



**STREP-CIT5-2006-029013**

**SAL**

**Society and Lifestyles: Towards Enhancing Social Harmonisation through  
Knowledge of Subcultural Communities**

Specific Targeted Research Project

Thematic Priority 7: Citizens and Governance in a Knowledge-based Society

**D 7.4 - Volume for dissemination of results of the project  
in Moldova**

Due date of deliverable: **16<sup>th</sup> March 2009**

Actual submission date: **6<sup>th</sup> April 2009**

Start date of project: **1<sup>st</sup> January 2006**

Duration: **36 months**

Organisation name of lead contractor for this deliverable: **EP**

<b>Project co-funded by the European Commission within the Sixth Framework Programme (2002-2006)</b>		
<b>Dissemination Level</b>		
<b>PU</b>	Public	✓
<b>PP</b>	Restricted to other programme participants (including the Commission Services)	
<b>RE</b>	Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services)	
<b>CO</b>	Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services)	

## Table of Contents

Summary .....	3
1. INTRODUCTION TO SOCIETY AND LIFESTYLES PROJECT .....	4
2. CASE STUDIES FOR THE MOLDOVAN-LANGUAGE VOLUME .....	8
RELIGIOUS ATTITUDES IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: CASE STUDIES OF THE METROPOLITAN CHURCH OF BESSARABIA AND THE BAPTIST COMMUNITY .....	8
3. CASE STUDIES FOR THE RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE VOLUME.....	34
3.1 ANTI-FA YOUTH GROUPS (SAINT-PETERSBURG) .....	34
3.2 DIY YOUTH GROUPS (SAINT-PETERSBURG) .....	39
3.3 NEOPAGAN YOUTH GROUPS (SAINT-PETERSBURG) .....	44

## Summary

This report contains the original English-language text for a volume which is being translated into Romanian and Russian and will be published in Moldova and Russian Federation as a stand-alone print-out to be used for disseminating the project results and increasing the impact of the project in these respective countries in the post-project phase.

This volume gives a glimpse into the Society and Lifestyles (SAL) project by presenting the project case studies related to Moldova and Russia: the case studies of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia and the Baptist Community researched by Natalia Cojocaru and Ruslan Sintov from CIVIS and three case-studies on Anti-fa youth groups, DIY youth groups and neopagan youth groups in St Petersburg (Russia), conducted by Elena Omin cooperation with Hilary Pilkington from the University of Warwick, UK.

Two editions of this volume have been prepared as to reflect the needs of stakeholders. The volume will help to link up the research results and showcased studies with the description of overall project findings, relevant for national and EU policy making.

## **1. INTRODUCTION TO SOCIETY AND LIFESTYLES PROJECT**

### ***Project Focus***

The aim of the ‘Society and Lifestyles: Towards Enhancing Social Harmonisation through Knowledge of Subcultural Communities’ (SAL) project was to increase knowledge of the values and beliefs of (and attitudes towards) various subcultural groups, including lifestyle subcultures, different sub-groups inside the groups of ethnic minorities, and groups of new religious movements in a wide range of mainly EU-member Eastern and Central European states. The objective was to investigate subgroup differentiation, structures and processes, and to determine the level of tolerance and intolerance towards these various subgroups, whose non-conformity to mainstream social and/or religious norms is often perceived as posing a challenge to social harmonization.

### ***The Scope of the Research***

The SAL project focused on case studies of various subcultural groups (including drug-users, eco-villagers, hippies, punks, ‘Euro-Indians’, skinheads, members of criminal gangs and radical political parties/movements); on the relationship between members of prevailing religions and new religious groups, whether revived from the pre-communist era (ethnic neo-paganism) or exported from the West (e.g. Mormonism, neo-Hindu movements such as Hare Krishna and so on); and finally on the plight of certain ethnic minority groups (Gypsies/Roma and Muslims). The countries covered included the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia and Slovakia.

### ***Project Methodology***

The project took advantage of an interdisciplinary approach based on the methodologies of cultural/social anthropology, cultural studies and natural sciences. It was implemented by means of ethnographic fieldwork which focused on the in-depth participation by researchers in the groups under investigation. The purpose for this was to explore the meanings of the values originating from these groups and disseminating into the society-at-large.

## ***Main Project Findings***

The SAL project findings vary according to the countries and subgroups studied (lifestyle subcultures, new religious movements and ethnic minority groups). Only brief highlights will be provided here,<sup>1</sup> as a context for the recommendations below.

### *Lifestyle subcultures*

SAL research considered the adoption and adaptation of some western-style subcultural groups in Eastern Europe, and ways in which these groups articulated political positions. SAL research on skinheads in Lithuania explored their espousal of radical nationalist views, but also discovered evidence of police harassment as well as verbal and physical abuse from members of the public. Researchers also found that school teachers spread biased and misleading information about skinheads; this was often reinforced by the mass media.

SAL research among criminal gangs and radical, nationalist political groups in Kazan, Russia, showed that mass-media coverage promoted stereotypical views of these groups rather than an understanding of their motivation, leading to moral panics. However, not all subcultural groups experienced a negative reaction from society. For instance, SAL researchers in Slovakia investigated eco-villagers from Zajezova whose views were based on a rejection of modern urban consumer society. Our research showed that, over the last decade, they had succeeded in earning the respect of locals, mainly because of their ecological way of life. SAL researchers in Slovakia also found that Euro-Indians were well treated.

Outside the EU, tolerance towards subcultural diversity in Russia is under threat due to a proposed new law on the spiritual and moral upbringing of children currently being discussed in the Duma (parliament). This seeks to prohibit those studying in a state, municipal secondary or higher education institution from displaying clear signs of their membership of lifestyle subcultures such as Goths or punks.

Finally, SAL research in Russia also demonstrates that young people do not necessarily engage in negative, anti-social activity, but – as members of groups such as the Youth Human Rights Movement, the Network Against Racism and Intolerance, and the international ‘Memorial’ society – are actively participating in the democratic process by trying to combat racism, fascism and intolerance. Furthermore, while some SAL research

---

<sup>1</sup> For further details, see G. McKay, C. Williams, M. Goddard, N. Foxlee and E. Ramanauskaitė, eds., *Subcultures and New Religious Movements in Russia and East-Central Europe* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009, forthcoming).

in Estonia, Lithuania and Romania confirms the use of hip-hop as a culture of resistance which criticises dominant society, in contrast to stereotypical thinking regarding members of youth subcultures other young people involved in hip-hop and general leisure/party cultures are not opposed to society, but are actively interested in successfully integrating into it. Instead of society reacting to such subcultures with moral panics, where young people are alienated from society, other aspects of these subcultures can also be seen as part of a socialisation process for young people.

### *New Religious Movements*

In parts of the expanded EU, the media often misrepresent new religious movements of foreign origin as dangerous cults or sects who brainwash their recruits. SAL project research among members of the Hare Krishna movement in Lithuania and Moldova, for example, showed that attitudes varied, with some negative attitudes evident in Moldova despite the movement's charity work. In Lithuania, the situation was similar in 1995, but this has since changed, with high levels of tolerance prevailing today. However, some Hare Krishna members in Lithuania have suffered as a result of inconsistent interpretations of the law governing their activities. In Moldova, Hare Krishna members thought that it was best to keep quiet to avoid trouble from the state, while Hare Krishna members in Lithuania failed to declare their religious beliefs during job searches due to a sense of discrimination. Those in the Lithuanian Army also encountered intolerance because of Hare Krishna membership. Although not all new religious movements experienced negative attitudes, one of the biggest problems related to legal status and registration, which has been required for new religious movements in Russia since 1997 and Muslim and Indian-inspired new religious movements in Slovakia since 2007, to cite just two examples.

More generally, SAL research demonstrated the diversity not only of but also *within* so-called new religious movements, which might more usefully be considered as new religious phenomena. On the one hand, these ranged from ethnic neo-paganism with pre-communist roots and Indian-inspired organisations based in the West, to New Age spiritualities originating in Russia and a breakaway Orthodox Church in Moldova (Mitropolia Basarabia). On the other, neo-paganism could be rooted in traditional folklore and customs (as in the case of certain Baltic neo-pagan groups) or be part of a broader, ethnically exclusive and militaristic worldview (as in the case of some Russian skinheads and Cossack revivalist groups), while research into contemporary theosophy in Latvia revealed three distinct strands focusing on culture, education and extreme right-wing politics respectively. The question thus arises, not only of the degree of tolerance or intolerance shown *towards* so-called new religious movements in Eastern and Central

European countries, but also of the degree of tolerance or intolerance shown *by* certain of these indigenous movements towards certain other groups.

*Ethnic minority groups*

Research focused on the Muslim minority in Slovakia and the Gypsy/Roma community in Hungary. With regard to the former, SAL researchers discovered that, as a result of the impact of 9/11 and the fear of so-called 'religious extremism', Muslims and converts to Islam experienced ignorance, prejudice and different forms of open or latent intolerance from family, friends, colleagues and the mass media. Muslims experienced verbal and physical attacks, including the forceful removing of headscarves. As with some new religious movements, followers of the Islamic faith have had difficulties registering as an 'official church', resulting in Slovakia having no official mosque. In relation to Roma in Hungary, SAL research demonstrates that while Gypsy folklore is popular among Hungarian youth, Roma experience social exclusion, prejudice and problems in accessing education and the labour market, with the mainly Romugro population in northern and eastern Hungary in particular suffering from rural poverty.

## 2. CASE STUDIES FOR THE MOLDOVAN-LANGUAGE VOLUME

### RELIGIOUS ATTITUDES IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: CASE STUDIES OF THE METROPOLITAN CHURCH OF BESSARABIA AND THE BAPTIST COMMUNITY

Natalia Cojocaru and Ruslan Sintov

This chapter examines the history and the present-day status of two religious and cultural groups in the Republic of Moldova: the Baptist community and the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia.<sup>1</sup> The lifestyle of the two communities will be discussed in terms of their members' dominant values, beliefs, world-views and behaviour. We will analyse the specific nature of the communication and relationships both inside and outside the groups, as well as the attitudes towards them of government organizations, the media and other religious groups in Moldavia. As the MCB (Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia) has broken away from the MCM (Metropolitan Church of Moldova), we also consider the conflict between the two Churches from a historical perspective by assessing its nature and effects on both the believers and the general image of Orthodoxy. Our analysis is based on the principle of triangulation using quantitative and qualitative methods. In particular, we carried out in-depth interviews with a representative sample of members from the Baptist community and the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia from the Republic of Moldova, including both rural and urban areas.

The EU FP6 "Society and lifestyles" (SAL) project's questionnaire was adopted for data collection. The surveys were carried out in August –September 2007. In all, 156 believers of MCB and 148 believers of Baptist community were interviewed using a structured questionnaire with pre-coded answers and open-ended questions. The gender composition across the two groups was 42% of male and 58% of female respondents. The age of the respondents ranged from 13 to 80 years. In terms of ethnicity, 97% of the respondents from MCB were Moldovan/Romanians, while the Baptist community is represented by two major ethnic groups (53% of Moldovans/Romanians and 33% of Ukrainians). 55% of the respondents from both communities came from rural areas and 45% from urban areas. The topics covered by the surveys included: values, ideas, collective activities, image and identity, relationship with society, tensions and relations inside the groups and participation in the groups.

---

<sup>1</sup> Bessarabia is a Romanian historical region, which prior to the 19th century comprised the southern area of the territory between Prut and Nistru Rivers (Bugeac area), a component of the feudal state of Moldova. Since 1812 the entire territory between Prut and Nistru Rivers was part of the Russian empire, and was officially named *Bessarabia* and subjected to forced colonization, while the Romanian indigenous population was still a majority. In 1856 Russia retroceded some southern counties to Moldova (Romanian region), while in 1878 it reattached these areas. In 1917 the Democratic Moldovan Republic (Bessarabia) proclaimed its independence and in 1918 it rejoined Romania. In 1940 Bessarabia was occupied by USSR and became part of the Moldovan SSR. In 1941-1944 it was governed by Romania. In 1944 it became again a Soviet republic, which existed until 1991, when it declared its independence as a state of the Republic of Moldova (*Dicționarul enciclopedic ilustrat (Illustrated Encyclopaedic Dictionary, Cartier, Chișinău 1999)*).



## **Religion in Moldova: The Soviet legacy**

The Republic of Moldova is situated in the south-eastern part of Europe, and became independent on August 27, 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> During several decades of state-sponsored “militant atheism” drastic methods were used to suppress and prohibit any expression of religious life. Among these methods one finds the forcible destruction of monuments to saints and of religious houses, the liquidation of churches and the mass deportation to Siberia of religious people and believers of different confessions. Beginning in the 1960s, after the so-called “thaw”, a policy of “tolerant atheism” was promoted. It lasted until 1988-1989 when the process of democratization of society and the national renaissance was launched. The policy of repressing religious worship and persecuting believers was replaced by the attitude of a “peaceful coexistence” between the state and the church. The direct control of religious groups was carried out by the Council in charge of religious affairs within the Government, the structure that functioned until 1989. The legislation used to regulate the activity of religious groups, and their relation to the state was regulated through the Resolution on Religious Communities (1977). In 1981 the Government approved a special resolution which sanctioned the formation of commissions responsible for supervising religious life.

Despite the fact that the Soviet system had an official position of recognizing the activity of religious groups, by the end of 1980s, Moldova had officially recognized 7 types of churches<sup>3</sup>: the traditional Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church of Old Believers, the Roman Catholic Church, the Christian Evangelical Baptist Church, the Seventh Day Adventist Church, the Seventh Day Adventist “Reformation Movement”, and the Pentecostalists. Nevertheless, the restrictions on freedom of thought remained as strict as they had been before. People were spied on and persecuted including their dismissal from positions and firing from work because of their religious beliefs. The educational system was oriented against religion. Officials, at best, treated any expression of faith in God as a “remnant of the past” which had to be eliminated from society.

## **The impact of democratic transition on religion**

The process of democratization and the creation of conditions for the free expression of basic human rights in the Republic of Moldova was launched in the early 1990s and served as a means to accelerate the development and extension of religious life. This tendency was observed within the traditional Orthodox Church, which was the primary religious affiliation for the largest section of the population of Moldova (approximately 93% of the population is baptized orthodox), as well as within other churches too.

In comparison with the recent past, freedom of religion in the Republic of Moldova is demonstrated by the enormous increase in the number of officially recognized religious groups.

---

<sup>2</sup> Additional information about the Republic of Moldova could be found at [www.moldova.md](http://www.moldova.md)

<sup>3</sup> *National Human Development Report: Republic of Moldova 2000*, UNDP Moldova, 2000 at [http://www.undp.md/publications/doc/HUMAN\\_2000\\_PDF.pdf](http://www.undp.md/publications/doc/HUMAN_2000_PDF.pdf)

At the beginning of 2000, 8 confessions and 12 religious associations (congregations, organizations, etc.) were officially recognized, as shown in Table 1.

In addition, representatives of some unregistered religious movements are becoming active in the country with a lesser number of followers: the Unification Church (followers of Moon) officially counts approximately 30 members; Innocents (followers of Inochentie Levizorul) - about 300 members; the International Church of Christ - around 200 members; Students of the Bible - more than 1000 members.

In August 2007, 23 religious groups were active within the territory of the Republic of Moldova with a total of 2319 units (congregations, monasteries, theological institutions and missions). Religions with the largest number of units were the Metropolitan Church of Moldova (1281 units), Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia (309), Union of Christian Evangelical Baptist Churches (273), Jehovah’s Witnesses (162), Church of the Seventh Day Adventists (151), Pentecostal Church (40), Apostolic Administration of the Roman Catholic Church (33), Union of Free Christian Churches - Charismatic Cult (19) and Metropolitan of Russian Orthodox Church of Old Believers (15). Finally, the other ten religious groups had from 1 to 11 units, and the further four – no units.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 1 – The number of religious communities in the Republic of Moldova, 1985-2000**

Name of religious group	Number of units	
	1985 <sup>5</sup>	2000 <sup>6</sup>
Orthodox Church of Moldova (approved pursuant to the new democratic legislation on November 13, 1993)	201	1054
Pentecostal Church (officially recognized on February 8, 1993)	34	194
Metropolitan of Russian Orthodox Church of Old Believers (recognized on August 28, 1995)	11	17
Apostolic Administration of the Roman Catholic Church (recognized on July 19, 1994)	4	17
Union of Christian Evangelical Baptist Churches (recognized on May 2, 1995)	124	350
Church of the Seventh Day Adventists (recognized on July 22, 1993)	41	127
Church of Adventists “Reformation Movement” of the Seventh Day Adventists (recognized on July 19, 1994)	-	12
Federation of Jewish Congregations (recognized on June 9, 1994)	-	7
Jehovah’s Witnesses (recognized on July 27, 1994)	-	163
Metropolitan of Armenian Apostolic Church (recognized on	-	1

<sup>4</sup> ‘There are 23 religious cults active in the Republic of Moldova’, Timpul, Issue No.692, 22 August 2007. (Editors note: the term cult is being used in a very broad sense in Moldova and refers to religious groups as a whole not just to the type of “cults” referred to elsewhere in this NRM section of this volume)

<sup>5</sup> O. Isac “Evolution of religion as a factor of solidarity and social integration of people in the society” *Scientific annals of the State University of Moldova*, Chisinau 1999, p. 169

<sup>6</sup> *National Human Development Report: Republic of Moldova 2000*, UNDP Moldova, 2000 at [http://www.undp.md/publications/doc/HUMAN\\_2000\\_PDF.pdf](http://www.undp.md/publications/doc/HUMAN_2000_PDF.pdf)

December 5, 1995)		
Krishna Society (recognized on July 13, 1994)	-	4
Union of Communities of Moloccan Spiritual Christians (recognized on August 11, 1995)	-	2
Baha'i Cult (recognized on May 31, 1994)	-	6
Presbyterian "Church of Peace" (recognized on June 9, 1994)	-	1
New-Apostolic Church (recognized on December 27, 1994)	-	11
Union of Free Christian Churches - Charismatic Cult (recognized on May 17, 1997)	-	16
Church of the Last Testimony (recognized on February 24, 1997)	-	4
Bible Church (recognized on February 24, 1997)	-	1
Union of Congregations of Messianic Jews (recognized on September 1, 1999)	-	3
Evangelical-Lutheran Church (recognized on July 5, 1999)		1

The universal principle of freedom of thought is reflected in the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova. Article 31 guarantees freedom of thought and the autonomy of religious groups as well as their separation from the state. It guarantees their right to get organized according to their own statutes. It also stipulates that freedom of thought is to be manifest in the spirit of tolerance and reciprocal respect. Hostile demonstrations are forbidden in relations among religious groups. In line with the above, Article 35, paragraph 8 of the Constitution envisages that the state is to provide, within the law, freedom of religious education.

The basic normative law that regulates confessional activity and the state relations with the representatives of religious groups in the Republic of Moldova is the Law on Religious Practice (1992). It was drafted in compliance with the democratic principles of freedom of thought, expression and religion and stipulates the right of any person to freely express their own religion in any form, individually or in association, to promote this religion, to represent the group publicly or individually as long as its acts do not contradict the legislation in force (Art. 1). The Law stipulates that nobody can be persecuted for practising a religion or for lack of religious practice. Any activity carried out within a denomination recognized by the state cannot prevent anyone from obtaining and exercising civil and political rights (Art. 2). At the same time, by guaranteeing confessional freedom, the Law stipulates that a limit on the practice or non-practice of religion cannot be imposed (Art. 3). For the first time in the history of Moldova, citizens who cannot serve in the army due to confessional reasons have been granted the right to take up an alternative service (Art. 5). For a society with representatives of many confessions, significant importance is attached to Article 4 of the Law on Religious Practice which states that freedom of thought is to be manifested in the spirit of tolerance and reciprocal respect and that confessional intolerance, manifested through acts which impede the free exercise of any religious group recognized by the state, constitutes a crime and is to be punishable by law, according to the legislation.

Freedom of religion in the Republic of Moldova is present not only in the Constitution and legislation but also in the daily life of Moldovan society. Thus, in new conditions, at the beginning of the 21st century the continuity of the country's traditions is maintained alongside religious diversity.

At present, two Orthodox religious establishments are officially operational in Moldova: *the Metropolitan Church of Chisinau and of All Moldova*, canonically subject to the Moscow Patriarchate, and *the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia*, a canonical subject of the Romanian Patriarchate. In the context of the division of religious power in Moldova, relations between the two Metropolitan Churches are limited to conflicts, quarrels and mutual accusations. We shall now explore what the aforementioned changes mean to these two religious communities.

### **The Cultural and Religious Specificity of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia**

#### *The experience of the MCB in promoting Religious Tolerance*

The majority of believers in the Republic of Moldova are Christian Orthodox (93.3%)<sup>7</sup>. The country's historical and political background has facilitated the establishment of two distinct religious institutions – *the Metropolitan Church of Chisinau and All Moldova* and *the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia*, which are canonically subordinated to the Russian Parish and the Romanian Parish, respectively. In terms of the separation of religious powers in Moldova, the relationship between the two Metropolitan churches is limited to conflicts, quarrels and mutual accusations. Domestically, the MCB is often presented as disadvantaged compared to the MCM (in this respect, mention should be made of the observance of freedom of religious consciousness, the right to pray and to meet in sanctuaries, spoliation of properties etc.)<sup>8</sup>.

It should be mentioned that there are no differences in terms of the religious doctrine between the two Metropolitan Churches: in fact, the faith and expression of faith are identical. The only difference relates to the Christian liturgical calendar. Thus, some churches of the MCB observe both the 'Russian' liturgical calendar (religious holidays are celebrated using the 'old style' calendar), and the 'Romanian' liturgical calendar (religious holidays are celebrated using the 'new style' calendar), while churches of the MCM observe only 'old style' religious holidays.

Furthermore, believers do not generally perceive themselves as members of different religious groups (although there are cases of interpersonal conflicts on grounds of membership). The behaviour of parishioners, the values, image and identity of the groups to which they belong, communication with society are seldom due to the affiliation of 'other believers' to different Metropolitan Churches.

The atheist ideology of the previous communist regime was imposed very severely on the Republic of Moldova. During this period, church officials were subjected to imprisonment, deportation, forced labour, persecution, restrictions and constraints of all kinds. Some churches

---

<sup>7</sup> Statistical summary given in *Moldova in figures*, 2007, Chisinau 2007

<sup>8</sup> E. Tverdohleb, 'The Role of Religious Communities in Developing Inter-Ethnic Relations in the Republic of Moldova: Achievements and Problems', in *Religion and Democracy in Moldova*, Chişinău, 2005; I. Chifu, V. Cubreacov, M. Potoroacă., *Dreptul de proprietate al Mitropoliei Basarabiei și restituirea averilor bisericești (studiu asupra practicilor și legislației aplicabile în Republica Moldova)* (Property rights of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia and restitution of church property (A study on applicable practices and legislation in the Republic of Moldova), Alfa și Omega, Chişinău 2004 and A. Magola, 'The Problem of Bessarabian Metropolitan Church', in *Religion, Society and Education in Post-Totalitarian Societies of Central and South Eastern Europe*, Chişinău, 2000, p. 76

were demolished and others desecrated, by being used for other purposes (such as driving schools, sheds, gymnasiums, warehouses, restaurants and so on). Religious literature was burnt, religious educational institutions were closed, and believers were deprived of their right to express their faith<sup>9</sup>.

The collapse of communism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union enabled the gradual restoration of religious life. This has been manifested in greater religious freedom, the emergence of several confessions, the restoration of old churches and the building of new ones, and the revival of church attendance by believers. One of the most important events in the religious life in the Republic of Moldova was the reactivation of the MCB, the accession to it of more and more parishes, and the recognition of their legal right to operate.

The MCB was canonically founded in 1925, under the Romanian Patriarchate. Its operation was suspended after the arrival of the Soviet army in 1940-1944 and it was replaced by a new Metropolitan see under the Russian Patriarchate. The appointed hierarchs were of Russian ethnic origin. In 1992, shortly after the proclamation of independence of the Republic of Moldova, the MCB was reactivated. However, its official recognition and acceptance of its legality did not occur until much later on in 30 July 2002, due to international pressure. The cause of this delay was the non-acceptance of the MCB by the central and local authorities, and by the MCM.

To understand the reasons for this resistance we must take into account numerous historical, canonical, economic and political factors<sup>10</sup>. But according to one source:

The dispute between the two Metropolitan Churches active in the Republic of Moldova relates to the issue of canonical jurisdiction of the Patriarchates in Bucharest and Moscow over the section of Moldova between Prut and Nistru. Historically and nationally, the dispute started after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the establishment of the Republic of Moldova as an independent state, which enabled the Romanian Patriarchate to claim its canonical right for the new state, which has been part of historical Moldova, a Romanian territory over a number of centuries. This historical truth was and is still ignored by Russian ideologists and the Moldovan authorities who created and support the theory of existence of a Moldovan nation, speaking a Moldovan language, different from the Romanian nation and Romanian language. According to church canons, churches are established only on the basis of a people's ethnicity. Considering that Soviet ideology, inherited and currently promoted by Chisinau authorities, asserts that the Moldovan nation was established through a symbiosis between eastern Slavic tribes and Walachians, Moldovans are allegedly

---

<sup>9</sup> Grossu S., *Cu gândul la Basarabia (Thinking of Bessarabia)*, Museum, Chişinău 2003, pp.7, 8, 53; A. Pascaru, 'The Condition of Confessions in Societies in Transition', in *Religion, Society and Education in Post-Totalitarian Societies of Central and South Eastern Europe*, Chişinău, 2000, p. 68-69; L. Tihonov, *Politica statului sovietic față de cultele din RSSM (The Soviet State's Policy on cults in MSSR) (1944-1965)*, Chişinău 2004; L. Tihonov, *Marginalizarea Bisericii ortodoxe în perioada regimului totalitar comunist (Marginalisation of the Orthodox Church during the communist totalitarian regime). 1945-1965*, Chişinău 2000

<sup>10</sup> On these issues see Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia ([www.mitropoliabasarabiei.ro](http://www.mitropoliabasarabiei.ro)); S. Devetak, O. Sirbu O and S. Rogobete (ed.), *Religion and Democracy in Moldova*, Maribor-Chişinău, 2005; *Religion, Society and Education in Post-Totalitarian Societies of Central and South Eastern Europe*, Chişinău, 2000; S. Grossu, *Cu gândul la Basarabia /Thinking of Bessarabia/*, Museum, Chişinău 2003; Romanian Patriarchate, *Adevărul despre Mitropolia Basarabiei (The Truth about the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia)*, Bucureşti 2003

related to Russians, which enables the Russian Patriarchate to claim canonical subordination of the territory between Prut and Nistru Rivers. Economically, the two metropolitan churches have a dispute over their patrimony. Reactivation of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia has led to debates over the property rights of the Metropolitan Church of Moldova and, consequently, the right of the Moscow Patriarchate over ecclesiastic possessions in Moldova, since, upon its recognition, the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia requested the retrocession of the patrimony of the legal person that was its predecessor, the interwar institution with the same name. A key political factor is the intention of the Russian Federation to maintain its influence over the country between Prut and Nistru Rivers. The Metropolitan Church of Moldova is very well equipped for this purpose from spiritual and ideological perspectives. Its presence and authority, at least from the spiritual perspective, was damaged by the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia. Consequently, to protect its former privileged position in the Republic of Moldova, the Metropolitan Church of Moldova aims to politicise the canonical dispute and to prohibit the registration of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia. Its reactivation was interpreted by the Chisinau authorities as Romania's "interference in Moldova's domestic affairs".<sup>11</sup>

Magola mentions that the true reasons of the conflict between the Government of the Republic of Moldova and the MCB are political, namely that

the government aimed at keeping the orthodox believers subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate in order to maintain Russia's influence on the Republic of Moldova and to keep it away from Romania<sup>12</sup>

In 2004, the national law-enforcement authorities recognized the position of historical canonical and spiritual successor of the MCB (which was initially not entitled to recover its property) in relation to the eponymous institution from the interwar period. The issue of the succession of property rights was resolved by the European Court for Human Rights, which ruled that the MCB was entitled to claim the goods that belonged to it.

### *Image and identity*

Whereas 72.4% of respondents thought that MCB group membership was due to their rightful inheritance, 27.6% thought that this was not the case. There are several reasons why respondents chose to be part of MCB: firstly, they thought that MCB best met individual expectations (35.9%); secondly, they were influenced by parents/relatives (33.8%); thirdly, the MCB provided the best explanation of their faith in God (16.0%); fourthly, in this group respondents learned the truth about faith (7.7%); fifthly, the MCB emphasised national

---

<sup>11</sup> Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia ([www.mitropoliabasarabiei.ro](http://www.mitropoliabasarabiei.ro))

<sup>12</sup> A. Magola, 'The Source of Religious Conflicts in Moldovan Society', in *Religion and Democracy in Moldova*, Maribor-Chișinău, 2005, p. 374

(Romanian<sup>13</sup>) values and ideals (7.0%) and finally, other factors were highlighted which included: the fact that the priest gives good service, has a fair attitude towards people, misunderstandings with the clergy of the MCM, geographical proximity (i.e. it is the only church in the community), economic reasons (no taxes, low price for services/candles), this group seems to be more disciplined etc. (44.2%)

The vast majority of respondents no longer participate in other groups except the one they belong to (87.8%), and those who were involved in other groups specified the MCM (12.2%). The proportion of respondents who were members of other religious groups before joining the MCB and the proportion of those who were not members of other groups were almost equal (49.4% against 50.6%). All respondents who had previously belonged to other religious groups were members of the MCM. The most frequently reported reasons<sup>14</sup> that made them leave the group that belonged to the MCM were immoral principles and an improper attitude towards priests from the MCM, in contrast to the politeness, kindness and fairness in dealing with people and the dedication of priests of the MCB to their work; political reasons, namely the reluctance to honour the Russian Metropolitan Church, love and devotion to national (Romanian) values and other factors cf. geographical proximity, failure to fulfil spiritual needs, etc.

The categories of people who join the MCB vary. They belong to different age groups, come from different nationalities, possess different levels of education, have different social statuses etc. MCB churches are attended mostly by women, adults over thirty and the elderly. In terms of education, 'ordinary' people (peasants, rural inhabitants with low level of education) prevail in rural communities because there are fewer intellectuals in villages. Nevertheless, a growing number of intellectuals attending church was evident.

The most important constraint on joining a religious community is the membership of a different faith. People who, for some reason, joined other religious groups but in the meantime have reconsidered their decision and wish to return to the MCB, have to admit their sin, undergo a *penitence*<sup>15</sup> period to confess, take communion, gain the agreement and the blessing of the Metropolitan Church relating to the acceptance of people who were baptised for the second time (in some religious sects), by baptised and only then become members of the group again.

In most cases, the decision to go to a particular church is not based on its membership of a particular Metropolitan see, but rather on other factors. Thus, *proximity* is an important criterion in choosing which religious community to join: people go to a church which is closer to their house. Another important criterion is the behaviour of the *priest*, his attitude towards people and the way he conducts church services. Believers attach great importance to the *location* where services or other religious activities are held. At the time of writing (2008), many communities in

---

<sup>13</sup> If for some ethnic groups the spoken language is an ethnic identifier, this is not applicable to "Moldovans/Romanians" in the Republic of Moldova who speak the "Moldovan/Romanian" language. The fact that people in the Republic of Moldova speak the same language as people in Romania is not deemed to be sufficient in order to treat the majority of "Moldovans" as "Romanians". The historical-ethnic-religious composition of MCB is obvious. MCB supporters promote Romanism in the Republic of Moldova. (E. Tverdohle, 'The Role of Religious Communities in Developing Inter-Ethnic Relations in the Republic of Moldova: Achievements and Problems' in *Religion and Democracy in Moldova*, Chişinău, 2005, pp. 350-351)

<sup>14</sup> Based on in-depth interviews with 20 members of the MCB

<sup>15</sup> Penitence is a punishment administered by a priest to someone to make satisfaction for their sins and which consists mainly of abstinence and prayers.

Moldova have no churches. Therefore, believers' preferences are obvious when a divine service is held in a kindergarten, and in a wagon, at the same time.

In terms of attendance of the church, people are divided into two categories: those who attend the church regularly (on Sunday and on holidays) and those who only attend it occasionally. The highest level of attendance of Orthodox believers was noted during Lent, the Easter holidays, Christmas or the community's holiday. The majority of believers developed the custom of going to church especially/only during Lent or religious holidays.

The parishioners' dress code is characterised by decency, modesty, simplicity, lack of extravagance and vulgarity. Inside a church, women (especially those who are married) must keep their heads covered and wear clothes (skirt, dress, sun-dress, but no trousers or shorts) of a length that is 'below the knees'. Clothes must cover the body (it is not allowed to enter the church with uncovered shoulders (some respondents even reported insistent use of long sleeves), stomach or décolleté area). Women should also not have make-up. Men should not wear sports clothes or jewellery in the church. However, not all the churches comply with these requirements at present.

Another indicator which provides an indicator of the image and identity of communities refers to the most important symbols held by the group. For all Orthodox communities, the most important symbols are those of the Cross, Bible and church. What makes the Orthodox different here is the importance it attaches to icons. These are liturgical objects (not carved faces) which facilitate communication, interaction with God, Jesus Christ, the Mother of God, the Saints and the Apostles. They are perceived as images that help the believer overcome impersonal feeling while communicating with the divinity.)

Among the topics for discussion addressed in communities of the MCB, those with religious content obviously prevail. At the same time, they also discuss issues relating to aspects of social, political, and economic life in Moldova (such as poverty, labour force migration, the negative impact of migration on family relationships, the future of children left without one or both parents, youth problems, medical care assistance, rural infrastructure problems, the MCB – MCM conflict etc.), issues of management and organization of churches, problems faced by communities that have churches, etc. The subject of the tension between the two Orthodox religious structures of Moldova received the least attention (see Figure 1).

The Orthodox Church does not generally impose on parishioners any restrictions on interaction or communication with outsiders. Nobody is forbidden to come to church, although members of other confessions cannot enjoy the Sacraments of the Orthodox Church. If a person was baptized Orthodox, and then joined another confession and wants to return, he/she must undergo a penitence period in order to be accepted again.

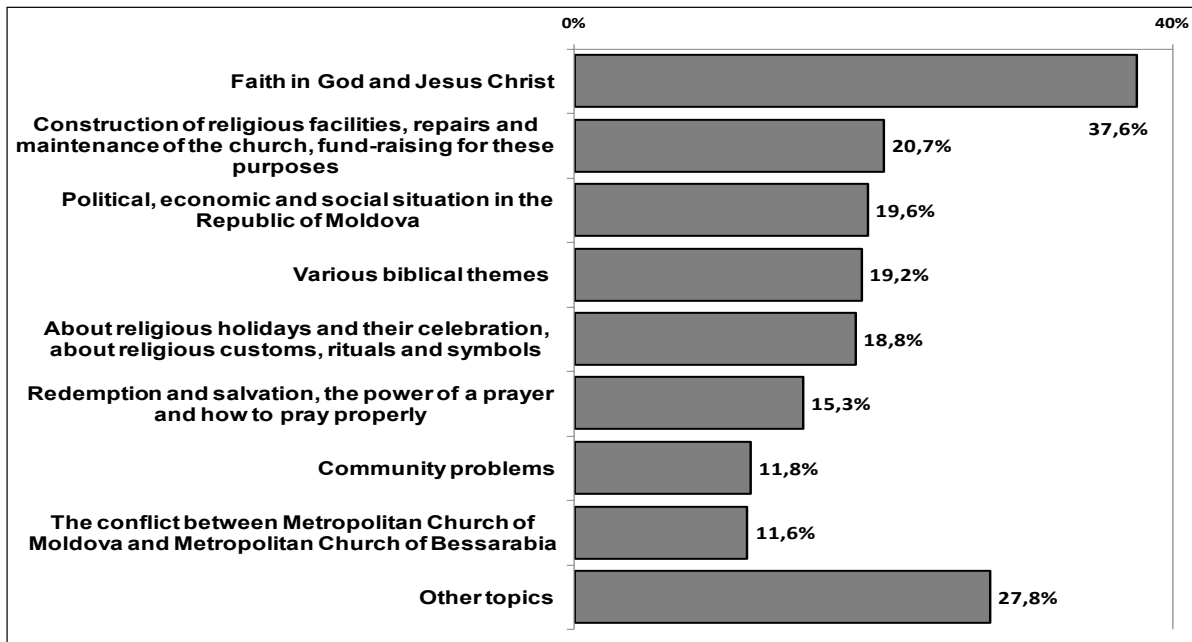
However, there are groups belonging to MCB which impose restrictions on their members regarding communication or interaction with representatives of other confessions (in particular sects). Since sects are known for their great power of conviction, it is widely believed that they impose their religious ideas, which is deemed to be wrong by the Orthodox Church.

In addition to the restrictions of communication/interaction with other people, there are also other restrictions relating to the behaviour of community members. In this case, there are also communities, which tolerate some 'violations' or 'vices' of the people and communities with higher requirements for behaviour of their members. The first argue that Orthodoxy differs from other confessions by not prohibiting anything. Religion warns about the negative effect of vices



or inappropriate behaviour, but it is up to individuals to choose the path that he/she wishes to follow. The restrictions on behaviour refer both to behaviour in the church (respect the priest, being quiet, not coming to church drunk, keeping to the proper dress code) as well as outside the church (people must not abuse alcohol, go to the bar on Saturday night and on Sunday, must not work on Sunday and on religious holidays, curse or lead an immoral and dissolute life etc.).<sup>16</sup>

**Figure 1: Topics discussed in the MCB communities (*multiple answers*) (in %)**  
Sample = 156 respondents



**Source:** CIVIS Centre survey as part of “Society and Lifestyles: Towards Enhancing Social Harmonization through Knowledge of Sub-cultural Communities” (hereafter SAL) project in Moldova, August-September 2007

#### *Communication with MCM, society and official representatives of governmental bodies*

Usually, the religious groups do not experience any internal tensions (87.8%); however certain divergences exist (12.2%). Disagreements within the group have, in general, an average intensity. The reasons for these contradictions are different: the financial and material problems the church faces, disagreements about the observance of certain customs and traditions, organizational problems, failure of parishioners to observe the remarks and canons set by the priest, as well as the conduct within the church, ‘weaknesses’ of some priests, etc. Another type of disagreement refers to the conflict between the MCM and the MCB. Thus, the decision of the church under the MCM to join the MCB sometimes creates tensions within the religious

<sup>16</sup> This conclusion and chapter is based on SAL related survey data, but these views are also valid for Moldovan Orthodox communities in general.

community they represent. These are conditioned by the scepticism or disagreement of the parishioners to adhere to another structure, considering it different in terms of manifestation of faith and religion. There are cases when group members leave the religious community they are part of, for various reasons.

According to the opinion of MCB believers the fact that makes it different from the MCM is its perception of history, identity and national values (especially in relation to Romanian or Moldovan identity of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova) and obedience, for this reason, to different eparchies. Relations between the MCB and the MCM have always been characterized by disagreements and tensions: firstly, there is the attitude of the MCM towards the MCB shows non-acceptance and a reluctance to resolve the dispute (via complaints to the Mayor, restrictions in obtaining the necessary documentation to build a church, letters to the investigating bodies, etc.); secondly, clergymen from the MCM calumniate the MCB and encourage Christians to take a negative stance against it, they put pressure on clergymen and the believers of the churches belonging to the MCB; thirdly, both state authorities and those of the MCM fail to acknowledge the essence of the MCB, inadequately interpreting its relation to the Romanian Church; fourthly there are tensions and disagreements between the clergymen under the two church structure and finally, there are struggles for sanctuaries (forced seizure the churches under the MCB by the MCM) and MCM clergymen of the MCM assert that differences of divine service officiating and style/ calendar distinctions exist.

**Table 2 – Reasons for leaving a MCB community (in %)**

Sample = 156 respondents

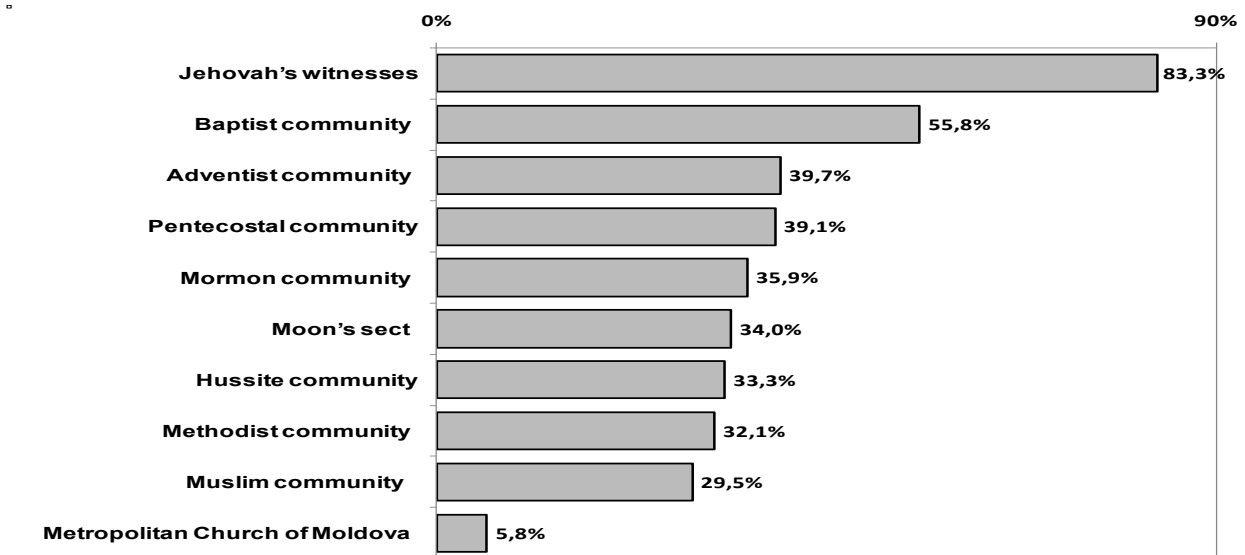
<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
Attracted by another religion (both from the doctrinal point of view and especially financial, materials support or promises)	55.3
Influenced by people from outside the group (have a weak character and give in to the pressures of other people; they don't know the real history and believe in calumnies about the MCB)	43.0
No longer want to observe the principles and rules of the group	9.6
Expectations not met	7.1
Dissatisfied with the affiliation to the group	6.3
Scared, threatened by police or face constraints at workplaces, mocked	3.1
other: leave to go abroad, disappointed by the priest's behaviour, join sects, priests unable to 'retain' believers, proximity of the church to home etc.	28.3

**Source:** CIVIS Centre survey as part of SAL project in Moldova, August-September 2007

At the same time, the MCM is the religious group with the smallest number of communities, which is not acceptable to the parishioners who attend churches of the MCB (see Figure 2). This proves once more that the conflict is beyond the minds of the majority of the parishioners, thus it counts less for the believers which Metropolitan Church the church they go praying to the Divine Force belongs.

**Figure 2: Which religious groups are not acceptable to you as a member of the Orthodox faith? (multiple answers) (in %)**

Sample = 156 respondents



**Source:** CIVIS Centre survey as part of SAL project in Moldova, August-September 2007

However, the MCM is not accepted due to the fact that it gets involved in politics in the religion, *splitting the believers into two parts*.

According to majority opinion, the ideas/world vision/attitudes of the religious groups of the MCB are not that different to the values of the society as a whole (63.5%). The individuals, in whose opinion these differences exist yet, referred to the following aspects (36.5%): Firstly, the fact that the church insists on meeting, primarily, spiritual requirements, however society is mostly preoccupied with satisfying material needs and carnal desires. The church criticises amoral behaviour, whilst society tolerates it. Secondly, the church imposes respect for their own institution (observance of rules and church canons), whilst society ignores attending church, tolerates the fact that people do not keep fasts, receive the Eucharist, adhere to religious holidays, worship on Sundays, neglect christening, worship icons and so forth. Thirdly, members of the group believe in God and are faithful to their religion, whilst in society faith often has a tendency to be less important or not important at all (in case of atheists). Fourthly, members of the group are often more kind and receptive to others' needs than society as a whole and finally, members of the group, unlike the general society, pay attention to national values.

There are cases when tensions and disagreements between the group and society, as result of the politicisation of the conflict between the MCB and MCM. Thus, we have localities *split into two adverse blocks*. According to some opinions, MCM clergymen of the MCM encourage ordinary people to go against the MCB and its fellows. At the same time, local and rayon<sup>17</sup> public administrations allow themselves to blaspheme against MCB churches via mockery, insults, non-acceptance, ignorance, rejection, failure to observe legal judgements, discrimination, etc.

<sup>17</sup> Rayon – refers to a territorial administrative unit of second level i.e. district

Communication with the official representatives of the governmental bodies is often difficult. Thus, 82.7% of the members of MCB communities faced problems related to (a) direct rejection of the group – 77.8%, (b) its denial – 62.9%, (c) discrimination (failure to register the parishes belonging to the MCB, not providing them with plots of land to build churches) – 60.4%, (d) ignoring of the group – 55.6%, (e) its erroneous/ wrong presentation – 48.1%, and (f) physical violence, firing or threatening them, trials, putting obstacles in the way of organizing different activities, illegal closure of churches in the localities, delay in building the church, calumny of priests, etc. – 40.7%.

### *Differences between the MCB and the MCM*

It is important to note here that a large proportion of MCB members consider that the sole distinction between it and the MCM relates its canonical affiliation to the Patriarchate of Romania rather than Russia. However, there are also those who explain the differences between them, not just in doctrinal terms. Thus they point to different perceptions of national values; the use of fees for officiating different divine services, imposed to the Christian parishioners by the churches or taxes levied by the MCM on churches (for blessing the parishes, quarterly taxes from the parishes, taxes for ordination, etc.). Furthermore the MCM is blamed for *megalomania* in its relations with the MCB and the MCB allegedly offers a better moral support to its parishes than the MCM. Finally, communication with the Metropolitan of Bessarabia is said to be easier than that with Metropolitan of Moldova.

During SAL surveys it was reported that there were cases when some priests renounced their membership of the MCM in favour of the MCB due to the support (spiritual rather than material and financial) provided by the latter. On the other hand, the MCM threatened to deprive priests of their parishes and of their right to serve as a priest (defrocking) if they moved to the MCB. Sometimes these threats achieved their goal and so priests give up the idea of joining the MCB, or returning to the MCM.

### **The conflict between MCB and MCM as reflected by the mass-media**

The mass-media in the Republic of Moldova has adopted two positions on the issue of the MCB: some support it whilst others are against its existence<sup>18</sup>. The former includes the press (for example, Flux, Glasul Națiunii, Cotidianul, Misionarul, Timpul, Țara etc.<sup>19</sup>), while those supporting the position of the MCM, include the national TV channel. The printed mass-media in favour of the MCB, abounds in information on its history and cases of discrimination based on the membership of this community on the part of various representatives of the public administrations at all levels, but also by the clergy of the MCM. These acts of injustice include the difficulties faced by parishes wishing to register in the MCB; the lack of a legislative framework consistent with the requirements submitted by the MCB after it was recognised as the

<sup>18</sup> 'It is difficult to find an article in the Romanian or Russian mass-media that would reflect impartially and objectively the actual situation regarding the general religious life in our country' (as posted on the web-site of the Centre for Strategic Monitoring and Analysis 'Moldova Noastră' [www.mdn.md](http://www.mdn.md) )

<sup>19</sup> For precise details see bibliography

successor of the homonym Orthodox institution before 1944; problems related to the implementation of laws regarding different issues of the MCB; intolerance, hostility, threats and even violence aimed at priests, but also parishioners joining the MCB; the application by authorities of a differentiated (negative) treatment of the MCB in comparison with other religious denominations in Moldova; calls made by the MCB to international organizations to solve problems that might, but are not always solved by national authorities, or are solved due to the prejudice of the MCB; the reactions of international bodies (e.g. Council of Europe, the European Court for Human Rights, etc.) regarding the conflict between the two metropolitan churches (and implicitly between authorities and the MCB) and finally the reactions and influence of the Russian Federation on the conflict between the two metropolitan churches.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See Preoții Mitropoliei Basarabiei, indignați de politica abuzivă a Departamentului de Stat pentru Culte (Priests of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia, indignant by the abusive policy of the State Department for Cults), Flux, 17 August 2007, p.2; Construcția unei biserici românești din Hâncești nu poate fi finisată (The construction of a Romanian Church in Hancesti cannot be completed), Flux, 9 February 2007, p.4; Preoții Mitropoliei Basarabiei alături de PF Daniel, Patriarhul Bisericii Ortodoxe Române (Priests of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia next to His Beatitude Daniel/, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church), Flux, 19 October 2007, p.1; Mitropolia Basarabiei, 15 ani de la reactivare (The Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia, 15 years since reactivation), Flux, 21 September 2007, p.4; ÎPS Petru Păduraru: PF Daniel nu va ceda niciodată în fața presiunilor rusești (His Holiness Petru Păduraru: His Beatitude Daniel will never give up to Russian pressures), Flux, 21 September 2007, p.4; Patriarhul, geopolitica și Mitropolia Basarabiei (The Patriarch, geopolitics and the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia), Flux, 10 August 2007, p.2; Biserica cu lacăte din Florești. Mitropolia Moldovei continuă presiunile asupra credincioșilor (A locked church in Florești. The Metropolitan Church of Moldova continues its pressures on believers), Flux, 1 June 2007, p.4; Mitropolia Moldovei a acaparat biserica „Acoperământul Maicii Domnului” din Florești (The Metropolitan Church of Moldova occupied the Church) Flux, 23 March 2007, p.4; Acțiunile îndreptate împotriva Mitropoliei Basarabiei sunt dirijate politic de către putere (Actions against the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia are politically orchestrated by authorities), Flux, 28 December 2007, p.2; Mitropolia Basarabiei răspunde atacurilor (The Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia responds to attacks), Flux 28 November 2006, p.1; 12 December 2006, p.1; 15 December 2006, p.4; Mitropolia Moldovei continuă presiunile (The Metropolitan Church of Moldova continues its pressures), Flux 24 November 2006, p.4; 21 November 2006, p.1; Autoritățile intervin în favoarea bisericii ruse (Authorities take action in favour of the Russian church), Flux 27 October 2006, p.2; Mitropolia Basarabiei, cea mai defavorizată biserică din Moldova (The Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia, the most disadvantaged church in Moldova), Flux, 4 August 2006, p.1; Mitropolia Basarabiei mizează pe sprijinul Consiliului Europei (The Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia relies on the support of the Council of Europe), Flux, 2 August 2006, p.1,2; Antonie Plămădeală: „Patriarhia Rusă – un URSS bisericesc” / Antonie Plămădeală: (The Russian Patriarchate – an ecclesiastical USSR), Flux 24 November, p.4; Poliția intervine în forță în problemele bisericești. MAI „nu știe nimic” despre isprăvile vicecomisarului de Orhei (Police applies force to solve church problems. MOI „knows nothing” about the deeds of the deputy commissioner of Orhei), Flux, 17 November 2006, p.2; Vandali în sutane: ortacii Episcopului Pentru Mustață au atacat în mod barbar parohia Ungheni, trecută recent în subordinea Mitropoliei Basarabiei (Vandals in cassocks: the supporters of the Bishop Petru Mustață committed a barbarian attack on the Ungheni parish, which has recently transferred in the subordination of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia), Flux, 10 November 2006, p.5; Serviciul Culte refuză să înregistreze opt parohii ale Mitropoliei Basarabiei (The Cults Service rejects the registration of eight parishes of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia), Flux 27 November 2006, p.1; Conflict la Florești: un preot face slujbă pe pragul bisericii, iar altul - în vestiarul unei școli (Conflict in Florești: a priest serves on the threshold of a church, and the other - in the cloakroom of a school), Timpul, 15 December 2005, no.321; În Postul Mare, poliția din Florești luptă cu Biserica (During Lent, the Florești police fights against a Church), Timpul, 27 March 2006, no.382; Preotul Ioan Ciuntu: „Primăriile blochează procedura de aderare la Mitropolia Basarabiei” (The priest Ioan Ciuntu: „Mayor’s offices block the procedure of accession to the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia”), Timpul, 27 October 2006, no.513; Damian G., Atac comunist

The mass media treats the issue of the two metropolitan churches mainly as a political one. Certain publications (for example, the newspaper *Moldova Suverană*) and TV shows are often accused of misinforming the population, aimed at deliberately spoiling the image of the MCB. With regard to the dispute between the two metropolitan churches, mass-media coverage focuses on the following issues: the involvement of believers in a conflict, which is primarily political; the decrease in the population's confidence in the Church as an institution; the deterioration in the image of Orthodoxy as a model for peaceful coexistence and deprivation of the right of membership/access of believers to the desired religion<sup>21</sup>

Competition between the two metropolitan churches has thus far made it impossible to address the issue of tolerance and dialogue between the parties involved in the conflict.

### **The Evangelical Baptist Community in the Republic of Moldova**

According to the most recent Census conducted in the Republic of Moldova in 2004, Baptists represented 1.0% (or 32,754) of believers who revealed their religious affiliation. The Baptist community is the largest minority religion in Moldova (the Orthodox population represents 93.3%, atheists or those without a religion 1.4% and 2.2% did not reveal their religious affiliation.

During the Soviet period there were 85 evangelical Baptist communities in the Republic of Moldova. Currently, there are approximately 500 established religious groups, 385 of which are officially registered communities. Their biggest concentration is in Balti (50 churches) and Chisinau (20 churches)<sup>22</sup>. During Soviet times, there were approximately 10,000 Baptists (disregarding children) in Moldova. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent liberalization of religion, the number of Baptist believers increased to approximately 11,000 adults [since 1991]. There have been large fluctuations in the number of believers because during the last eighteen years, most believers who emigrated from the Republic of Moldova went to the US.

---

la Mitropolia Basarabiei (A communist attack on the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia), Ziua, 4 December 2006, p.4; Deleu A., 10 ani de suferințe și batjocură (despre prigoana și calvarul la care au fost supuși Mitropolia Basarabiei și adeptii ei) (10 years of sufferings and mockery (about chase and calvary that was faced by the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia and its supporters), Flux, 14 December, 2001 p.9; Deleu A., Parohiile care au aderat la Mitropolia Basarabiei sunt persecutate (Parishes that acceded to the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia are persecuted), Flux 6 September 2002, p.4; Grosu A., Un nou val de represii împotriva preoților și enoriașilor Mitropoliei Basarabiei (A new wave of reprisals against priests and parishioners of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia), Flux, 23 October 2003, pp. 1, 3; Manole I., Comuniștii nu au de gând să înregistreze Mitropolia Basarabiei (Communists are not going to register the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia), Flux, 12 June 2002; Războiul moldovenesc al credinței și patrimoniului (Mitropolia Basarabiei) (Moldovan war over faith and patrimony (the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia), 18-19 October 2003, p. 2; Tanase C., Mitropolia Moldovei - aliatul ideologic al comuniștilor (The Metropolitan Church of Moldova – ideological ally of communists), Timpul, 24 May, 2002, p. 2; Proiectul de lege privind cultele defavorizează Mitropolia Basarabiei (Draft law on cults is disadvantageous for the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia), Țara, 19 December 2002, p. 1;

<sup>21</sup> For more details See bibliography

<sup>22</sup> Figures provided directly by the Union of Christian Evangelical Baptist Churches of Moldova to authors

During the Soviet period the Baptist community was a part of the Baptist Union of the USSR. Since 1995 it has been recognized by the Government of the Republic of Moldova as an autonomous community, being registered officially as the Union of Christian Evangelical Baptist Churches of Moldova.

In the context of the atheist ideology promoted by the communist regime, the Baptist community faced multiple and very different difficulties. The biggest problem was oppression, pursuit and persecution to which the baptism believers were subjected. To this should be added arrest, investigation, trial and imprisonment (in some cases even repeatedly), all having a religious substratum. Among the most frequent forms of discrimination were relating to jobs. The other difficulties members of Baptist communities faced included suspicion, mockery, insults, material restrictions, the imposition of state obligations such as loans and fines, threats (including exile in camps and even exile of Baptist ministers) and physical aggression. Even children from evangelical families have been victims of unfavourable circumstances such as being disgraced by teachers (in front of other children), underestimation of their knowledge and violations of their rights to higher education and work, etc. Baptist churches (in Moldova they are called *praying houses*) were closed and expropriated and it was forbidden to publish and distribute literature on religious themes.

The year 1989 brought a higher degree of liberty in the field of religion in general, represented by the acknowledgement of the importance of Christian values for society both by the population and government at all levels. The period of spiritual awakening was indicated by the new freedom of expression and religious sermons as well as by other actions (publication and distribution of literature on religious themes, attempts to attract people to churches, building evangelical churches, etc.) and most importantly, greater openness and willingness on the part of the people to participate in different religious events. In the context of increase in the number of Baptist believers<sup>23</sup> (see table 3), praying houses and rising attendance, a change of attitude in people outside the Baptist community with regard to their members, is also taking place with attitudes becoming more tolerant and friendlier.

**Table 3 – The number of Baptists communities in Moldova, 1991-2007**

Year	No. of churches	No. of believers
1991	130	11530
1994	220	16217
2001	331	21054
2002	342	21296
2003	345	21186
2004	357	21100
2005	369	21053
2006	373	20911
2007	385	20391

**Source:** Unpublished Union of Christian Evangelical Baptist Churches of Moldova data provided directly by the administration to the authors

<sup>23</sup> The number of Baptists increased until 2002. Since then the number of Baptists has decreased.

Table 3 above shows a continuous increase in the number of churches on the entire territory of the Republic of Moldova and a decrease since 2002 in the number of Baptist believers. The increase in the number of churches is due to the spiritual awakening after 1989 and higher religious freedom associated with this period. The number of evangelical Baptist believers is in continuous decline because of their emigration abroad, especially to the USA largely because of poverty.

Although after 1989 there were positive changes for Baptists, there were also some negative trends including material and financial difficulties, discrimination and the marginalization of the Baptists in comparison with Orthodox Church members; problems of 'image and credibility' of those members who established Baptist communities (especially in localities where until 1989 people did not know anything about them and where there were no followers of this confession). The Baptist cult was and is often confused with a sect (sometimes in a deliberate way).

For the majority of Baptist Christians, the religious group they are part of is a hereditary one (as they came from Baptist families) (64.2%).<sup>24</sup> The 'new' believers come mainly from the Orthodox religion. Most often the shift from Orthodoxy to baptism is explained by the fact that Baptist churches better satisfy individual interests and the spiritual, pious necessities of the believers. In this context, a special role is played by evangelical actions (missions) organized and carried out by Baptists. And, last but not least, is the importance of the Baptist community's image in society: ethical and moral behaviour, decent clothes, benevolent attitude towards people, etc, an issue we shall now explore.

#### *Image and identity: Why Moldovans become Baptists*

According to the CIVIS Centre surveys in Moldova, August-September 2007 as part of the project „Society and Lifestyles: Towards Enhancing Social Harmonization through Knowledge of Subcultural Communities”, a member of the Baptist community could be recognised, first of all, by their *clothes, hairdo and makeup* (decent, modest, simple clothing, without elements of extravagance or vulgarity, etc.; absence of jewellery; absence of make-up; decent hairdo and so on). It should be noted that there are communities which advise believers to buy cheap clothes, so that they can 'invest' money saved in the church or people in difficulty. The Baptists can be distinguished from people outside their community by a demanding attitude towards themselves, by a friendlier and gentler attitude towards people around them and by devotion towards Church and God.

These evangelical Baptist communities are composed of different categories of people from different social groups: from children to the elderly, from people with an education as well as the illiterate, from 'degenerate' people (alcoholic people, drug addicts, etc.) to people 'without vices', to people of different nationalities and of different religious confessions. At the same time, evangelical Baptist communities also attract people hoping to take advantage from membership by getting some help (financial and in-goods support, help in going abroad on religious grounds) and so forth.

There are various reasons why people in general or certain categories of people (women, poor people, young people and others) join evangelical Baptist communities. Answers to the

---

<sup>24</sup> SAL surveys in Moldova, August-September 2007



question “*What type of people join your community?*” revealed that some joined to find refuge from daily problems, from their sins; others were attracted because these communities are more receptive, more responsive or more open to the ‘*evangelical voice*’ (poor people, people in need, women, etc.); yet other sought peace of mind, love, reconciliation and support in these communities. It is also clear that people join religious groups because they are impressed by certain activities or services carried out by them. The Soviet regime educated people to be kind; therefore it is easier for older people to get nearer to the church and to hence, find those values. In the case of Baptists Moldovans were impressed by programs and services aimed at certain target groups – children, youngsters, students, women, families, elders, sick people, etc. However, young people and children are educated in another manner (more selfish and individualistic) and, therefore, these values might seem strange to them. But above all, people join these communities to meet their spiritual needs or are looking for a change and have nothing to lose. However as we get older our value orientations also change, thus these people show a greater interest in God and religion. They want to escape from the feeling of fear they have always had.

The most popular activity among members of Baptist communities are attending church (100%), studying the Bible (98.6%), discussing biblical themes (91.9%) and listening to sermons (90.5%). At the same time Baptist communities also get involved in other types of activities, such as building, repairing and cleaning the church, organizing Sunday schools and summer camps for children and youngsters, charitable activities, etc. (41.9%). These social activities are geared towards poor people and families, homeless children, orphans, children from socially vulnerable families (when parents consume alcohol, drugs or whose parents are in detention, etc.), the elderly, sick people, people wishing to ‘get rid of’ their vices and youth.

There are three main conditions to be met by those who want to become members of the group: to believe in God, to do penance (to acknowledge their sins, to ask forgiveness before God) and receive the holy baptisms. Members are also required to confirm with words and deeds that their life has changed since joining the community.

There are cases when the community imposes restrictions on people wishing to join the group. The most important one is affiliation to other religion. Another restriction is the age of people wanting to join. As the Baptist community baptize people when they are adults, children cannot become members earlier than a certain age (different religious groups perceive the age limit differently), however this fact does not prevent attending church. Other restrictions include political affiliation (with communists, for example), previous excommunication from other churches, some types of behaviour (smoking, use of alcohol, premarital sexual intercourse, adultery, aggression towards other people etc.) and the need for no debts, including unpaid state taxes.

The identity of a community can be defined by its symbols. Certain groups do not acknowledge any kind of symbols, considering them banned by the Bible. Other churches do not insist on symbols and do not forbid members to have an icon or to cross, considering that each church has the right to have its own symbol. The main symbols of the Baptist communities are: the Cross, the Bible, The Last Supper (communion), the Fish, the Baptism and the Pigeon.

Baptists own self-characterization and characterization of their communities is generally positive whereas for those outside, views are mainly negative, not on a personal member level,

but because they are a religious minority, treated as a sect. Baptist groups are blamed for attracting people into their community with the help material and financial means.

*Communication with religious groups with different values, lifestyles and visions*

Evangelical Baptist groups do not impose, in general, any type of restrictions on interaction/communication with other people; in some communities they even encourage doing this. However, they prefer avoiding relationships with people with amoral behaviour, of a manner contravening not only the Biblical Code, but also the law. Another type of restriction refers to marriage with persons of other religious confessions. Baptist churches address this issue differently with some Baptist communities not permitting people to marry people of other religious orientation or atheists, while others allow marriage to those of another confession, the single condition being that spouses should live according to Christian values. The third type of restriction relates to attending churches, which do not observe the Bible's requirements (religious sects) in order to avoid infiltration of false knowledge in the Baptist community.

Among the religious groups with different values and lifestyles, the Baptists communicate with, the Orthodox occupy the biggest share (80.5%) and 4.1% of the Baptists do not communicate with anyone but representatives of the evangelical Baptist community (see Figure 3, page 27). Opinions on relations with the Orthodox and catholic churches stem partly from *arrogance and superiority* which the leaders show for evangelical movements.

In the opinion of Baptist believers, the religious communities they belong to, exercise influence on the external environment (67.6%). This consists, to a great extent, in establishing some norms of behaviour according to their ethics. At the same time, influence is exercised by preaching from the Bible (76.0%), to which people very often respond with receptiveness. Society is particularly impressed by the charitable actions of the Baptist communities, activities in which children are involved (organization of concerts, contests, events, summer camps, etc.), are geared towards local well-being (territory sanitation, participation in building and repairing works of some social buildings and others), etc. (38.0%).

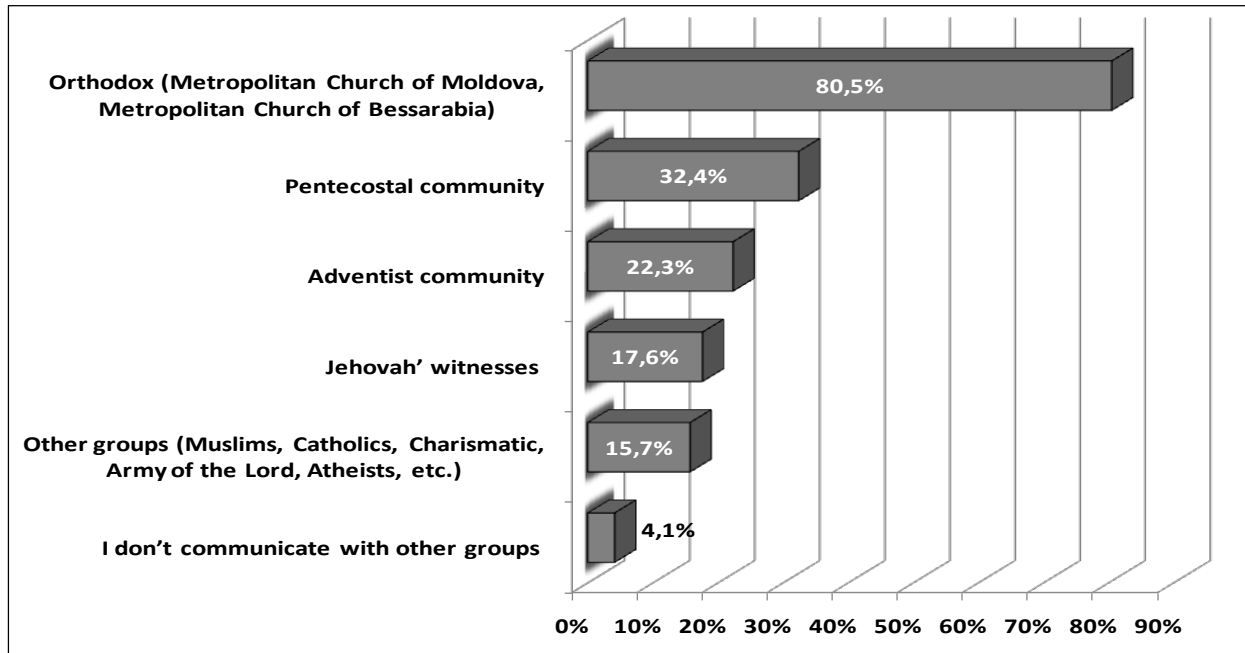
Another example of the influence of Baptist groups is the fact that Orthodox believers join evangelical communities because the Baptists meet *their expectations and spiritual necessities* more; Baptism offers a new model of life (more beautiful, more peaceful, more harmonious, guided by love and peace); there is superficiality in the representation of Orthodox religion; contradiction with the Bible's laws; of the inadequate behaviour and attitude of Orthodox priests and of other reasons including feeling no attraction for the Orthodox church (due to the *lack of communication, absence of love there*); the fact they some people feel the Orthodox church is corrupt; the introduction of fees for its services; proximity to the place they live; political reasons (the *MCM did not reproach the president of the state, when he said that Jesus was the first communist, I didn't want to be under the leadership of the Russian Metropolitan*), etc.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Results received on the basis of answers to the following questions: if you were a member of another religious community before joining the current community, what were the reasons that made you leave that community? Why did you choose to join namely the Baptists?

**Figure 3: Which groups with different values/lifestyles/ visions do you as members of Baptist communities communicate with personally? (multiple answers) (in %)**

Sample = 148 respondents



**Source:** CIVIS Centre survey as part of SAL project in Moldova, August-September 2007

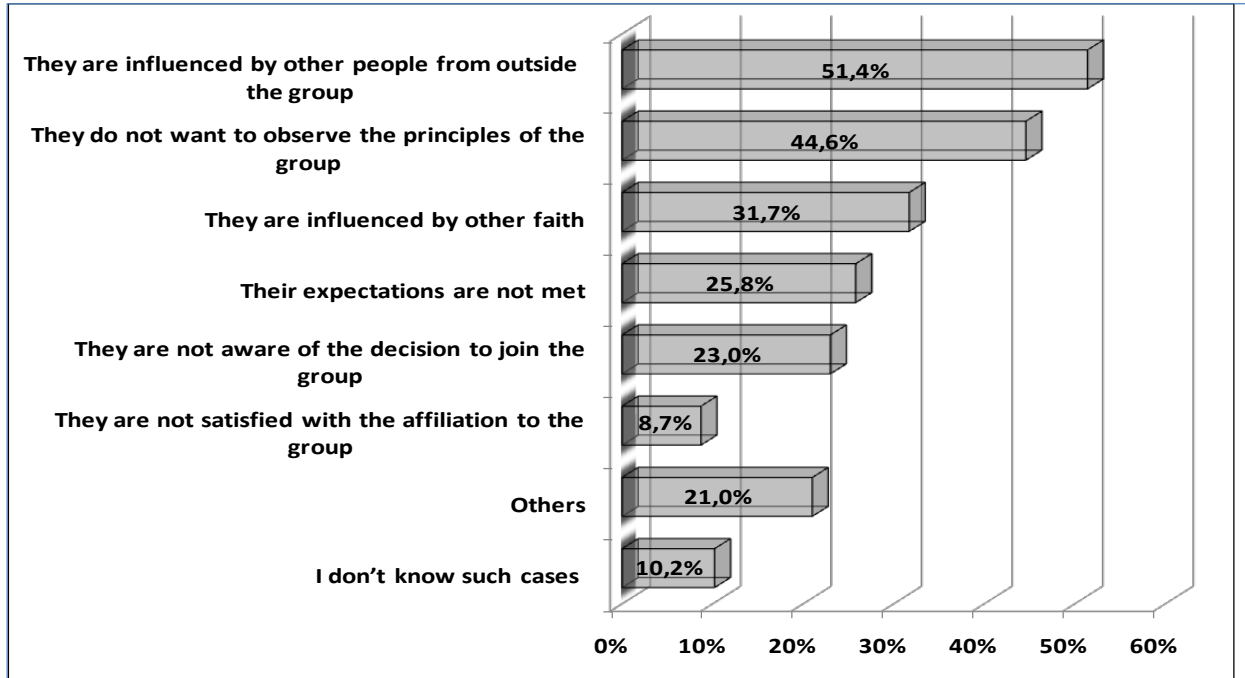
Although very rare, there are also certain tensions and different opinions within the Baptist communities. These are largely related to organizational and administrative issues. However, there are also instances of behavioural non-conformism by some community members leading to warnings, castigation, and in extreme cases, excommunication. In some cases, members themselves decide to leave for a variety of reasons (see Figure 4, page 28).

The influence of people from outside the group on decisions to leave is evident and includes the impact of close relatives (usually Orthodox) and the scepticism they show for non-Orthodox religious communities. In relation to not wishing to observe the principles of the group, this implies smoking, alcohol consumption, adultery, etc or possibly arises out of disagreement with church regulations or its ideology.

The influence of other religious groups (especially sects) is often the result of promises (of material or financial support) or via close relatives trying to get them to become members of these communities.

The other reasons community members leave are due to change in value orientations from spiritual towards material, the fact that feel superior to other members of the community, marry persons belonging to other religious confessions (and give up attending church in order to avoid family conflicts), move to another place/ leave to work abroad or because they are disappointed as they didn't receive the material or financial support they thought they would by becoming members of the community.

**Figure 4: In your opinion, why do people leave the Baptist community?**  
*(multiple answers)* (in %)  
 Sample no = 148 respondents



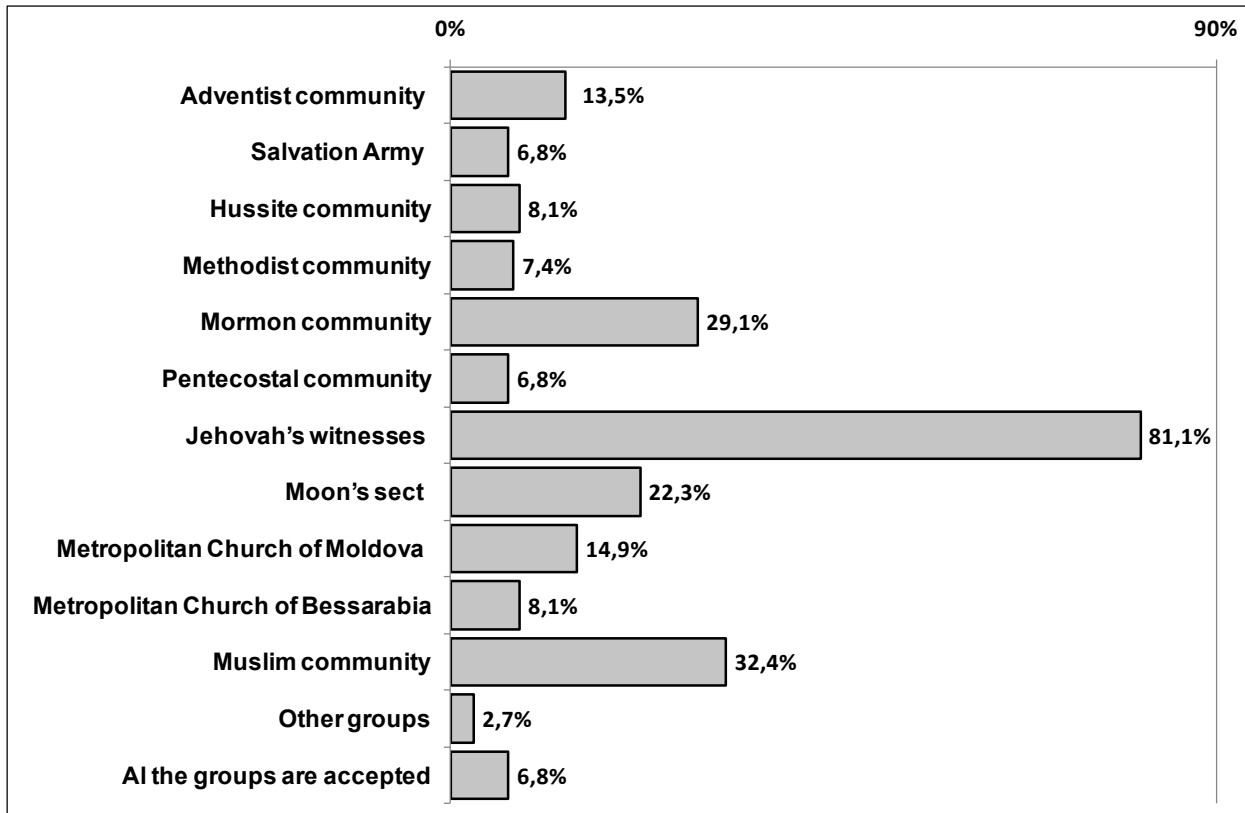
**Source:** CIVIS Centre survey as part of SAL project in Moldova, August-September 2007

#### *Misunderstandings and tension between Baptists and other religious communities*

Sometimes, there are disagreements/misunderstandings/tensions between the evangelical Baptist communities and other religious groups for two reasons: different understanding and interpretation of the religious doctrine and intolerance.

Thus, misunderstandings/disagreements between the evangelical Baptist movement and the **Orthodox** relate to the age when the believers can be baptised; worship of icons, crosses; baptism of the Orthodox without taking into account the religious' beliefs of those involved; the negative attitude which Orthodox priests have with regard to other confessions; ignorance of the Bible by Orthodox members; obstacles in burying members of the Baptist communities and finally in organizing and carrying out some charity work. In the case of tensions with **Jehovah's witnesses**, these refer especially to disagreement/ non-acceptance the Baptists show towards the religious doctrine of Jehovah's witnesses, but also to the alleged aggression with which the Jehovah's fellows impose their religious principles. According to the results of our survey, Jehovah's Witnesses represent the least acceptable religious group for Baptists. Thus, 81.1% of the respondents mentioned that this is the religious group they do not accept (see Figure 5, page 29).

**Figure 5: Which religious groups are not acceptable to you as Baptists?**  
 (multiple answers) (in %)  
 Sample = 148 respondents



**Source:** CIVIS Centre survey as part of SAL project in Moldova, August-September 2007

Half of the Baptist believers were unaware of the dispute between the two Metropolitan churches in Moldova outlined above. Some Baptists believe that the Orthodox Church does not fulfil its main function – to meet the spiritual requirements of its believers – and argue that the church is best in a single form, rather than divided into the MCB and MCM, and getting involved in politics, and drifting away from its main mission. At the same time, the positive attitude towards the MCB (sympathy, respect, friendliness) arises because it is undergoing similar difficulties – marginalization, discrimination in comparison to Baptists.

#### *Differences and tensions between Baptist values and values and Moldovan society*

Over half (50.7%) of Baptist believers consider that there are some tensions between them and society because people do not know: the specifics of the Baptist cult, considering it a sect; the Holy Scripture and, therefore, behave differently, have other concepts, attitudes, etc.; do not accept others religion than the one they believe in; because society accepts and tolerates some social phenomena considered as inadmissible and blamed by the Baptists (libertinage, homosexuality, premarital sexual intercourse, smoking, drugs, drinks, discotheques, etc.). The Baptists hope for eternal life and behave accordingly whilst society hopes in eternity, but does

not behave in a way worthy of it. Baptists encountered more negative than positive reactions: non-acceptance/ rejection of Baptists (50.0%), ignorance (33.1%), exclusion (8.1%) or other negative reactions (suspicion, envy, insults, hate, mockery, aggression, criticism, intolerance, obstacles in organizing different events, etc.) (21.0%). Among the positive reactions we should mention tolerance for the members of the Baptist community (33.8%) or other positive reactions (acceptance, satisfaction) (4.1%). The unofficial name used most often by the persons from outside the group to define the evangelical Baptist religious community and its members is *sectarians*. Other negative terms used include: *stund* or *stundist* (nicknames that would mean “saint”) *pietist*, *pagans*, *Pharisees*, *bacteria*, *non-believers*, *dark*, *abnormal*, *stupid*, *the cursed*, *fanatics*, *antichrists*, *strayed* etc.

In addition, 21.6% of the Baptist believers stated that they had encountered some difficulties in communication with governmental bodies and representatives, as a result of religious and/ or ideological discrimination against the evangelical Baptist communities; erroneous presentation of the group, often done on purpose; neglect and ignorance or direct rejection of the group. The biggest difficulties arose at the time of the establishment of churches (registration of the religious community, building the church, obtaining authorisation to build it) and during the organization of some public events/manifestations. However it is important to note that 78.4% of the Baptists did not encounter any communication problems with the official representatives of the governmental bodies with some Baptist communities supported by the authorities.

Various factors have impacted on the formation of the Baptist religious group including members recruitment strategy, the personal interest of people in evangelical teachings and the opening of a new cult building in the locality which always attracts new fellows.

Some have argued that lately the interest of people in spiritual and religious values has decreased and therefore it is now more difficult to attract people because they are more concerned with their material-financial wellbeing.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion it can be mentioned that the Moldova’s historical and political background facilitated the establishment of two distinct religious institutions – *the Metropolitan Church of Chisinau and All Moldova* and *the M Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia*, which are canonically subordinated to the Russian Parish and the Romanian Parish, respectively.

The existence of two different church systems in the context of the same religious doctrine defines specific relationships between them, mainly based on political reasons. To that end, reference should be made to the ongoing conflict in which the conflicting parties are: on one hand, the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia, and on the other hand, the Metropolitan Church of Moldova and the state.

Initially, the conflict was focused on the recognition of legality of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia, and later – on its claim for the church patrimony, which was seized, confiscated or nationalized in Soviet times. While the first problem was solved in favour of the MCB, the problem with patrimony remains unsolved. It should be noted that the official recognition of legality of the MCB was enforced by a decision of the ECHR.

In terms of separation of religious powers in the country, the MCB is often presented as disadvantaged compared to the MCM (to this end, we should recall the observance of the freedom of religious consciousness, the right to pray and to meet in sanctuaries, spoliation of properties etc.).

The settlement of dispute between the two metropolitan churches is/will be affected by the political orientation of the Moldovan state.

Among the other religious communities active in the Republic of Moldova, the Baptists are the most numerous religious group. They consider themselves more religious when compared to the Orthodox (the majority group) due to their regular attendance of church, thorough reading of the Bible and participation in group discussions about their readings, abstention from immoral behaviour etc. The doctrinal aspects of the Baptist ideology are very close to the Orthodox one, while the differences results from different interpretations of the Bible messages, observance/non-observance of certain religious rites, ways of administrating Christian sacraments. A Baptist's appearance is always modest, both in terms of clothing and hairdo. Women of this community (especially the married ones) wear kerchiefs and don't put on make-up. The Baptist community does not generally impose any restrictions on communication and interaction with outsiders, but, at the same time, discourages relationships with people with immoral behaviour. Some Baptist churches prohibit the marriage with persons of other religious confessions or with atheists. Another restriction refers to attendance of foreign (non-Baptist) churches. However, this restriction applies only to some churches. Communication with other religious communities, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, is very modest (this is an unacceptable group for most Baptists, especially due to the promotion and aggressive imposition by Jehovah's Witnesses of a deliberately erroneous religious doctrine). The attitude of the general public towards Baptists became more tolerant and more friendly over the last 15 years.

## References

Centre for Strategic Monitoring and Analysis 'Moldova Noastra' ([www.mdn.md](http://www.mdn.md))

Chifu I., Cubreacov V., Potoroacă M., *Dreptul de proprietate al Mitropoliei Basarabiei și restituirea averilor bisericesti (studiu asupra practicilor și legislației aplicabile în Republica Moldova)* (Property right of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia and restitution of church property (study on applicable practices and legislation in the Republic of Moldova)), Alfa și Omega, Chișinău 2004

Damian G., 'Atac comunist la Mitropolia Basarabiei' (A communist attack on the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia), *Ziua*, 4 December 2006, p.4,

Deleu A., '10 ani de suferințe și batjocură (despre prigoana și calvarul la care au fost supuși Mitropolia Basarabiei și adepții ei)', (10 years of suffering and mockery (about chase and calvary that was faced by the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia and its supporters), *Flux*, 14 December 2001, p.9

Deleu A., 'Parohiile care au aderat la Mitropolia Basarabiei sunt persecutate', (Parishes that acceded to the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia are persecuted) *Flux*, 6 September 2002, p.4,

Devetak S., Sirbu O., Rogobete S. (ed.), *Religion and Democracy in Moldova*, Maribor-Chisinau, 2005

- Goncear A., 'Biserica ortodoxă sub regimul communist' (Orthodox Church under the communist regime), *Misionarul*, May (No.4), 2004, p.6
- Grossu S., *Cu gândul la Basarabia* (Thinking of Bessarabia), Museum, Chişinău 2003
- Hachi Mihai 'The life style of people from the Republic of Moldova, Socio-geographic approach', Chisinau 2004 pp. 11-14
- Grosu A., 'Un nou val de represii împotriva preoţilor şi enoriaşilor Mitropoliei Basarabiei', (A new wave of reprisals against priests and parishioners of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia), *Flux*, 23 October 2001 pp. 1, 3
- Leancă M., 'Amintiri din ghearele balaurului roşu (deportările şi fărâdelegile regimului sovietic)', (Memories from the claws of the red dragon (deportations and unlawfulness of the Soviet regime)), *Glasul Naţiunii*, 10, 17 June 2004, p.7,
- Manole I., 'Comuniştii nu au de gând să înregistreze Mitropolia Basarabiei', (Communists are not going to register the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia), *Flux*, 12 June 2002
- Moraru A., 'Aşa a început sovietizarea' (This is how the Sovietisation started). Basarabia, 1945-1952, *Magazin istoric*, No. 6, 2007, pp.14-17
- Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia ([www.mitropoliabasarabiei.ro](http://www.mitropoliabasarabiei.ro))
- Moldova in figures*, Chisinau 2007
- Munteanu I., Mocanu G., Ioniţă V., Sinchevici I., '100 cele mai presante probleme ale Republicii Moldova în 2006 (studio de analiză)' (100 most serious problems of the Republic of Moldova in 2006: analytic study), Chisinau 2006
- Newspaper *Flux*: daily and Friday issues, 2001 – 2007
- Newspaper *Timpul*, 2002 - 2007
- Newspaper *Glasul Naţiunii*, 2004
- Newspaper *Cotidianul*, 2003
- Newspaper *Țara*, 2002
- 'Proiectul de lege privind cultele defavorizează Mitropolia Basarabiei' (Draft law on cults is disadvantageous for the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia), *Țara*, 19 December 2002, p.1
- 'Războiul moldovenesc al credinţei şi patrimoniului (Mitropolia Basarabiei)' (Moldovan war over faith and patrimony (the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia), *Cotidianul* 18-19 October 2003, p.2
- Religion, Society and Education in Post-Totalitarian Societies of Central and South Eastern Europe, Roundtable Discussion Materials*, (Association of Young Historians of Moldova, Soros Foundation Moldova, EAST EAST Program of the Open Society Institute Budapest) Chişinău, 26-28 October 2000
- Republicii Moldova în 2006* (studiu de analiză) (Republic of Moldova in 2006 (analytical study), Chişinău 2006
- Romanian Patriarchate, Adevărul despre Mitropolia Basarabiei* (The Truth about the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia), Bucureşti 2003
- Tanase C., 'Mitropolia Moldovei - aliatul ideologic al comuniştilor' (The Metropolitan Church of Moldova – ideological ally of communists), *Timpul*, 24 May 2002, p.7
- Tihonov L., *Politica statului sovietic faţă de cultele din RSSM* (Soviet State's Policy on cults in MSSR) (1944-1965), Chişinău 2004



Tihonov L., *Marginalizarea Bisericii ortodoxe în perioada regimului totalitar comunist* (Marginalisation of the Orthodox Church during the communist totalitarian regime). 1945-1965, Chişinău 2000

### 3. CASE STUDIES FOR THE RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE VOLUME

#### 3.1 ANTI-FA YOUTH GROUPS (SAINT-PETERSBURG)

Elena Omel'chenko, Hilary Pilkington, Yulia Andreeva

*Abstract:* The research enables the description of the (sub)cultural Anti-fa scene, an analysis of how participants enter and progress within the movement and the illumination of important aspects of interpersonal and group interactions. The research also reveals the emergence of new forms of Anti-fa solidarities and explains the meanings, logic and justification provided by members for radical Anti-fa actions. The further development of a youth Anti-fa movement is closely connected to the development of fascistic youth groups and will continue to develop in parallel with them.

#### **Introduction**

There is to date no academic literature on the Anti-fa movement in Russia; information in the public sphere is thus based on media reporting and commentary in which the Anti-fascist movement is often portrayed as an extremist organisation. Sometimes the alternative media attempt to present the movement from within and outline a more or less 'objective' interpretation of its members. Such attempts include an article in the newspaper *Russkii reporter* (see: [http://antifa-news.ya.ru/replies.xml?item\\_no=46&ncrnd=2656](http://antifa-news.ya.ru/replies.xml?item_no=46&ncrnd=2656)) and a series of documentary television programmes. Nonetheless this material lacks any scientifically based conclusions regarding the spontaneous formation of youth Anti-fa groups.<sup>1</sup>

The antifascist movement in Russia consists of informal youth groups calling themselves 'Anti-fa' as well as organisations such as the Youth Human Rights Movement (abbreviated in Russia as MPD), the Network against Racism and Intolerance, and the International society 'Memorial', which share anti-fascist ideas. The findings of the research for this case study are based on extensive qualitative data including interviews with young participants in Anti-fa groups and field observations in St Petersburg. The aim was not to map the whole anti-fascist movement in the city but to explore the specifics of youth protest as manifested by a particular network of anti-fascist activists. On the basis of the research for SAL, it has been possible to determine the political and cultural context and key characteristics in the development of the Anti-fa movement in St Petersburg. The research facilitated the description of the (sub)cultural Anti-fa scene, an analysis of how participants enter and progress within the movement and the illumination of important aspects of interpersonal and group interactions. The research also reveals the emergence of new forms of Anti-fa solidarities and explains the meanings, logic and justification provided by members for radical Anti-fa actions.

---

<sup>1</sup> The first academic study of the anti-fascist movement in contemporary Russia has been completed recently by Mischa Gabowitsch (Princeton University) based on research in a number of Russian provincial cities. A book based on this research is in preparation but not yet published.

## Methods

One period of six-weeks of fieldwork was conducted in Spring 2008. Access to the group was gained through existing contacts in St Petersburg and contacts provided by scene members in other cities. Prior to the commencement of fieldwork a survey of the media coverage and self-presentation of the groups (especially via the Internet) was conducted. This also facilitated initial contacts – for example in the case of the neo-pagan case study - through chat forums. In all cases snowballing was used to generate new respondents from contacts provided by key informants. The main methodological techniques employed for gathering data for these case studies were:

- web-site analysis;
- ethnographic observation;
- recorded interviews with respondents;
- researcher diaries;
- visual mappings of urban space used by the groups using still and video photography.

A total of 14 interviews and 1 fieldwork diary were analysed in this case study.

## Results

Young people use a wide range of means to make public their Anti-fa identity. These actions include those with strong socially normative associations (e.g. provision of help to vulnerable groups and ecological protection) as well as more contentious actions such as pickets, direct action against ideological enemies and graffiti actions which are often interpreted as anti-social.

- The internet is a very popular mode of activity as it provides the easiest way of opposing right-wing organisations; neo-fascist sites are hacked into and boneheads uncovered in forums and chats via provocative postings against fascists or, on the contrary, postings of a clearly fascist nature. The aim is to flush out Nazi-skins (either by penetrating the group or by challenging them to meet) and set them up for an Anti-fa attack.
- Also popular are Food Not Bombs actions as they are examples of direct action whose meaning is in the demonstration of the ineffectiveness of a state that prefers to spend money on arms rather than attending to social problems. Groups of young anti-fascists independently collect money to buy vegan foodstuffs and disposable crockery and utensils. Several people prepare the food at home and then take it to the place of the action - usually by train stations where the homeless often live. Leaflets are also handed out giving information about where the next action will be held.
- Graffiti actions usually consist of the painting over of fascist slogans and symbols in entrance ways, on walls and fences and along railway lines. Anti-fa symbols are also drawn, however, using their own, hand-made stencils or stencil templates found on the Internet. Graffiti actions are organised quite often as they are one of the simplest ways of getting involved in direct Anti-fa actions. Sticker actions take place in public places (metro, public transport) and have an informational character. The stickers can also be found in the internet and virtually every Anti-fa activist has his/her own archive of sticker pictures and templates. In additional sticker pictures are drawn independently in the form of neo-Nazi caricatures. Sticker actions are undertaken by small groups of Anti-fa activists (3-4 people) who place

the stickers on already existing advertising materials so as not to damage public transport carriages.

- Meetings and pickets are organised generally on squares or in places where large numbers of people gather. These meetings and pickets usually have an animal, ecological or anti-military character and are linked to some concrete event, incident or fact.
- Military actions are radical direct actions. The Anti-fa organises 'patrols' that gather usually by the metro and follow the flows of people coming and going. Having picked out a 'bonehead', or group of boneheads, they mount surprise attacks on them. Usually it is only Anti-fa skinheads and football hooligans who engage in these fights – ordinary young people are involved in such actions only in the role of scouts, looking out for victims or warning the Anti-fa of the presence of police.

Relations with law-enforcement organs are rather complicated and ambivalent. According to many informants the Anti-fa is treated as a dangerous subculture and their appearance alone (baggy trousers, Anti-fa badges, rapper caps, yashmak scarves, nose piercings etc) is enough to get them stopped and their papers checked. Many key figures in the Anti-fa scene are convinced that many policemen are Nazi-skinhead sympathisers:

...the police are cadets and there is a section of cadets who fully approve of such things because after work they themselves mix with those people (Nazi-skinheads). Another section just don't want to create additional problems for themselves, it's easier to walk away, turn their backs, as they have done many times when I have been there... (A., 22 years old).

In public discourse the Anti-fa is almost always associated with acts of hooliganism. Informants stated that often no distinction was made between them and fascist youth groups:

...in Petersburg there is a programme to promote tolerance and counter xenophobia and racism... everyday tens of thousands of people see on the streets these posters like 'Petersburg – a city without racism' or 'the capital of the family of nations' but this doesn't concern anybody. But we were like doing a graffiti action... and it happened that in one archway I was writing 'Skinheads against racism' in Russian, like, and this woman turns into the archway, about 40 years old, typical market dress, and starts squealing wildly at me that like I am worse than the skinheads, and I should get out of there before she called the police. So what can you do with these people? You could give these people 500 newspapers, 1000 leaflets, put the same speech on the television saying racism or fascism is bad 700 times- they wouldn't give a damn because they are only bothered about themselves... (M., 21 years old)

**Intragroup relations**

The Anti-fa scene is extremely heterogeneous; people within it often have completely opposed political, subcultural, stylistic and other preferences and interests. It ranges from aggressive Anti-fa-crews to intellectual anarchists, from anti-military activists to aggressive hooligans. They range from 15 to 35 years of age and include those into music including punk rock, ska-punk and hard core. In terms of political preferences, the Anti-fa include liberals, social democrats, communists, anarchists and even those who have no political conviction or consciously reject politics. All, however, are people with a particular view of the world and who are, to some degree or other, ideologically grounded. Subculturally Anti-fa includes punks (anarcho-punks, 'cultural' punks, Goth punks), skinheads ['Rash' (Red and anarchist) skins, Sharps (Skinheads against racial prejudice) and Trads (Traditional skinheads)], football hooligans, rappers and those who call themselves 'civilians' i.e. ordinary people without any subcultural affiliation. In terms of lifestyles, among the Anti-fa one finds DIYers, straight-edgers and vegans.

Thus antifascism is best understood as a set of ideas around which young people, often with relatively different views, unite at least temporarily.

... antifascism incorporates all kinds of different ideas, that is someone may be an anarchist, someone else a patriot, someone else a vegan... or vegetarian, someone else simply has musical interests, someone else is into communism or Trotskyism, there could even be Hare Krishnas... (M. 21 years old)

For most youthful Anti-fa groups the meaning of their activism is not only in winning space (real and virtual) but in active cultural opposition:

... the rivalry between the Fa [fascists] and the Anti-fa is like the rivalry between two football teams. Whichever team wins over a certain period of time then that team will get more and more fans... (M. 21 years old)

Nobody came and said they would teach us how to be anti-fascists, nothing like that, it was just that mixing in punk rock circles led to us notice the behaviour of the extreme right at all kinds of concerts. It became clearer and clearer that those people were actively... damaging the punk movement and nobody was doing anything. So we wanted to do something to stop these people being at the concerts, on the streets... (M., 21 years old)

The question of the use of force remains the most contentious question in relations between the various strands of young people within Anti-fa groups. Justification of the use of violence towards Nazi-skinheads rests on arguments that 'otherwise they don't understand' or as a counter demonstration of force:

If we kick somebody, then, first of all, he will get back into the swing, to put it crudely, only after some time and in the meantime he won't be doing anything to anybody. Secondly he might get frightened off and the next time they go somewhere, he'll say 'I've got to pick up my Mum from the station' or something and simply won't go. That's what we count on. (V., 24 years old)

**Views, beliefs and ideology**

Notwithstanding the actively declared 'political' context, therefore, it is actually cultural opposition which is the key factor in the development of the Petersburg anti-fascist scene since it began to form as a response to the cultural activity of fascist groups. In this sense the Anti-fa groups are unique since as a rule 'traditional' subcultural movements are specific projects in the sense that their formation does not require a counterculture against which the movement develops. But for the Anti-fa movement the opposition is self-evident: you are either 'Fa' or 'Anti-fa'. For this reason at least a section of the youth Anti-fa groups can be considered a kind of collective resistance to the 'boneheads' who are, according to many informants, just former local thugs (*gopniki*):

The majority of them (Nazi-skinheads) were local thugs, they had no great ideology and what they had was enough for them. Their whole ideology was 'I hate those who are not like me' starting with foreigners with a different skin colour and shape of eye, and ending with friends who just dressed differently, like punks. (A, 22 years old)

Currently Anti-fa groups are in a state of transformation and this is reflected first and foremost in their attempts to think through their own understanding of anti-fascist ideas. In some cases their reinterpretations lead to the broadening of the philosophy to mean opposition to all kinds of discriminatory practices including racism, Nazism, anti-Semitism, capitalism and all forms of discrimination (and not only against people but also against animals). And in these groups no initial subcultural solidarity is necessary; one can be an anti-fascist and nothing else. Nevertheless the further development of a youth Anti-fa movement is closely connected to the development of fascistic youth groups and will continue to develop in parallel with them.

**Conclusions**

The Anti-fa scene is an unusual subcultural grouping in that its formation was largely as a response – a cultural opposition - to the cultural activity of fascist groups. Perhaps for this reason, it is an extremely heterogeneous scene which includes individuals with often completely opposed political, subcultural, stylistic and other preferences and interests ranging from aggressive Anti-fa-crews to intellectual anarchists, from anti-military activists to aggressive hooligans. The preference for different kinds of action is a particular source of tension within the scene. Thus antifascism is best understood as a set of ideas around which young people, often with relatively different views, unite at least temporarily and whose future development will run very much in parallel to the development of the extreme right-wing (fascist) youth movement..

**References**

- Hesmondhalgh, D. (2005). 'Subcultures, scenes or tribes? None of the above', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 8 (1): 21-40.
- Moscow Bureau for Human Rights (nd). *Kratkii obzor proivlenii agressivnoi ksenofobii na territorii Rossiiskoi Federatsii v 2007*, accessed online [http://www.antirasizm.ru/publ.php\\_on\\_4th\\_November\\_2008](http://www.antirasizm.ru/publ.php_on_4th_November_2008).

### 3.2 DIY YOUTH GROUPS (SAINT-PETERSBURG)

Elena Omel'chenko, Hilary Pilkington, Irina Kosterina

*Abstract:* This research considers the key actors and principles constituting the DIY-scene in St Petersburg. It traces the importance of independent production, anti-commercialisation, anti consumerism and creative self-realisation to the scene. It pays particular attention to the exploration of the diversity of young people involved in DIY scenes in the city and the evidence of differing narratives of DIY culture between musicians and activists within it.

#### **Introduction**

In a series of publications Ol'ga Aksiutina (2005b) considers 'DIY-culture projects and DIY cultures themselves... as free zones for everyday alternative life'. She argues that 'DIY punk culture is not a mass culture; it does not use means of *mass* information to disseminate itself and does not seek to win a "*mass*" audience, but directly relates to punks and hard-core kids in small venues (not stadia). Punk resists the massive transnational companies preferring small independent labels, avoids buying in expensive supermarkets by accessing products via post or at concerts (via direct contact between bands and the audience), replaces glossy music magazines with self-produced fanzines and replaces music as a commodity with music as protest and self-expression, ignoring the media with its system of "hits" and "charts"' (Aksiutina 2004). In similar vein Zaitseva (2004) argues that 'every DIY enterprise is vulnerable but the lack of interest in profit continues to be reproduced as a result of the whole system of collective action which has a central position in the musical world in which DIY labels often become "laboratories" of style and movements as well as starting points for groups on the path to wider recognition. And despite frequent claims that "any music can become commercial", it is precisely the productive illusion of a "pure" and non-profit oriented musical process that ensures both artistic innovation and an alternative to the capitalist mode of production and consumption'. Without wishing to deny the roots of DIY culture in resistance, nonetheless the material from St Petersburg gathered under the auspices of the SAL project allows a more balanced insight into such scenes than hitherto captured in published literature. In particular the research allowed the exploration of the diversity of young people involved in DIY scenes in the city and thus also the discovery of differing narratives of DIY culture between musicians and activists within it.

#### **Methods**

One period of six-weeks of fieldwork was conducted in Spring 2008. Access to the group was gained through existing contacts in St Petersburg and contacts provided by scene members in other cities. Prior to the commencement of fieldwork a survey of the media coverage and self-presentation of the groups (especially via the Internet) was conducted. This also facilitated initial contacts – for example in the case of the neo-pagan case study - through chat forums. In all cases snowballing was used to generate new respondents from contacts provided by key informants. The main methodological techniques employed for gathering data for these case studies were:

- web-site analysis;

- ethnographic observation;
- recorded interviews with respondents;
- researcher diaries;
- visual mappings of urban space used by the groups using still and video photography.

A total of 9 interviews and 1 fieldwork diary were analysed in this case study.

## **Results**

Within the punk community there is an image of ‘authentic’ and ‘inauthentic’ punks. ‘Inauthentic’ punks include those associated with the 1980s and 1990s who are often referred to as ‘dirty-punks’ and seen as adopting only the external attributes of punk and realising the idea of protest through anti-social demonstrative behaviour, alcoholism etc. From around 2000 there appeared a new generation of punks who can be seen as more politicized and for whom external appearance is of relatively minor importance. They consider views and behaviour - real protest against social injustice and capitalist values - to be the most important thing. This leads to conflict between punks of the old and new type:

Interviewer: Are there no conflicts between punks like you and those who [were around] before...?

Respondent: Well there are... They make out that I, my friends – are not punks, but rather they are the real punks because they are dirty, drunk etc. And that we are like some show-off rich kids, as they see it. They are known as ‘decorative’ punks... But even so, they are not punk. They don’t do anything... They buy all kinds of things, go to shops where they sell Nazi paraphernalia and so on, all kinds of cheap T-shirts and so on and think they are punks, get drunk and that’s it. (Punk musician, 22 years old)

At the same time people sharing the same values and views and communicating on one wavelength can quickly find a common language. The practice of ‘signing in’ i.e. getting in to concerts free (by being on a list of invitees) or staying overnight at somebody’s, helps them travel and attend concerts. These principles of mutual support and assistance are a kind of social and economic resource ensuring the stability and viability of the punk community.

Important also is the use of informational resources about which only people incorporated into punk practice know. This is information about closed internet portals, forums, specialised shops and trading points where it is possible to buy music and subcultural products and obtain information about actions (events, meetings, protests) and future concerts. Access to such resources saves time and money.

### ***Group-society relations***

The ideas of equality and non-discrimination in the sphere of culture, music and information are extrapolated by informants into an ideology of anti-discrimination action and views such as the protest against racism, xenophobia and homophobia and the protection of animals:

If you extend the idea of equality, then naturally equality means opposition to all kinds of discrimination, oppression and so on. It is against prejudices related to race or



nationality, against racism, homophobia and everything connected to it. The support of animal rights also, naturally, the equality of rights between people and animals, and the support of all liberatory discourses. (Punk, fanzine producer, 29 years old)

In some cases this expresses itself in veganism, straight-edge culture, the organisation of participation in various actions such as the defence of human rights, environmental protection, and anti-fascist and anti-globalization (Food Not Bombs) actions when vegetarian food is distributed free of charge to the needy.

In the case study undertaken in this research the ideas of the DIY-punk movement and the anti-fascist movement were closely interwoven since non-discrimination assumes an anti-fascist position. For this reason some informants identified as anti-fascists and participated in related protest and violent actions.

Attending DIY and hard core concerts and the use of DIY symbols places a certain responsibility on young people since these signs can be interpreted by hostile Nazi-skinheads as a sign of anti-fascist views:

If they see some badge being worn by someone, they go 'Aha, so you're Anti-fa'. And that's it, they jump on you. They can kill you without blinking. They don't bother to find out what or who you are. The most dangerous thing is all these (cloth) DIY badges – I mean you might not be an anti-fascist at all but simply somebody who has bought a badge and worn it. I mean you just liked this group and you went to a hardcore concert. But you could get yourself killed just for that. They won't bother to find out. (Punk, musician, 23 years old).

### ***Views, beliefs and ideology***

DIY stands for Do It Yourself and is part of the ideology and practice of many youth cultures. It is one of the main principles within punk culture since it is linked to the idea of social protest against globalization and mass culture. For example there is a widespread practice of creating independent music labels and distribution companies and producing newspapers and specialised journals (fanzines). Of all the manifestations of punk DIY, the production of fanzines has become the most widespread in the post-Soviet space (especially at the end of the 1990s, beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century). To create a fanzine one does not need a huge sum of money; instead of publishing a huge run, one original can be printed and then photocopied as orders come in. Usually fanzines are produced at the creator's own expense and sold for cost-price. The average price of a fanzine is 50 roubles. There are also individuals who make and sell music-related and subcultural paraphernalia: T-shirts, cloth and metal badges and banners. But such DIY-products are produced not in their millions but in tens or 100s which indicates the 'non-mass' nature of this phenomenon.

The DIY 'ethic' assumes that the income from the sale of punk or hardcore production is put towards the development of the local scene and not personal enrichment. Thus the money generated by cultural production as a rule goes towards production and distribution labels and is used, for example, for the next releases. Punk production is distributed primarily through exchange. Exchanges take place between labels in different cities and countries. The main forms of

distribution of punk artefacts are mail order or purchase at concerts. In both cases this assumes not only consumption but also communication and moves relations between ‘buyer’ and ‘seller’ onto a personal level. At the same time the notion that ‘you can’t buy punk recordings at the nearest rock shop’ creates an important sense of exclusivity about this production.

Apart from its consumption function, these practices also carry the meanings of protest within punk; representatives of the punk-DIY culture believe that the ability to do everything yourself, and thus bypass consumer society, has a subversive function. Thus DIY-culture embodies the following qualities: independent production; independence; anti-commercialisation and anti consumerism; creativity; self-realisation; the creation of one’s own culture; communication; enthusiasm; mutual support; joy of creativity; honesty; interest/engagement.

The main political idea of the group is equality and non-discrimination, the recognition of freedom of expression and the rejection of hierarchy and control:

To my mind, punk is a youth – and now not even that youthful - culture based on ideas of equality. The idea is that, in relation to music for example, the boundary between the listener and those on stage is blurred. If three people are playing on the stage, then [when they finish] they come down into the room and listen to the next group. It’s the same with fanzines – there again the boundary between those who make [fanzines] and those who read them is erased, yeah, so that today you read a zine, tomorrow you make your own one. You see. And... that, in my opinion, is the punk idea. And when there are concerts, not in clubs, not in some... but in places like clubs or bars but independent, then often they organise them in sports halls or cafeterias – in places where there are no stages. And so the listeners and the musicians are all on the same level. That’s like, the punk idea, that’s an important part of what it’s all about. (Punk, fanzine producer, 29 years)

Many punks also share anarchist ideas and are members of political communities. A separate practice is squatting, that is the occupation of empty buildings in the city where life is constructed according to the principle of the commune.

## Conclusions

DIY-culture in Russia has been studied to date primarily through ‘insider’ accounts of the movement. This material provides an interesting insight into the self-presentation of the movement as a form of resistance to the institutions of commercial music and culture. The research conducted here, in contrast, explores the engagement with the DIY scene of a broader range of individuals and groups and thus allows a more balanced insight into the solidarities – and ruptures – that govern the scene.

## References

- Aksiutina, O. (2004). ‘DIY-protest protiv kommercheskoi kul’turny v postsovetskom prostranstve: massovaia muzyka i andergraund’, [DIY protest against commercial culture in the post-Soviet space: mass music and the underground] in A.P.Logunov, L.G. Berezova, N.V. Illeritskaia and E.V Baryshnikova (eds) *Massovoe soznanie i massovaia kul’tura v Rossii: istoriia i sovremennost’*, Moscow: RGGU, 230-254.
- Aksiutina, O. (2005a). ‘DIY pank-kul’tura kak fenomen molodezhnoi kontrkul’turny v post-sovetskom postranstve’, [DIY punk culture as a youth counter cultural phenomenon in post-Soviet space] in I.V. Kondakov (ed.) *Sovremennie transformatsii rossiiskoi kul’turny*, Moscow: Nauka, 564-603.
- Aksiutina, O. (2005b). ‘Kul’tura povsednevnosti sovremennikh protestnikh dvizhenii v Evrope’, [The culture of everyday life of contemporary protest movements in Europe] in G.Iu. Sterin, N.O. Osipova and N.I. Pospelova (eds) *Povsednevnost’ kak tekst kul’turny. Materialy mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii*, Kirov: ViatGGU, 45-56.
- Aksiutina, O. (2006). ‘Politika povsednevnoi zhizni DIY-kul’turny’, [The politics of everyday life of DIY cultures] in E.Omel’chenko and N.Goncharova (eds) *Meniaiushchaisia molodezh’ v meniaiushchemsia mire: nevidimaiai povsednevnost’*, Ul’ianovsk: Ido UGU, 13-17.
- Zaitseva, A. (2004). ‘(Anti)ekonomika rok-andergraunda: dobrodeteli “sdelai sam” i mekhanika vytesneniia deneg’ [The (anti)economics of the rock underground: the virtues of “DIY” and the mechanics of the exclusion of money], *Neprikosnovennii zapas*, 1(33).

### 3.3 NEOPAGAN YOUTH GROUPS (SAINT-PETERSBURG)

Elena Omel'chenko, Hilary Pilkington, Elvira Sharifullina

*Abstract:* Literature to date on the neo-pagan movement in Russia has focused on understanding the movement as a form of 'escape' and evaluating the relative 'harm' posed to individuals and society by such organizations. This research focused on the everyday manifestation and reproduction of Slavic neo-paganist groups in St Petersburg. The research suggested that as the Slavic neo-paganist movement struggled to establish an agreed set of principles and practices, disagreement focused around the relative weight of its ideological and cultural components and that particular communities of neo-pagans become organised around their position in relation to these discourses.

#### **Introduction**

Current academic literature on the question of paganism might be broadly defined as adopting one of two approaches. The first envisages paganism as one tendency within a wider sphere of new religious movements by which is meant religious or spiritual groups that have emerged relatively recently or which have not been recognized publicly as distinct denominations, churches or religions (Barker 1997). The second approach interprets paganism as a branch of the New-Age movement where New-Age is understood as a particular constellation of various occult groups which emerged as a movement for the revival of spirituality, esoteric traditions and the revision of established views. Paganism, from this viewpoint is characterised by syncretism and the belief in the unity of science, mysticism and religion (Kanterov 2006). Common to both these approaches is the understanding of the attraction of paganism as lying in the desire to escape the reality of the everyday contemporary world. Much of this literature consists of: the description of the reasons for this 'escape'; the various pagan groups themselves; the form and depth of the 'escape' into them; the relative potential harm to society such movements present; and the acceptability of individual choices to join them.

In contrast to this emerging body of literature, the research conducted for SAL moved away from the centrality of the notion of 'escape' to consider the mechanisms of the reproduction of the logic of everyday life of people identifying as pagans. This shift of focus allowed researchers to explore new questions in the field, such as how and why particular elements of traditional and sacred knowledge (be they practices or speech forms) become normatively accepted while others are rendered unacceptable. The understanding of neo-paganism adopted for this research was thus that it constitutes a form of polytheism as part of which various kinds of historical, traditional, cultural forms (knowledge, perceptions, practices, bodily forms) and images of the sacred are learned, re-thought, given new meaning and reproduced.

## **Methods**

One period of six-weeks of fieldwork was conducted in Spring 2008. Access to the group was gained through existing contacts in St Petersburg and contacts provided by scene members in other cities. Prior to the commencement of fieldwork a survey of the media coverage and self-presentation of the groups (especially via the Internet) was conducted. This also facilitated initial contacts – for example in the case of the neo-pagan case study - through chat forums. In all cases snowballing was used to generate new respondents from contacts provided by key informants. The main methodological techniques employed for gathering data for these case studies were:

- web-site analysis;
- ethnographic observation;
- recorded interviews with respondents;
- researcher diaries;
- visual mappings of urban space used by the groups using still and video photography.

A total of 14 interviews and 1 fieldwork diary were analysed in this case study.

## **Results**

### ***Group-Society relations***

In Russian society neo-paganism is a marginal discourse in relation to monotheism. This is manifested in the fact that the Russian Orthodox Church treats neo-pagans more negatively even than members of religious sects. Informants reported that they often concealed their views for fear of evoking a negative reaction, being ridiculed or simply not being understood appropriately. The prefix ‘neo’ is thus adopted in this research to describe members of neo-pagan communities in order to indicate linguistically the significance of the discursive construction of the movement in contemporary Russia; to talk of the direct reproduction of paganism (in contrast to other contemporary religions like Judaism, Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Lamaism, Sintoism or Brahmanism) in contemporary Russia is impossible due to the dominant culture of monotheism whose hegemony is underpinned by the maintenance of a particular understanding and structuring of traditional and sacred knowledge.

### ***Intra-group relations***

Although neo-paganism is very internally diverse, this research focused from the outset on Slavic neo-pagans (see also Gaidukov n.d). Thus the research related to Slavic and

Scandinavian forms of neo-paganism as well as to followers of Wicca.<sup>28</sup> This focus facilitated the understanding of how the different meanings attached to neo-paganism had engendered a discursive confrontation over the establishment of the principles of normative neo-paganism both in general as well as within particular branches of it (Slavic, Scandinavian and Wicca).

The analysis of Slavic neo-pagan websites conducted for this research<sup>29</sup> suggests that Slavic neo-paganism falls into two broad categories. The first – the cultural branch of the movement - is oriented towards the history of the Slavs of Ancient Rus', their culture, daily life, traditions and the reconstruction of pagan rituals and holidays. The second group of websites, in addition to containing information on the history and rituals of neo-paganism, also carry literature of a nationalist, revisionist and racially oriented kind. This was particularly evident from the exploration of linked sites which almost always contained not only neo-pagan references but also fascist and nationalist materials. Thus organisations and communities whose leaders and representatives openly demonstrated nationalist views were considered to constitute a second, ideological, branch of Slavic neo-paganism.

The results of the analysis of the informational space of Slavic neo-paganism were confirmed by interviews with neo-pagans and discussions within their groups. This suggested that as the Slavic neo-paganist movement struggled to establish an agreed set of principles and practices, disagreement focused around the relative weight of its ideological and cultural components. At the current point in time, it is the ideological branch of Slavic neo-paganism which dominates. This is evident from the representation of neo-paganism in the public sphere (media, Internet), specifically its dominance in claims on the 'true' understanding of historical, cultural and sacred knowledge.

On the level of everyday practice, this discursive struggle was an important element in the positioning of individual subjects within the group as this respondent makes clear:

Respondent: Religion – as a way of life – was what interested me. I was more oriented towards the spiritual aspect. I bought the relevant literature and read it. I found people of a like mind to talk to via the Internet – met with them once or twice. We discussed common interests and after some time – 2 or 3 months – we set up our society, completely separate from politics, from

---

<sup>28</sup> Wicca is derived from the 'synthesis of eastern magical rituals and a series of books on European witchcraft. ...At the heart of Wicca ethics is the principle "Do what you want as long as it harms no-one". ...The movement consists of small groups (covens) who gather twice per month (at new moon and half way through the lunar cycle). They also celebrate a series of ancient Celtic festivals (Halloween, Beltane etc)' (Falikhov 1999: 104).

<sup>29</sup> A total of 38 neopagan sites were studied prior to commencing the fieldwork.

everything. We discuss only issues relating to traditions. Not a whiff of nationalism. Far from it.

Interviewer: Do you mean in your group or more generally?

Respondent: We never cooperate with organisations which politicize it all – but there are many of those kinds of organisations, even in Petersburg. So we make a clear distinction. So that's how we formed basically – we determined our ideas and principles and the frameworks within which we wanted to work, made sure we were clear about them. In particular we don't want anything to do with politics and what I mentioned. That's it basically. The main members are all right here in front of you – bar five or six people who can't make it every day. (M. Scandinavian pagan)

Thus the rupture between ideological and cultural discourses of neo-paganism means that particular communities of neo-pagans become organised around their position in relation to these discourses.

### **Conclusions**

At its current stage of development, Slavic neo-paganism in St Petersburg falls into two broad categories: a cultural branch of the movement oriented towards the history of the Slavs of Ancient Rus', their culture, daily life, traditions and the reconstruction of pagan rituals and holidays; and an ideological branch which propagates nationalist, revisionist and racially oriented worldviews. This division is central to the self-identification of individual neo-paganists and neo-pagan groups and prevents any agreed set of principles and practices for the movement being established. It also makes the movement vulnerable to criticism from within the dominant culture.

### **References**

- Barker, E. (1997). *Novie religioznie dvizheniia: Prakticheskoe vvedenie*, [New Religious Movements: A Practical Introduction] St Petersburg [translated from the original English].
- Falikhov, B. (1999). *Novie religioznie dvizheniia khristianskogo i nekhristsianskogo proiskhozhdeniia*, in *Khristianstvo i drugie religii*.
- Kanterov, I.Ia (2006). *Novie religioznie dvizheniia v Rossii*, Moscow.
- Gaidukov, A. (n.d). 'Molodezhnaia subkul'tura slavianskogo neoiazychestva v Peterburge', accessed online at: <http://subculture.narod.ru/texts/book2/gaidukov.htm> on 15.02.2009.