciation of the Concordat, the adoption of Decree No. 177, or the proclamation of the return of Greek Catholics to Orthodoxy. A similar step was taken on the occasion of the arrest of Greek Catholic bishops, with the Nunciature requesting on 19 November information about those detained, considered to be "victims of religious persecution".<sup>155</sup> The Foreign Ministry's response on 25 November reaffirmed the regime's position that the Nunciature was nothing more than the Vatican's diplomatic representation, and that requests such as the above were considered interference in the internal affairs of the Romanian state.<sup>156</sup> The same response<sup>157</sup> was reiterated when the Nunciature protested against the issuance of Decree 358, which it considered a serious violation of freedom of conscience.<sup>158</sup>

Alongside these protests, the Nunciature continued to gather information on the persecutions in Romania, to try to maintain the unity of the Catholic Church and to coordinate the resistance. It was very important to maintain high morale among the clergy and the faithful and to maintain a functional organisational structure. In this regard, the decree *De Nominatione Ordinariorum Substitutorum*, adopted by the Holy See on 29 July 1948, was of great help. Suspending the provisions of canon law regarding the resolution of episcopal vacancies, this decree allowed bishops to appoint two substitute ordinaries from among trusted priests who were to succeed the bishop, in order of appointment, if they were prevented by the authorities from governing their dioceses. In turn, once the substitute ordinaries had taken over the leadership of the dioceses, each had to appoint a priest who could succeed him in the same capacity as substitute ordinary. The substitute ordinaries enjoyed the same prerogatives as bishops invested according to canonical norms. In addition, as a reserve measure, the regent of the nunciature was instructed to secretly consecrate bishops for both the Byzantine and Latin rites.<sup>159</sup> Such consecrations had been

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<sup>155</sup> AMAE, Vatican collection, issue no. 220, vol. 1/1948-1956, unpaginated.

<sup>156</sup> AMAE, Vatican collection, issue no. 71/1947-1949, vol. 4, unpaginated.

<sup>157</sup> AMAE, Vatican collection, issue no. 217/1948-1950, unpaginated.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> Ovidiu Bozgan, *Cronica unui eşec previzibil*, 41.

taking place since November 1948, but we will deal with them in a unified manner in the following chapters.

Other aspects of the Nunciature's activity are revealed by the Security reports, which are obviously subjective and seek to give each element a criminal dimension, but beyond them, a certain real attitude of the institution in question can be outlined. We thus learn that after the bishops' conference on 6-9 October, the Nunciature sought new ways to obtain information on the situation in the country: "In order to draw the attention of imperialist circles to the situation in the Romanian People's Republic, the report states, the Nunciature is encouraging the American journalist Stevens to visit the Ministry of Cults to obtain details on the unification action, and the Italian military attaché, Lieutenant Colonel Donatti, is trying to contact Márton Áron in Alba Iulia for the same purpose".<sup>160</sup>

"Among the precautionary measures taken by the Nunciature during October, the document states, were the removal of the essential parts of the archives of all dioceses and their evacuation to the Papal Nunciature, as well as the appointment of a new group of couriers in the persons of priests Kaspar Bachmayer for the diocese of Iași and Ferecz Beniamin for the diocese of Alba Iulia. During the same period, O'Hara expressed his satisfaction that the government had not reached a final decision to denounce the Concordat, namely to sever relations with the Vatican.

On this issue, Barral stated that O'Hara was constantly sending valuable information abroad, sometimes even sheltering priests who had fled for fear of the authorities. Del Mestri pointed out that O'Hara and Kirk had, in addition to their Vatican passports, American passports with valid visas so that they could remain in place for as long as possible. Del Mestri repeated O'Hara's statements that the dirty tricks being played on him were intended to force him to request his recall, but that he (O'Hara) had received precise orders from the Vatican not to leave voluntarily under any circumstances, no matter how many insults he suffered, and that if the Romanian government wanted to break off relations with Rome, it would have to take violent measures for his expulsion, measures that would allow the Catholic press abroad to launch a campaign against it."<sup>161</sup>

Invoking the "provocation" of the status of the Catholic Church and the events surrounding the arrest of the united bishops, the report stated that "making it impossible for the Greek Catholic bishops to continue stirring up opposition to the return to Orthodoxy led to a new combative attitude on the part of the Apostolic Nunciature," explained briefly as follows: "If until now the fight against the return

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<sup>160</sup> AMAE, Vatican collection 2, issue no. 220, 35.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

of Greek Catholics to Orthodoxy and the regime in general had been led by the Greek Catholic bishops, especially under the guidance of the Papal Nunciature, from this point on O'Hara and especially Guido del Mestri took direct control of the 'battle against darkness'.

Thus, O'Hara demanded that the monk Ioan Liviu Leluțiu, director of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, resign immediately under penalty of excommunication. Del Mestri drafted a secret circular to all Greek and Roman Catholic bishoprics, demanding that they unconditionally apply the decision taken that all priests and monks should maintain their resignations from teaching, in order to hinder the smooth running of courses [...]

Following the instructions of the Nunciature, a conference of bishops chaired by Alexandru Cizar was held on 16, 17 and 18 November 1948 at the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Bucharest, during which it was decided to activate the Csángós in Moldova and to promote Márton Áron to the forefront, any attempt to disrupt his agitation was to be publicised as anti-Hungarian persecution. On this occasion, O'Hara stated that the rejection of the statute presented by the Catholics by the Ministry of Religious Affairs was inevitable, but its timely submission was only to allow Rome to launch a press campaign against the RPR, under the pretext that the authorities, by not approving a "normal statute," aimed to make Catholicism illegal.

Also in November 1948, on the orders of the Nunciature, Greek Catholic priests who were members of the resistance began to provide information about the progress of the unification to Teddy Matthews, the British consul in Cluj.

During the same period, the Nunciature instructed all Greek Catholic priests to gather in centres with Greek Catholic populations around official or clandestine vicars general, and in centres with Roman Catholic populations around Roman Catholic bishoprics and churches. In order to be able to officiate, Greek Catholic priests were instructed to learn to serve in the Latin rite.

Immediately after Decree Law No. 358, which legalised the de facto situation of the transition of the vast majority of Greek Catholics to Orthodoxy, declaring this religion abolished by law, the Nunciature sent as clandestine couriers, loaded with sums of money as aid for the "resistance", Rafael Haag, provincial of the Jesuit Order in the Romanian People's Republic, Francisc Pall, a Jesuit monk, and Ioan Justin Nohai of the Congregation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, a man on duty at the Nunciature, as well as Brother Tarsidius, a Greek Catholic, also on duty at the Nunciature.

At the same time, on 11 December 1948, O'Hara informed Archbishop Alexandru Cizar that the Vatican was planning a series of new notes of protest against the "misdeeds" allegedly being committed in the Romanian People's

Republic. On this occasion, O'Hara confessed that he was deeply affected by the Foreign Ministry's refusal to receive him in the audience he had requested over a month earlier. However, the fact that the Romanian People's Republic had not broken diplomatic relations with the Vatican was the best proof that there were still possibilities for negotiation. Precisely with a view to these negotiations, he, O'Hara, would gather material on the "persecution" in our country, having so much material that he could send a courier to the Vatican every day".<sup>162</sup>

The report goes on to list a series of elements whose veracity is difficult to verify, but which would weigh heavily in the later orchestration of actions against the Catholic Church: "[...] in full agreement with Alexandru Cisar, lawyer Virgil Damian, prefect of the Marian Congregation, handed O'Hara a memorandum urging the Vatican to refer the matter to the International Court of Justice in The Hague in order to sue the Government of the People's Republic of Romania, which, in accordance with the provisions of the peace treaty and the Charter of the United Nations, would not have had the right to denounce the concordat.

On 13 December 1948, Guido del Mestri visited Alexandru Cisar, giving him instructions, which were passed on to the bishoprics of Iași and Alba Iulia by the clandestine couriers Anton Bișoc from Săbăoani and Ferecz Benjamin from Alba Iulia.

Also in December 1948, Augustin Pacha and the nun Wulf Hildegardis reorganised their organisation in Timișoara to help Greek Catholic resistance fighters cross the border, this time, Ioan Duma, provincial of the Franciscan Friars Minor in Arad and apostolic visitor to all the monasteries in the country, and Ștefan Kirsch, parish priest in Timișoara, collaborated. Among those sent across the border during this period was the Greek Catholic canon Teodor Voștinariu from Lugoj.

On the orders of the Nunciature, as was later established, and in close contact with Mgr. John Kirk, Matei Dumitru and Trifaș, young priests from the diocese of Iași, began to participate in a series of subversive groups with Christian pretensions such as the "Anti-Jewish-Masonic Group", the "Unitary Christian Party" of Prof. Dan Camil Manoliu, and the "Christian Socialist Party" of theologian and teacher Iosif Sabău.

For the capital, Louis Barral and Mgr. Vladimir Ghica created a vast information network, supported by the chapels of Saint Vincent de Paul, Notre Dame de Sion, Pitar Moș and the Assumptionists in the capital, visited by Greek Catholic resistance members. Barral boasted that the information provided by Mgr. Vladimir Ghica, the monk priest Jean Emile from the Byzantine Institute, the alleged official of the French Legation, Georges Schorung, a Lazarist monk from Saint

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<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

Vincent de Paul, and Francois van der Joneheyd, a confidant of Nuncio O'Hara, transmitted through the French Legation, was sometimes more complete and more useful to the Vatican than that received through the "normal" channels of the Nunciature.

On 17 December 1948, Del Mestri visited Alexandru Cisar again to instruct him to activate all preachers in order to keep spirits in a state of constant agitation".<sup>163</sup>

Towards the end of 1948, the Securitate noticed a change in Vatican policy, which meant an attempt to find new ways of negotiating with the communist authorities and new forms of supporting the Catholic resistance: "Around Christmas, Louis Barral told some trusted acquaintances that the Vatican's new line for Catholics in people's democracies was to seek to remove the friction that existed between the official leadership and the respective governments; However, alongside this official conciliatory attitude, the Vatican would encourage the clandestine Greek or Roman Catholic 'Christian resistance' movement that had emerged secretly up to that point in Poland, Hungary, the Baltic States and Ukraine [...]"<sup>164</sup>

"The end of 1948 was dominated by two events of great importance for the Nunciature in the People's Republic of Romania, namely: the arrest of Cardinal Mindszenty in Hungary and the Pope's Christmas speech, which stated that those forced to leave Catholicism (Greek and Ruthenian Catholics in Ukraine, Poland and Romania) could be secretly readmitted to the Catholic Church after completing certain formalities, including assurances that they were not 'contaminated by communist propaganda'.

Mindszenty's arrest prompted a new visit by Guido Del Mestri to the Roman Catholic Archdiocese on 26 December 1948, drawing the line that all priests and bishops should stir up spirits in such a way that "Mindszenty's release would seem desirable to all mankind". The Pope's special speech was broadcast to the faithful in the early days of 1949, showing that the return to Catholicism, the "retraction," was no longer linked to any public formality, but was done in secret. In practice, there may be priests who continue to serve as if they were Orthodox and believers who have formally converted to Orthodoxy but are still Catholic".<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 39–40.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 40–41.