

Primul Război Mondial – perspectivă istorică și istoriografică
World War I – a Historical and Historiographical Perspective

PRIMUL RĂZBOI MONDIAL

Perspectivă istorică și istoriografică



WORLD WAR I

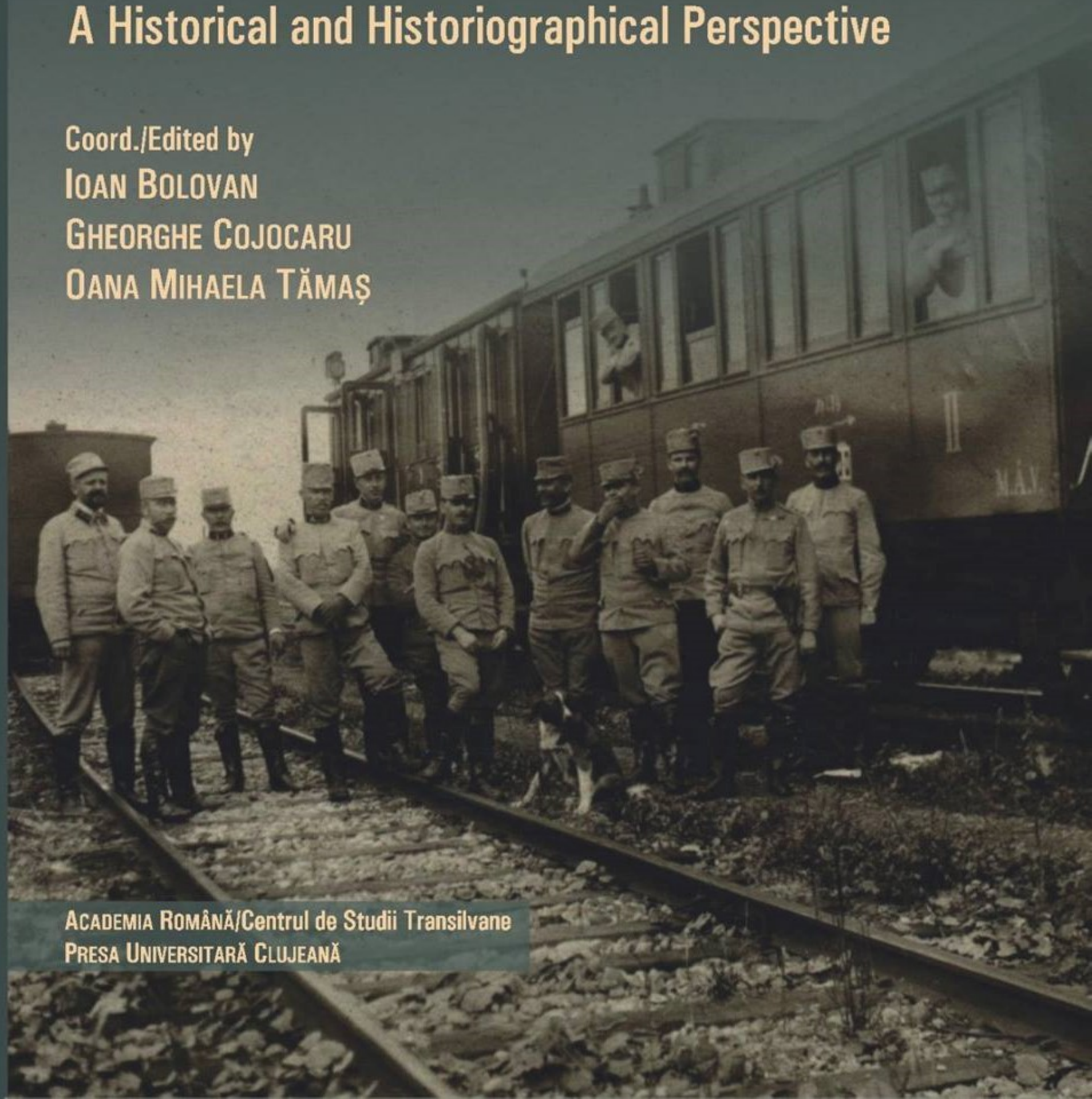
A Historical and Historiographical Perspective

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AFTER THE “GREAT WAR”

The Muslim Seminary in Medgidia in Greater Romania

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După „Marele Război”: Seminarul musulman de la Medgidia în România Mare

Abstract. Lucrarea abordează subiectul Primului Război Mondial din perspectiva consecințelor sale pentru nou-creatul stat roman din 1918. Pentru a consolida unitatea politică și teritorială a statului, conducerea românească a angajat un ambițios program de construcție națională. În acest context, autoritățile romane au considerat educația și instituțiile educaționale ca instrumente puternice de omogenizare națională, capabile a accelera procesul de construcție a națiunii. Folosind documentele de arhivă create de Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, lucrarea analizează proiectul românesc de construire a națiunii în Dobrogea după Primul Război Mondial, în legătură cu una dintre cele mai importante instituții religioase și educaționale create pentru minoritățile turcă și tătară, și anume seminarul musulman de la Medgidia. Prima parte a lucrării conține o scurtă istorie a acestei instituții, de la crearea sa și până în perioada interbelică, arătând cum transformarea sa într-o școală publică i-a schimbat statutul și relația cu statul roman. Cea de a doua parte arată cum agenda naționalistă a statului roman a influențat nu doar organizarea programei educaționale, dar și soluționarea debaterilor publice privind mutarea seminarului de la Medgidia spre o altă localitate din Dobrogea. Ultima parte se concentrează asupra subiectului examenelor de absolvire a elevilor de la seminar. Aceasta pentru a sublinia nu doar preferința autorităților românești pentru alegerea unor subiecte cu încărcătură naționalistă pentru examenele finale, dar și preocuparea evidentă a absolvenților de a descrie în aceeași tonalitate naționalistă rolul lor de învățători și lideri religioși în cadrul comunității musulmane din România.

Keywords. Seminar musulman, Medgidia, proiect național, România Mare, religie

Introduction

THE GREAT Union achieved in 1918 imperatively imposed the consolidation of the national construction by integrating the new provinces and their minority populations in the new Romanian state. Irina Livezeanu has documented the way in which the government used education in order to promote its project for building and consolidating the nation and the Romanian state.¹ Similarly my study examines the way in which the Romanian state's nation building project in the interwar period influenced in the functioning of the Muslim seminary in Medgidia.

The need that the seminary students should receive a national education was justified by the objective conditions in which they had to work after graduation. Usually, the graduates of the Medgidia Muslim seminary worked as religious clergy and/or teachers for the Muslim population in Dobroudja. This population belonged to Turkish or Tartar ethnic groups, and was largely located in Southern Dobruja, which became a part of the Romanian state at the end of the First World War. From this point of view, the graduates of the Muslim seminary had to act as "agents" of the Romanian state and to locally promote the Romanian nation building project among a population that not only was not ethnically Romanian, but it had been included within the borders of the Romanian state very recently.

My approach is one of *local history*, but not along the lines of the studies which discuss the "deconstruction" of the nation state and the centrifugal tendencies manifested at the regional level. On the contrary, by the a discourse analysis of the graduation theses of the Muslim seminary students in Medgidia I shall emphasize the existence of a convergence between the national construction policy of the Romanian state, promoted promoted by the means of this educational institution, and the position of a part of the Muslim community concerning the emigration of ethnic Turks and Tatars from Dobroudja to Turkey (the Ottoman Empire) and other Muslim countries. Regarding the issue of emigration problem starting with 1878 and throughout the interwar period, two currents of opinion emerged among the Turkish-Tatar community in Dobroudja. The first supported the need for emigration, arguing that the Muslims could not practice their religion properly in a non-Muslim state, like the Romanian state. The second current of opinion supported the Muslim believers' staying in Dobroudja and implicitly the consolidation of local Muslim communities.²

My study also proposes an institutional analysis exploring aspects related to the historical evolution of the Muslim seminary in Medgidia from its creation until the end of the interwar period. Such an analytical perspective can capture

1. Irina Livezeanu, *Cultură și naționalism în România Mare 1918-1930*, București: Humanitas, 1998, pp. 14-29.

2. I am grateful to my colleague Metin Omer for suggesting me this interpretation.

not only the way in which priorities of the Romanian state's national policy were reflected in the functioning of this religious and educational institution, but also the way in which the project of the Romanian nation-building, supported by a centralization of the political decision making process, did not necessarily operate to the detriment of the Turkish and Tatar minorities in Dobroudja.

The study has three main parts. The first section includes a brief history of the seminary, and some general information on the functioning of this educational institution. The second part of the study will show that during the debate about moving the Muslim seminary in Medgidia, in order to support their position, all stakeholders used arguments that resonated with the Romanian nation-building objectives. The last part will examine the graduation theses of seminary students, showing how, as a culmination of the knowledge acquired in school, they understood to contribute, in their turn, to the national education of their coreligionists.

As could be noticed throughout my introductory considerations I chose to use, in different contexts, the term *national* instead of *nationalism* in order to avoid the negative connotations that this last term has in the contemporary history of Romania, which are not suitable for my topic. Thus, when talking about national project, about national policy or national education I refer to actions taken by the Romanian state, especially in educational field, for building a nation and a national identity that would be suitable for the radically different conditions generated by the creation of Greater Romania.

The History of the Muslim Seminary from Medgidia

The Muslim seminary was established in 1610 in Babadag. For its functioning and maintenance, the Turkish general Gazi Ali Pasha who participated in the siege against Vienna, donated his estate in Zebil village and Babadag Lake. In 1837, with the financial support of Sultan Mahmut II a new building was built, which would host the seminary until 1901, with an interruption between 1877 and 1889. Based on article no. 21 of the Law on the organization of Dobroudja, the seminary reopened and became a state institution. Changing the status of the seminary had two main consequences. Firstly, the entire estate used for maintaining this educational institution became the state's property. Moreover, through the intermediary of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Arts, the Romanian state committed to financially support its functioning. Secondly, the Romanian state will intervene, especially after 1904, to regulate and synchronize the seminary curriculum with that of other educational institutions³.

3. Nuredin Ibram, *Comunitatea musulmană din Dobrogea. Repere de viață spirituală. Viață religioasă și învățământ în limba maternă*, Constanța, ExPonto, 1998, p. 153; Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale (hereafter abbreviated as ANIC), Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 84/1932, f. 28 f; Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor-Direcția Studii, dosar 94/1955, f. 6.

For demographic reasons (the decrease in the number of Romanian citizens of Turkish and Tatar ethnicity after 1877-1878), the seminary was moved to in 1901 to Medgidia, located in the centre of old Dobroudja and very well connected, in terms of infrastructure, with the entire region.⁴ In 1904, under the guidance of Spiru Haret, Minister of Religious Affairs and Public Education at the time, the first functional regulations of the seminary were drawn up, having "in mind the harmonization of Muslim religious interests with the state interests of the country."⁵

This harmonization involved the introduction of Romanian language as a school subject and its use for teaching some "scientific school subjects" included in the curriculum of state secondary schools (geography, history, mathematics, calligraphy, pedagogy, administrative and constitutional law, hygiene etc.). Obviously, taking into account the profile of this educational institution, its curriculum included Turkish and Arabic teaching, the interpretation of the Koran, Muslim law, history of the Islamic religion or religious music⁶.

The regulations of 1904 also stipulated the organization of courses by classes (rather than in groups as they were originally organized) and the 8-year duration of studies, as well as the fact that the diploma was to be obtained after a final (written and oral) examination, conducted by a special examining board. After it was moved to Medgidia, the seminary also had a boarding house, where students from all over Dobroudja were hosted, some of them studying on scholarships from the Ministry of Public Education. This institution was served by administrative and teaching staff (depending on the school subjects taught), and it was headed by a Romanian administrative manager and a Muslim (study) "spiritual deputy manager". In general, this organization of the Muslim seminary in Medgidia will be maintained in the interwar period.⁷

The graduates of the seminary represented what could be generically called the local and national elite of the Turkish and Tatar minorities from Dobroudja. This was because the "capacity" diploma of the Muslim seminary in Medgidia was a prerequisite for being hired in an ecclesiastical position in the mosques in Dobroudja, for becoming a part of the body of religious and public education teachers and later, for being elected as muftis⁸ and presidents of religious courts,

4. *Anuarul seminarului musulman al statului din Medgidia pe anul școlar 1903-1904*, București, 1904, p. 4; ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 84/1932, f. 28 f.

5. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor-Direcția Studii, dosar 94/1955, f. 6; Adrian Rădulescu, Ion Bitoleanu, *Istoria Dobrogei*, Constanța: ExPonto, 1998, p. 361.

6. Nuredin Ibram, *Comunitatea musulmană din Dobrogea*, p. 154; ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor-Direcția Studii, dosar 94/1955, f. 6; *Istoria Dobrogei*, p. 361.

7. Nuredin Ibram, *Comunitatea musulmană din Dobrogea*, p. 154; *Anuarul 1903-1904*, București, 1904, p. 4; *Anuarul seminarului musulman al statului din Medgidia pe anul școlar 1907-1908*, Constanța, 1908, p. 4; *Anuarul seminarului musulman din Medgidia pe anul școlar 1928-1929*, Constanța, 1929, p. 5; *Anuarul seminarului musulman din Medgidia pe anul școlar 1930-1931*, Constanța, 1930, p. 20.

8. The *muftiate* is the central and representative institution of the Muslim community in Romania. In Greater Romania, four such muftiates functioned in Constanta, Silistra, Tulcea and Bazargic.

positions reserved only for those who came from Turkey or who studied in this country⁹. Also, some of the graduates from the Muslim seminary in Medgidia continued their religious studies in Turkey or Egypt, others chose secular professions, becoming physicians, economists, engineers, men of letters or publicists¹⁰.

III. Medgidia or Silistra?

The Debate on Moving the Muslim Seminar.

The debate on moving the Muslim seminary from Medgidia took place in two stages during the early 1920s. As I will show below, all stakeholders tried to show that placing the seminary in Medgidia or Silistra best answered the interests of the Romanian state, meaning that it ensured a "national education" for future religious clergy or teachers. Also, when taking the final decision to keep the Muslim seminary in Old Dobroudja, the officials from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Arts considered that an institution of the Romanian state, such as the seminary in Medgidia, could better serve its interests within the Romanian territory of a certain age, as Old Dobroudja was.

The fact that the Quadrilateral became part of Romania raised the issue of having the denominational schools existing here authorized by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Arts. Thus, in Bazargic and Silistra two private Turkish seminars functioned without authorization. In 1921, travelling in the two towns, the Deputy Minister of Religious Affairs and Arts found out that the seminary in Bazargic did not function any longer for lack of students, who chose to attend public schools, when the local Turkish gymnasium was closed. In Silistra, the four classes of the seminary were still functioning and during the discussions with the Romanian official the representatives of the local Muslim community expressed their interest to keep the seminary open and, consequently, to obtain the accreditation from the Ministry. At both meetings, the representative of the Religious Affairs and Arts was proposed to move the Muslim seminary from Medgidia to Bazargic, or to Silistra as a solution for the convenient settlement of the situa-

They decided on the community's religious matters, collaborated with all state institutions or other organizations or associations for defending and promoting the interests of Muslims and last, but not least, they kept in touch with diplomats and religious leaders in the Islamic countries, but not only. After the surrender of the Quadrilateral in 1940, only two muftiates (Constanța and Tulcea) were left, which will reunite in 1943. The muftiate headquarters was established in Constanta, where it still is today. See Nuredin Ibram, *Comunitatea musulmană din Dobrogea*, pp. 116-128 and *Istoria Dobrogei*, pp. 361, 363.

9. *Anuarul 1928-1929*, p. 3. Muslim courts were the main judicial bodies for the Muslim community in Dobroudja. Within these courts, presidents or *kadis* (judges) judged the disputes and court cases of Muslims in accordance with the basic principles of the Islamic Sharia. Created during the Ottoman rule, these courts functioned under the guidance of the Muftis from the counties in question until their abolition in 1935, under the influence of the secular reforms implemented in Turkey by Kemal Atatürk. See Nuredin Ibram, *Comunitatea musulmană din Dobrogea*, pp. 128-133.

10. Nuredin Ibram, *Comunitatea musulmană din Dobrogea*, pp. 155-156.

tion of the seminars of the two Muslim communities in New Dobroudja (South Dobroudja or the Quadrilateral).¹¹

This discussion was resumed in 1923, when the Muslim community of Durostor County asked again, this time through Senator Mehmet Fehnri, for the Muslim seminary to be moved from Medgidia to Silistra. Also, according to the testimony of the representative of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Arts, this proposal was also supported by the Mufti and by a senator from Caliacra County. In his capacity as deputy general manager in the Ministry of Religious Affairs, on 13 August 1923 Gheorghe Comşa met with the representatives of the Muslim community “in order to investigate the circumstances which determined the Muslim population in Durostor County to ask for the movement of the Muslim seminary from Medgidia to Silistra.” In his report, the Romanian official mentioned that the request to move the seminary was “supported by highly appreciable reasons.” The lack of staff (which included not only imams, hodzhass, but also hatips and muezzins) for the mosques in the two counties of New Dobroudja would have been solved by moving the seminary to Silistra, where 300 students could have been easily accommodated, including those transferred from Medgidia. In this way, a greater number of young Muslims could be “brought up in the spirit demanded not only by the religious needs of the Muslim population, but also by the interests of the state.” Moreover, touching upon sensitive topic for the Romanian state, the representatives of the Muslim community declared that by unifying the two seminars “population will have the required priests who will know their duties, will know the language of the state and will be educated to be devoted to the state, thus increasing Muslim sympathy for the Romanian state.”¹²

The discussion also addressed specific issues related to the actual location of the seminar, as the Ministry representative inquiring whether Silistra had an appropriate location for the seminary and its boarding house. The answer of the Muslim delegation pointed out that the population would be willing to financially support on its own the transformation of the Ac Kapu mosque into a school building. Thus, it was proposed that the building of the current private seminary should be converted into a boarding house for the students, alongside a military barracks in Silistra. But the Muslim community conditioned this financial effort on the granting by the Romanian state of 400,000 lei for repairing the royal mosque destroyed during the war. This amount was to be supplemented by the state contribution for the upkeep of the seminary which should not exceed the amount granted to the educational institution in Medgidia. The Muslim representatives also asked that the new boarding house would be equipped with inventory items brought from the seminary in Medgidia, including textbooks and other teaching materials.¹³

11. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 133/1921, ff. 16-17 f-v.

12. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 174/1923, f. 19 f.

13. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 174/1923, ff. 19 f, 22.

In his report, the Romanian official stated that if the sum of 400,000 lei requested by the Muslim community in Silistra was approved and if the Muslim population of other counties and the teaching staff in Medgidia adhered to the proposal, then "nothing would stand against moving the seminary next year."¹⁴

As it could be seen above, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Arts did not reject right from the beginning the idea of moving the Muslim seminary from Medgidia to Silistra, although it eventually remained where it had been located since the early twentieth century. There were several reasons that prompted the Romanian Ministry officials to take this option into account.

Firstly, the representatives of the Muslim community, representing 65% of the population in Durostor County, were the ones who requested the movement of the seminar. This request was also supported by the Muslim believers who were concentrated in large numbers in Caliacra County.¹⁵ Secondly, Silistra was also the headquarters of one of the four muftiates that were active in the interwar period.¹⁶

A third reason referred to the material situation of the seminary which at the end of the war was in "straiten circumstances."¹⁷ Thus, in early 1921, the headmaster unsuccessfully tried to recover part of the estate belonging to the boarding house of the Muslim seminary. When the town of Medgidia was evacuated in October 1916, in order to be saved, some of its belongings were handed over to the inventory of the Red Cross, which had a hospital installed in the boarding house of the Muslim school. These belongings, which included sheets, pillowcases, cotton blankets, beds, napkins, tableware, buckets, were mixed with those of the Red Cross Măcin Hospital and were used for the needs of the hospital that functioned in Brăila between November 1916 and April 1917. Some of these objects were requisitioned by the Germans. When the hospital in Măcin was closed, its entire property was handed over to Brăila city hall, which redistributed it to the hospitals in its administrative area. Thus, the Muslim seminary couldn't recover its inventory items belonging to its boarding house.¹⁸

Also, the boarding house of the seminary in Medgidia was not functional for a few years, probably because of the building being damaged during the fights taking place in the region. Consequently, seminary students were "forced to find accommodation in inns and isolated houses, coming in contact with all kinds of men and women of easy virtue", as they were not received by "neither Muslims, nor Romanians for reasons of religious prejudice." Being aware of the fact that "the education of students and school prestige" were harmed by the perpetuation of this situation, the headmaster of the seminary repeatedly asked for the support of

14. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 174/1923, f. 24 v.

15. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 174/1923, f. 20 f-v.

16. Nuredin Ibram, *Comunitatea musulmană din Dobrogea*, p. 117.

17. *Anuarul 1930-1931*, p. 4.

18. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 107/1922, ff. 68 f-v, 71, 77.

the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Arts in solving this problem, but according to his testimony, this was “of no avail.”¹⁹

Under these circumstances, the option of moving the seminary to Silistra seemed to be a convenient solution, which would not only have solved the difficult material circumstances of the school, but would also have partially relieved the Romanian state from going to expense for this purpose. Yet, the Muslim seminary continued to function in Medgidia until its closing in 1967. This outcome was determined by several factors. The most important development in this regard was the vehement opposition of the Muslim community in old Dobroudja concerning this matter.

Thus, the muftis of both Constanța county and Tulcea county declared to be against the unification of the two seminaries in Silistra and Medgidia and addressed to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Arts in writing, bringing arguments for their position. The Muslim community in Constanța had the same position, and it also addressed to the Ministry in writing, suggesting the organization of a meeting with one of their representatives who would explain the reasons why they were against moving the seminary in New Dobroudja. Five main arguments could be found in the documents submitted to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Arts, justifying the rejection of moving the seminary “so insistently demanded by Silistra inhabitants.”²⁰ Firstly, Medgidia had a special meaning for the Muslim population, being one of the oldest settlements of this community in Dobroudja²¹. Secondly, Medgidia always hosted a religious educational institution (madrassa), just before the movement of the seminary from Babadag in 1889²². Thus the Muslim seminary became a symbol of Medgidia, and, in its turn, this city was the “cradle of the highest religious institution-the seminary.”²³ Thirdly, Medgidia was in the centre of Dobroudja, being a railway junction ensuring the connection to the Capital. But more than anything, Medgidia was “at hand to all Muslims, and students who, during major holidays and fasting periods, when under the law they are on holiday, can go to the villages and towns for religious services.” In contrast, Silistra was placed at an extreme side of Dobroudja, and the only communication way with Old Dobroudja was the Danube, which became inaccessible during winter²⁴. However, as stated by the Mufti of Tulcea County the seminary was an institution of the Romanian state, which had to be placed in a “Romanian centre” like Medgidia, where “students

19. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 107/1922, ff. 158 v-159; dosar 174/1923, f. 70 f. The problem shall be solved in the next years by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Arts which rented a building that will be used as a boarding house for the seminary. See, *Anuarul seminarului musulman din Medgidia pe anul școlar 1932-33*, Constanța, 1933, p. 17.

20. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 174/1923, ff. 27, 30, 76 f-v-77, 88 f-v.

21. *Istoria Dobrogei*, p. 287.

22. Nuredin Ibram, *Comunitatea musulmană din Dobrogea*, p. 153.

23. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 174/1923, f. 27. It should be noted that after the fall of communism, Medgidia also hosted the Muslim pedagogical and theological high school *Kemal Atatürk*.

could also get an education with Romanian feelings, which was imperatively required for the young seminarians, for the interest of the country.”²⁵ What the Mufti was trying to say and what is relevant from the point of view of my study is that the Quadrilateral counties had become part of the Romanian state very recently. Moreover, Bulgarians accounted for a significant part in the population of the Quadrilateral, and their loyalty to the Romanian state was questionable.²⁶ Fifthly, as the representative of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Arts remarked as early as 1921, Silistra was not a safe area because the Bulgarian population in here “was stirring the other nations.”²⁷ Also, the frequent attacks of Bulgarian Comitadjis that targeted southern Dobroudja²⁸ represented another element taken into account by the Romanian authorities for keeping the Muslim seminary in Medgidia.

IV. The Seminary Graduate and His Role in the Romanian Society

The national agenda of the Romanian state was also reflected in the choice of subjects for the Romanian language exam that students had to pass for the completion of the eight classes of the Muslim seminary in Medgidia. These topics, of which the future graduates had a choice in their final examination, were intended to test their knowledge of Romanian language and literature or Romanian history. Also, another requirement for the same Romanian language exam was writing of an essay in which the future religious leaders and teachers were to describe how they were going to organize and develop their activity within the local Muslim communities. Obviously, the purpose of such an essay was to evaluate the way in which graduates intended to apply and adapt what they have learned at the seminary to the specific local circumstances.

Analysing the content of student theses suggests that for the graduates of the Muslim seminary in Medgidia the education of their “coreligionists” was a priority. This is because, from their point of view, the lack of education was the main cause of the material and spiritual decline of the Muslims in Dobroudja. In order to justify their position, the great majority of graduates painted a dark picture of the situation of Muslims in Dobroudja, being careful to mention that such an unfavourable development was generated by internal causes of the Muslim communities and was not the result of a discriminatory policy conducted by the Romanian state concerning the Turkish and Tatar minorities. Here is how a graduate of the Medgidia seminary described in 1921 the living conditions of the Muslims in Dobroudja:

24. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 174/1923, ff. 76 v, 88 f-v.

25. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 174/1923, f. 88 f.

26. *Istoria Dobrogei*, pp. 380, 392, 432-435

27. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 133/1921, f. 17 f.

28. *Istoria Dobrogei*, p. 434.

"A low-built long house, with bright windows, made of clay, covered with straw, a yard fenced with a ditch or garbage, and no trace of plantation or vegetables, this is the household of a Muslim from Dobroudja. A few houses like this that you could pull down with a single stitch, placed in disorder, a pitiful mosque and a hodzha leading a contemplative life, here is the icon of our villages in Dobroudja."²⁹

Trying to find an explanation for this state of affairs, another seminary student noted that "the Muslim population is not really hard-working and careful with their savings" and therefore, he proposed to advise the members of his community "to start working, showing them that if, when Dobroudja was absorbed, Muslims were the biggest landowners, now they became servants to those who used to be their servants and this happened only because the latter have worked diligently, and they sat and only thought about emigration, wrongly advised by foreign hodzhas." At the same time, "besides the economic, cultural and intellectual flaw" Muslims were also "narrow circumstances." According to the same student, most of his "coreligionists" were "illiterate, which greatly influenced [their] demoralization."³⁰

In this context, the word *education* did not strictly refer to the educational process taking place within the organized framework of the school, but to a specific way in which the daily life of the Muslim population was organized. In fact, most of the seminary graduates described the purpose of their work as one of "enlightenment" or "illumination" of the Muslim population that they guided from the spiritual point of view. Consequently, in their perspective, clergymen had to be "those who enlightened the villages"³¹ sent "to illuminate like a ship guiding lighthouse in the vast and infinite waters of the great ocean"³² and who proposed to uplift the "soul of the people, taking it to glory and illumination". As "in any nation people have a blind faith in the words of the clergy",³³ seminary graduates had the strength or moral force to make those changes necessary for the social and spiritual uplifting of the Muslim population in Dobroudja.

What is important to note is that, from Medgidia seminary graduates' point of view, carrying out the "enlightenment" mission of their "coreligionists" also involved a national dimension, which regarded both the secular and the religious aspects of their work. Thus, for some of them, the primary task was "to remove fanaticism from the people's minds."³⁴ "A flaw that caused the Muslim population to fall into such a deplorable state,"³⁵ this action meant encouraging the Turkish and Tatar popu-

29. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 133/1921, f. 42.

30. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 133/1921, ff. 46-47.

31. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 174/1928, f. 115 f.

32. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 133/1921, f. 100 f.

33. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 174/1928, f. 115 f.

34. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 174/1928, f. 107.

35. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 137/1929, f. 86.

lations to integrate in the Romanian society. Those who were responsible for the religiously motivated self-marginalization of the Muslims in Dobroudja were, according to seminary graduates, some "uneducated hodzhas brought from Constantinople and not enough well-prepared."³⁶ These latter not only encouraged the segregation of Turks and Tatars based on ethnic and religious criteria, but also maintained their dream of emigration "to Anatolia or (...), as they said, the holy land."³⁷

In this context, by their sermons held in the mosque, the future hodzhas and teachers proposed to convince the faithful Muslims that Greater Romania was their country and to "inspire them with love for their neighbour, regardless of religion and nationality",³⁸ to help them "know the language of their country, know its laws and abide by them, and live in a perfect union with everybody" and last but not least, to "love their country and its leaders."³⁹

The educational component of the activity carried out by the Muslim seminary graduates also aimed at enhancing the attachment of the Muslim population to the Romanian state. In this respect, learning the Romanian language and getting familiar with the Romanian history and culture became a priority of educating the representatives of ethnic Turks and Tatars as "true believers and patriots."⁴⁰ This was because, according to some of the seminary students, a common language was the "external sign" defining a nation. Not only did this ensure the specific interaction between its members, but also the transmission of some specific cultural values, meant to support the perpetuation of the nation and its unity of action in case its physical existence or the existence of its national territory would have been threatened from the outside.⁴¹

In their essays, the future hocas also indicated the most important tools that they intended to use for the national education of the Muslim population in Dobroudja. For many of them, such an activity was a continuation of their work already begun during the years of study at the seminary. Thus, on different occasions, as students, they organized evening get togethers (in Romanian, *șezători*) or theatre shows in the villages in Dobroudja. Not only did these events represent an opportunity for the Muslim believers to get familiar with Romanian language, but they were also a tool "for propagating Romanian culture within the popular masses."⁴²

The graduates of the Muslim seminary identified other tools that they wanted to use in order to consolidate the knowledge taught in the Romanian language, Romanian history and geography classes. One of these tools was organizing school

36. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 133/1921, f. 45.

37. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 133/1921, ff. 47-48.

38. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 174/1928, f. 107.

39. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 137/1929, ff. 86, 92.

40. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 174/1928, f. 113 v.

41. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 104 vol. 1/1939, ff. 38-39 f-v, 42 f-v.

42. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 137/1929, f. 88 v.

trips to the “important and historical places of the country”.⁴³ They shouldn’t be just “wonderful life, joyful [*experiences*] (...) and memories”, “but also an opportunity to make pupils familiar with “symbols and evocations meant to create that chapter of impressions from which future draws its most fertile examples and inspirations of patriotism.”⁴⁴ At the same time, the “seminary teacher-to-be student” also had to take care of organizing a rural library, which would become not only a centre of culture, but primarily a centre of Romanian culture for both students and for adult Muslims.⁴⁵

Seeing that the adult Muslim population also needed education, Medgidia seminary graduates also included among their preoccupations the establishment of an adult school, actually of some “evening classes for adults.” Within this education process, adults had to acquire “knowledge absolutely necessary for practical life, for example, reading and writing, computing, their rights and duties within the state” that would help them “find their way in society.”⁴⁶

V. Conclusions

My study has analyzed the way in which the nation building policy started by the interwar Romanian state influenced in the functioning of the Muslim seminary in Medgidia. To this effect, my study focused on two issues related to the evolution of the seminary, namely, the debate on moving the seminary from Medgidia to Silistra and the written works of the students who graduated from this educational institution.

In the first case, I showed how all stakeholders tried to prove that placing the seminary in Medgidia or Silistra would best answer the national interests of the Romanian state and how, finally, the decision of the Ministry of Religions Affairs and Arts was based on an argument which indicated that an institution of the Romanian state, such as the seminary in Medgidia, could better serve its interests in a Romanian territory of a certain age, such as Old Dobroudja.

And last but not least, the analysis of the essays of seminary graduates indicated their concern for dedicating a significant part of their professional activity to the national education of their coreligionists, as a culmination of the knowledge they had acquired in school.

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43. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 137/1929, f. 112.

44. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 129/1937, f. 102 v.

45. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 137/1929, f. 114; dosar 111/1933, f. 50.

46. ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor și Artelor, dosar 137/1929, ff. 93, 95 f, 114.

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