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ABSTRACT

TEZĂ DE DOCTORAT

**THE HISTORY OF THE TURKISH COMMUNITY IN
DOBRUJA THROUGH THE PRISM OF THE MUSLIM
SEMINARY IN BABADAG/MEDGIDIA
(Istoria comunitatii turce din Dobrogea prin prisma
Seminarului de la Babadag/Medgidia)**

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The main subject of this thesis entitled ‘‘The History of the Turkish Community in Dobruja through the Prism of the Muslim Seminary in Babadag/Medgidia’’ revolves around the evolutionary process of the *madrassa* in Babadag in the 17th century into the Muslim Seminary in Medgidia in the 20th century and the subsequent effects of this evolution of the symbolic educational institution on the Muslim minority in Dobruja partly dwelling upon the history of the Dobruja region and its Turkish-Tatar inhabitants.

The thesis tries to show how the seminary was crucial to the Turkish community to maintain their cultural identity, and its important role in the Turkish-Romanian relations after Dobruja was integrated into Romania with 1878 Berlin Treaty.

It aims at depicting the situation of the Turkish-Tatar minority in Dobruja in different phases after 1878 up to now from political, social, cultural and economic perspectives by referring the developments related the seminary. It defends that the seminary undeniably designed the future of the new generations of the Muslim minority in Romania for decades, but within the limits allowed by the political regime. It puts forward that being in the center of the lives of the Muslim community in Dobruja, the seminary is not a marginal matter with having plenty of reference material related to its establishment, objectives and functions.

The theme chosen is relevant in order to understand in a more profound manner the place of the Turkish-Tatar community in the Romanian society and in the relations between Romania and Turkey after Dobruja joined Romania. It attaches special importance to the seminary of the community as the unique source to educate religious clergy and teachers of Turkish language, both being the indispensable pillars of the social and cultural identity of the minority.

While the study inquires the institutional setting of the seminary from Babadag to Medgidia in detail, it also focuses on its surrounding political,

economic, social and cultural environment, as outer elements, which affected the destiny of the young generations of the Muslim minority.

The study is composed of seven chapters excluding the parts of Introduction and Conclusions, the first being dedicated to the history of Dobruja region including the origins of the name of Dobruja, settlement of the Turkish tribes in Dobruja in pre-Islamic and Islamic periods, the installing of Ottoman rule in the region starting from the 15th century, the administrative structure of the region up to the 1878 Berlin Treaty, significance of Dobruja for the Ottomans from military and economic perspectives and lastly integration of the region into Romania and its repercussions on the Turkish minority. The chapter emphasizes the role of the monumental educational institution, the Muslim Seminary, as the legacy of the minority coming from the Ottoman period and functioning as a state institution after the integration of Dobruja into the territory of Romania.

Based on the case study of the seminary, the second chapter analyzes the education system of the Ottomans in different stages from *mektebi sıbyan* (Primary Schools) to *rüşdiye* (Secondary Schools) and then *madrassa* (High Schools) in depth. It examines the reasons and origins of the concentration on the religious education in the classical period of the Empire and the motivations of the evolution of this education into the more secular one in its declining period. While the chapter gives satisfactory quantitative data on student profiles, school numbers and types in *Vilayets* of Danube, Bosnia Herzegovina and Kosova of the Empire, it aims at a providing comparative view of the situation of education across the Empire. The chapter dwells upon similarities of the education system in Dobruja region with the other parts of the Empire by reviewing developments in this field with the inauguration of the *Tanzimat* period reforms as of 1839. The chapter diagnoses that the Ottomans strove hard to catch up with the Western powers by improving their education system first in the military field and then for the civilians ending up ultimately in a partial success.

The third chapter of the study entitled as ‘‘Integration of the Turkish Community in Dobruja into the Romanian Ruling System (1878-1914)’’ investigates challenges of the integration of the Muslim minority into the new state from 1878 till the outbreak of the First World War by the Romanian authorities. To this end, it summarizes those obstacles ahead of integration as conflictive political discussions of the period, demographic density of the Muslims and backward economic structure of the region. It gives detailed information on the exceptional administrative regime of Dobruja which was established to carry out ethnic assimilation, economic modernization and cultural homogenization in the Dobruja region on the way of full integration. While it analyzes those integration policies of the Romanian state, it does not neglect to present the legal regulations at the background beginning from ‘‘The Law Concerning Dobruja’s Administrative Organization’’ dated 1880. In addition, it emphasizes that the Bucharest authorities sought to avoid creating social problems through the measures taken in the field of religion and education for the majority of the population living in the region with customs and traditions completely different from the rest of the country. It also probes into the subject of using education as a tool for nation building in the process of integration, and highlights the important place of the seminary in Medgidia after it was converted into a state school in this process. The chapter ends with the clarification of reasons of mass emigration of Muslims from Dobruja on the basis of integration policies followed by the Romanian state.

The fourth chapter of the dissertation inquires deeper into the institutional development of the Muslim Seminary between 1878 and 1914. It explains the reasons of turning this school into a state body by the Constitution of Dobruja within the context of integration policies, its relocation from Babadag to Medgidia and the problems arose after the relocation. The chapter goes into details of the composition and the structure of students and teachers of the seminary putting

special emphasis on its *curriculum* which combined the theocratic education with modern secular courses in Romanian language. It takes note that the seminary became successful with its modern *curriculum* and high standard of education which led the graduation of high caliber members of the Muslim community either as religious clergy and Turkish language teachers or university students in other branches.

The fifth chapter starts with examining the elevated situation of the Turkish-Tatar community from having special citizenship status to a normal one as of 1910. It elaborates on the positive effects of the incorporation of the Southern Dobruja into Romania following up the Balkan wars in 1913 and its impact on the approach of the Romanian state to the Muslim minority. It also adds that the Muslim population preferred the Romanian rule to the Bulgarian one as the latter pursued more repressive and assimilationist policies towards the minority. It notes that the Turkish community being a small minority in Romania was always cautious to be in harmony with the political system in order to survive while it did not cut off its organic relations with motherland Turkey. In the following pages of the chapter, the constructive role of the Seminary in Medgidia in bilateral relations of Romania and Turkey was put into light by giving examples from meetings and visits of the Turkish Ambassador Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver in Bucharest who served between the years 1931-1944. The chapter highlights politically good relations between two countries paved the way for a more positive attitude towards the Turkish minority in Romania and even Gagauze minority in Moldavia, which is ethnically Turkish having Orthodox Christian belief. Yet, both Dobruja regions witnessed huge exodus of the Muslim population towards Turkey in this period especially after the 1930s. The chapter analyzes the reasons of this mass emigration, of which the total figure is around 120.000, from the perspectives of homogenization policies pursued by the Romanian rule to the need of man-power of developing Turkey in detail. It completes the whole picture

stating that the Agreement dated 1936 on emigration between Romania and Turkey facilitated the regular flow of emigrants to Turkey and constituted another example of good relations between Romania and Turkey in the interwar period.

The sixth chapter of the study deals with the negative consequences of the Second World War on the Turkish Muslim minority in Romania, which caused change in the territorial map of Romania and in its political regime. It expounds how heavy collectivization and industrialization policies of the Communist regime changed the way of life of all society including the Muslim minority, and forced to give concessions from their belief system. The regime reached its goal to mobilize, control and integrate the population under these Stalinist policies by putting tremendous pressure on the minorities in order to destroy their cultural identities and affiliations with their motherlands. It elaborates on the diminished significance of the religion on the young generations due to the restrictions in the fields of education and religion. It notes that the continuity of the *Muftiate* in this period as an institution did not help the minority as this body turned into an agent of the regime. It defends that the closure of the Turkish schools and the most importantly the Muslim Seminary in Medgidia in 1967 was the greatest blow to the maintenance of the cultural identity of the Turkish-Tatar community.

The last chapter focuses on the situation of the Muslim minority after the Communist rule was toppled down in 1989 by a popular movement. It reviews the developments regarding how the Turkish and Tatar communities immediately started to reconstruct and restore their cultural, religious and educational institutions and revive their cultural heritage by having the strong constitutional support behind them. It summarizes the process of institutionalization of Turks and Tatars under different umbrella associations as Democratic Turkish Union of Romania (Uniunea Democrată Turcă din România or UDTR), and the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars of Romania (Uniunea Democrată a Tătarilor

Turco-Musulmani din România or UDTTMR). The chapter gives insights about the internal debates and conflicts among the minority, which was divided officially anymore and represented separately at the Parliament by one quota deputy for each. It analyzes the role of Turkey in the process of institutionalization of Turks and Tatars after a new era began following the fall of the iron curtain. Turkey's interest in the Dobruja Muslims is studied closely in different perspectives ranging from political aspirations to cultural affinity. To this end, the study emphasizes the Turkish assistance to the minority in the fields of education and religion through its different state agencies like Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) and Yunus Emre Turkish Cultural Centers as well as Turkish Presidency for Religious Affairs. It does not underestimate the financial support of the Turkish businessmen associations to the minority in various forms. The chapter dwells upon the reopening the emblematic educational institution of the Turkish community in 1995 in Medgidia by the initiative and support of Turkey and cooperation of the Romanian authorities under the name of Kemal Atatürk National College (Colegiul Național Kemal Atatürk). It highlights a new revival inaugurated by this reopening of the historical school to preserve and develop the elements of cultural identity of the Turkish-Tatar community.

In conclusion, this study intends to show how the Muslim Seminary in Babadag/Medgidia was instrumental to the Turkish community to maintain their cultural identity, and had played an important role in the Turkish-Romanian relations after Dobruja was integrated into Romania. In the immediate aftermath of the Ottoman withdrawal from the region, the Turkish and Tatar communities were not accepted as equal citizens with the Romanians until the outbreak of the Balkan Wars. They had to immigrate in mass numbers to the motherland Turkey during the inter-war period due to many and complex reasons which are elaborated in depth in the study. However, the worse would follow in the communist regime era when the Muslim minority heavily suffered from its oppressive and assimilationist policies, which eventually led to big erosion in their

cultural identity and loyalty to their belief system. In this context, the closure of the seminary in 1967 signaled a darker period awaiting the Turkish Tatar community. The community had lost its beacon of hope and enlightenment by its closure. This agonizing period ended with the regime change in Romania in 1989. Following this historic milestone, the presence of the Turkish-Tatar minorities in Romania is regarded as an asset by the Romanian and Turkish governments for improving bilateral relations. It has been registered that they are a part of Turkey's history, and they have right to transfer their genuine ethnic and religious values to the next generations born in Romania.

Kemal Atatürk National College in Medgidia by bearing the name of the founder of the Republic of Turkey and the heir of the Muslim Seminary holds a special place in the bilateral relations of the two countries. As the Muslim Seminary played an unprecedented role in connecting Romania and Turkey after 1878, its reopening under Kemal Atatürk name with a joint effort of the both countries in the wake of the communist era is a strong message of their good cooperation regards to the Muslim minority rather than creating a point of conflict. Moreover, the Turkish-Tatar communities in Dobruja reowned their cultural and historical heritage and symbols while having a progressive outlook embodied in the same college.

The Muslim minority acknowledges that the Romanian state sponsors their representative organizations and the religious body to preserve their cultural and faith based values. They are thankful of being respected by the state and their traditional values, mother tongue, culture and Islam religion are tolerated.

The study notes that in addition to the Romanian financial support and preparing a tolerant legal ground for the Muslim minority to preserve their ethnic and cultural identity, the support given by the Turkish state is equally crucial to their existence. The future of the College in Medgidia, teaching of the Turkish

language, conservation of the historical and spiritual heritage largely depends on the continuation of the Turkish assistance. Looking into the historical evolution of the relations between Turkey and Romania, it is easy to tell that Turkey's interest in the Turkish minorities in the Balkans and in the near neighbourhood will continue unabated. The combination of the Turkish commitment and the tolerance and cooperation of Romania pulled the standard of cultural and social lives of the community to a higher point. This explains multi-culturalism and co-habitation are deeply rooted in the Romanian psyche. With this ever-living approach Romanian democracy is further consolidated to the extent that it is shown as an exemplary model to the region and even to the world.