

**THE ACTIVITIES OF THE TRANSFIGURATION FRATERNITY FOR THE PRESERVATION OF
HISTORICAL MEMORY.
THE EXPERIENCE OF THE ENTIRE FRATERNITY AND ITS PARTICULARITIES IN 2021**

Good afternoon, dear friends ("doamnelor și domnilor, onorată asistență"). On behalf of the Orthodox Fraternity of Saint Paisii Velichkovsky from Chisinau, to which we belong, we would like to welcome everyone and thank the organisers of the conference for their invitation!

We come from the Republic of Moldova. Our Brotherhood is part of the Great Transfiguration Brotherhood, Community of Orthodox Brotherhoods, an informal association of believers of the Russian Orthodox Church, which unites Orthodox Christians not only in Russia, but also in other post-Soviet countries such as Moldova, Belarus, Latvia, as well as in European countries, for example in Germany, in the Czech Republic. The Brotherhood sees the preservation of historical memory as one of its tasks and has initiated a series of "commemorative events" for many years.

The activity of the Transfiguration Community of Orthodox Brotherhoods for the Restoration of Historical Memory, which has been reported here at conferences for several years, is based on Christian foundations. We are aware that we exist in time and in history, and furthermore, as Christians we are responsible for this history. Rejecting the past is not only inhumane, but also anti-Christian.

A particular painful and spiritual challenge for us is the history of Russia in the twentieth century and the countries that used to belong to the Russian Empire.

Totalitarianism, in the long years of its existence (70 years in Russia and 50 years in Bessarabia), was able to influence through its actions not only the level of world outlook, but also "the level of the simplest instincts of life". Its effect extended to everyone, not only to those who acted on behalf of the totalitarian government. What happened in the history of Russia in the XX century is rightly called the "Russian catastrophe" and genocide of the Russian people. We are talking about destructive processes in the economic, political and cultural spheres that brought the most terrible fruits, destroyed whole estates and classes, and exterminated the most creative, free and responsible citizens of the country. Specifically, one can speak of an "anthropological catastrophe", which has a double character: on the one hand, the physical destruction of the strongest, most independent, freedom-loving part of the people, and on the other hand, the spiritual changes of those who survived, sometimes at the price of destructive compromises with their own conscience. Today we are witnessing the new fruits of missed opportunities. It is the consequence of a time when the crimes of the Soviet regime were not appreciated and there was no national remorse. It is a collective trauma that has not yet healed and keeps us coming back to it.

Together with the brothers and sisters of the Transfiguration Fraternity, our Fraternity of St. Paisii Velichkovski in Moldova has the following goals:

Firstly, to preserve the memory of the tragic pages of our past, especially of the innocent victims, and to bring this memory to as many compatriots as possible. The Brotherhood supports, conducts prayer readings of names and takes care of burial sites: these include Kommunarka in Moscow, the Levashovskaya heath near St. Petersburg, Mednoye - a memorial in Tver, Rutschenkovo field in Donetsk, etc. In Moldova, these are the execution site in Valya Morilor Park in Chisinau, mass graves in the Armenian cemetery, Powder Camp - the site of mass executions in Tiraspol. The members of the Brotherhood organise excursions and pilgrimages to the

memorial sites and encourage people to participate in the memorial prayer. Such excursions are traditionally part of the International Theological Conference "Paisii Readings", which has been organised for 10 years by our St. Paisij Brotherhood with the support of the St. Ascension Monastery in Novo-Niemiec and with the blessing of Metropolitan Vladimir of Chisinau and all Moldova.¹

The prayer of remembrance is not a political or protest action. It has nothing to do with "settling accounts". It is a remembrance before God of the victims who have been forgotten and whose forgetting has been sought. It is an attempt to adopt a Christian attitude towards the victims of the twentieth century. We believe that every person is alive with God, which means that we must pray for them before God.

It is important that since 2015 the memorial prayer has been held not only in Russia but also in Moldova, a post-Soviet country. In Chisinau, for example, our Fraternity of St. Paisii Velichkovski will hold a prayer with the reading of the names of the victims of repression at the execution site in Valea Morilor Park, at the memorial stone at the site of the former NKVD building², on 6 July and 30 October.

Our second task is to encourage people to reflect on the past, to repent and to reconcile.

Totalitarianism has shown itself in a particular way in each country, therefore each country must have its own way to overcome it. But some principles for overcoming its consequences, which relate to human rebirth, can be useful for all. For example, the principle of A. Solzhenitsyn. Solzhenitsyn's principle "do not live with the lie" applies to all nations.

In Russia today, there are two polar positions on this issue. One position is expressed by the formula: "We will not forget, we will not forgive" - a saying often uttered by the descendants of the victims of the repressions. The second is voiced by today's Communist Party supporters: "There is no need to cry foul over the Soviet past: The sacrifices were inevitable and the achievements undisputed.

In Moldova, we have outwardly separated ourselves from the communist past and officially recognised this destructive ideology as evil, but we have not learned to distinguish between the Russian and the Soviet and to recognise where the Soviet lives on in us and bears its poisonous fruits.

At the same time, society in the Republic of Moldova is divided not only along the lines of Moldova - Transnistria, Romania - Russia. The official ideology is often expressed with the formulas "all evil comes from Russia" and "Europe will help us" or "Russia has imperial ambitions" and "only Russians should repent for the crimes of the totalitarian past". It is forgotten that we were all Soviet and to some extent still are.

Today's events make this understanding even more difficult.

An example of understanding and overcoming the consequences of the tragic events of the 20th century in Russian history and the totalitarian regime throughout the post-Soviet space was the Forum for Repentance and Rebirth - "Those Who Have Hope", which opened in 2018.

The forum was initiated by the Transfiguration Community of Small Orthodox Brotherhoods, as well as some NGOs, scholars and artists.

The Forum presented the main challenges in restoring moderation and normality in the life of the individual, the whole people, the Church and society. We have talked about this at previous conferences.

¹ VI International Theological and Practical Conference "Paisii Readings" in 2017 was dedicated to the theme "The Patristic Heritage in the Experience of Spiritual Resistance to Godlessness in the Former USSR: 1917-1991".

² Mihai Tascu, Doctor of History. A presentation on the repressions related to the execution site in Valea Morilor Park in Chisinau was given at a conference in Petesti, Romania, in 20... reported.

I would like to point out the specifics of one of the most important events of the 2021 Forum, and that is the Days of Mourning and Repentance.

In 2017, for the first time, the Transfiguration Fraternity observed the days from 30 October (Memorial Day for the Victims of Soviet Repression) to 7 November (the Day of the Russian Catastrophe) as special days of fasting and prayer, penance and mourning for all the victims of the 20th century. This tradition has continued for five years now. It is important that this time, on the Day of Mourning and Repentance, an attempt was made to talk about different levels of remembrance. Not only history, but also famine (Holodomor), man-made disasters, the confiscation of church assets, the sale of these assets abroad and the purchase of these assets (from the Soviet government) were discussed, i.e. an attempt was made to broaden the view of history. Life on these days was accompanied by penitential fasts, commemorative meals were also held with invited guests.

The main idea of the "Days of Mourning and Repentance" is to remember certain tragic events from the life of our country in the 20th century, to show what enormous losses and destruction the criminal Soviet regime brought upon Russia and the entire territory of the former USSR, what we as a people lost at that time, about the genocide to which people were subjected, that the peoples of the USSR and especially the Russian people are a victim that is not thought about or spoken about. At the same time, it was important to tell something about the people who did not submit to this evil and were able to resist it.

Today there are problems of unconsciousness not only in Russian society, but also in free democratic Moldova. And in the Republic of Moldova, this memory is not particularly honoured.

There is a continuity of power structures. The archives in Moldova are still closed. NKVD documents relevant to this topic are nowadays kept in the Republic of Moldova in the archives of the Information and Security Service (ISS) and are practically inaccessible to researchers. The situation with the promotion of research and excavations is very complicated everywhere. Work is slowed down, sometimes threats are made, and conditions are imposed which are essentially: "You will never find anything else in this place!". The officials who approved the research are removed, initiatives are curtailed, subsidies are not maintained. Moreover, both in Russia and in Moldova there is still no unified view of the events of those years. We often hear such opinions as that the number of oppressed during the years of the "Great Terror" is considerably exaggerated; that in found execution sites are buried the remains of people shot during the Nazi occupation; that the repressions affected mainly representatives of the party elite, while the common people were not affected, and so on. It is often claimed in the media and at the leadership level that the excavations have been completed and that all victims have been found and buried, but officials have learned to respond formalistically to petitions and letters requesting further investigation.

It must be emphasised that the initiators and creators of the "Great Terror" sought, among other things, to ensure that no trace of a human being was left on earth: neither his grave, nor his name in human memory, nor a photo in a family album. This goal was achieved in many ways.

Silence has become the root of irresponsibility and ruthlessness in our society. In families where someone was oppressed, usually either nothing is known at all except the fact that the person was oppressed, or there is only a certificate of rehabilitation. At the same time, people themselves do not want to look back at the tragic pages of history, even if it is a matter of personal history and family honour. Ludmila Pavlovna Alferieva, a consultant of the Diocese of Tiraspol-Dubasari, an employee of the historical and archival department, a spiritual champion in the canonisation of new martyrs and confessors of the 20th century, as well as an initiator and

largely one of the leaders of the excavations of the execution sites in Tiraspol, speaks about this problem: "As for the obstacles in restoring and preserving the memory of the repressed, in my opinion, the main obstacle is that there is still a strong polarisation of opinions on this issue in society. Most people do not want to know or believe that it was a genocide against their own people. And I understand such people well. The psyche of a normal person simply refuses to accept such things ...". The silence about the difficult past, which once could have helped to avoid new repressions and save lives, has entered the subconscious, the behavioural pattern, but there are no answers to the questions about the evaluation of evil, the consequences of which are passed on to the next generations.

In the current situation, where there is no consensus in post-Soviet societies about the history of the twentieth century, civic initiatives aimed at awakening people's consciousness and conscience have a special role to play.

After the partial release of the documents of the NKVD of the MASSR on the subject of political repressions as a result of the excavations of the so-called shooting pit on the territory of the Suvorov fortress and a comprehensive study of the findings made, a rare opportunity arose to return the names and graves of their ancestors to the descendants of the oppressed. This is an opportunity for society to carefully read the previously inaccessible pages of history, learn historical lessons and bring justice to the thousands upon thousands of people who were wronged and suffered innocently.

The excavations in Tiraspol (Moldova, Transnistria) are an experience of interaction between a specialised archaeologist (I. A. Chetveriakov) and a researcher of the history of political repressions (L. P. Apferieva) in terms of finding the names of the oppressed, establishing the exact location of their burial and introducing previously unavailable information about the history of Transnistria (Moldova) in the period 1937-1938 into the scientific turnover.

Igor Chetverikov, senior researcher at the research laboratory "Archaeology"³, and Lyudmila Pavlovna Alferieva are the initiators of the search operations. On a voluntary basis, they recruit young people⁴ to participate in the excavations.

To date, I. Chetverikov and his team have found the remains of about 2600 people, but according to the documents in Tiraspol, more than 5 thousand people were shot, which means that probably half of the victims have not yet been found and reburied.

Most of the firing pits that can be seen in the aerial photos of the war kept in the German archives have not yet been explored. These photos were found last year. The thirty-eighth execution pit was recently found and opened, and excavation of the execution pits has now resumed. The remains of more than 850 people have also been recovered, and are still being excavated. About 2,000 more people have not yet been excavated.

The archaeologists, in cooperation with historians and forensic doctors, succeeded in bringing archival and excavation data down to a single quantitative denominator. Piece by piece, the data found sometimes miraculously helped to identify the names of the victims, sometimes made it possible to complete the assignment of the execution pits, to restore the complete lists of the names of those shot in that pit.

In Tiraspol, a museum was set up on the site of the execution pits and a small wooden church was built on the site of the reburial to commemorate the victims of the Soviet repressions.

³ Research laboratory "Archaeology Access mode 2022.08.01: <http://arhmuseum.spsu.ru/home/nil-arkheologiya>

⁴ Members of the military-patriotic club "Heirs of Victory", established under the Union of Veterans of the War in Afghanistan, Tiraspol.

Unfortunately, it is not uncommon that places of repression often become not places of remembrance but places of forgetting. The destruction of these places takes place just as consistently and systematically as in the USSR. Places of entertainment are built on them or housing estates are erected.

I would like to give you another example. The execution site in Chisinau in Valea Morilor Park is unique. Unlike many places associated with the tragic past, there is documentary evidence of the historical significance of this place, there are lists of victims, memories of contemporaries and newspaper articles from the 1940s.

We have prepared a short film about this place and would like to show it to you. [\(film\)](#)

Of course, the current situation raises new questions and the attitude towards it requires appropriate efforts. We do not believe that repentance is necessary only in the past. Repentance is a change of some basic approaches, approaches to understanding the world and human beings, it is also necessary in the present. We cannot say that there has been repentance, conversion, but neither can we say that all people in our country have remained deaf to our call. Therefore, our position remains true to what we have always advocated: Repentance is necessary, it must be deep, it must encompass everything that happened in the 20th century in Russia and on the territory of the former USSR. And not only for the repressions of the 1930s, but fundamentally also for what began after the 1917 revolution, for the crimes that are still happening.

Therefore, in our fraternity, the prayer for truth and peace has come into being, which we pray in every service.

Prayer for truth and peace (for all who believe in the one God)

God Almighty!

Help us to recognise where the truth lies and to stand up for it.

Free us from all fear of violence and lawlessness.

Teach us to fight evil without falling into hatred, and to see the human being even in the enemy.

Help us to put life in order on our land so that no blood is spilled and no violence is perpetrated.

Lord, into your hands we commit our past, present and future. Amen.