

MINORITIES – ETHNICITY AND DENOMINATION

GAGAUZ ‘ORTHODOXISM’ IN INTERWAR ROMANIA: MIHAIL ÇAKIR AND THE GAGAUZ NATIONAL MOVEMENT

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This paper is concerned with the agency of the Gagauz clerical elite in the interwar period and its ability, through acts initiated in the religious sphere, to shape broader political and social changes. The Gagauz clergy, and specifically Archpriest Mihail Çakir, through religiously motivated and religiously formulated interventions, helped mould the ethno-national consciousness of the Gagauz and acted as a catalyst for political mobilisation. I argue here that Çakir’s formulations of a Gagauz Orthodox nation mirrored Romanian national and, more specifically, Orthodoxist discourses. That is to say, the Gagauz elite formulated their representations and imaginings of a Gagauz nation in order to both accommodate, rather than confront, and to mimic, rather than deviate from, the dominant discourses of the majority nation in Greater Romania.

Keywords: Gagauz; Moldova; Bessarabia; Orthodoxism; Greater Romania; Orthodoxy; national movements; minority politics

The whole population inhabiting Bessarabia under the beneficent influence of Russia consisted of one sole people – the Russians. There existed neither Bulgarians, nor Moldavians, nor Gagauzes. All declared themselves with pride to be Russian. Such was Bessarabia, a land of smiling beauty, of corn and wine, prior to the arrival of the Romanians.¹

The sentiments expressed in this representation of the harmony and plenty that was Bessarabia before the Romanian occupation, which comes from documents presented at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, are ones familiar to anyone who has read the Russian and Soviet propaganda of the time. However, this romanticised picture of Russian rule, for many segments of the Moldovan population, is one that persists to this day and has even been strengthened by experiences of conflict and economic crisis within the Moldovan state in the post-Soviet era. The anti-Romanian disposition of much of the Bessarabian population in the interwar years is likewise mirrored in contemporary political discourse in the

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¹ *The Romanian Occupation in Bessarabia: Documents* (Paris: Lahure, 1920), 179.

ethnically and linguistically polarised region of southern Moldova, home to the Gagauz minority.

Moving beyond this kind of representation when approaching the history of a politically and economically marginalised and geographically peripheral group such as the Gagauz is problematic. What is certain is that by the closing years of the 1930s from out of the mosaic of ethnic and linguistic groups of southern Moldova a Gagauz national consciousness had been born in the minds of an emergent elite and this had begun to find expression in the political, educational and, as I shall argue here, perhaps most significantly in the religious sphere.

Much of what we know of the ‘Gagauz perspective’ in this period is through the prism of one man’s writing and activities, the Orthodox priest Mihail Çakir.² Çakir is considered the founder of the Gagauz national movement and the father of Gagauz letters, but he also appeared a devout and active Church leader. In the early years of the twentieth century Çakir embarked on the project to translate the entire Orthodox scriptural and liturgical canon into the Gagauz language in order to, in his own words, ‘protect and strengthen’ the faith of his people. It was in his role as both a national and religious leader that Çakir steered the course of his people’s ‘national awakening’ in the sensitive political climate of 1930s Romania.³ In this sense, this paper is concerned with the agency of clerical elites and their ability, through acts initiated in the religious sphere, to shape broader political and social changes. In the case of the Gagauz, this is evident in the will and capacity of the clergy, through religiously motivated and religiously formulated interventions, to mould ethno-national consciousness and act as a catalyst for political mobilisation. I argue here that Çakir’s formulations of a Gagauz Orthodox nation mirrored Romanian national and, more specifically, Orthodoxist discourses. That is to say, the Gagauz elite moulded their representations and imaginings of a Gagauz nation in order to both accommodate, rather than confront, and to mimic, rather than deviate from, the dominant discourses of the majority nation.

Today, Gagauz identity appears fraught with tensions, at the heart of which is the dichotomy between Orthodox Christianity, on the one hand, and a linguistic Turkish heritage, with its historical and cultural associations with Islam, on the other. Religion and the implications of the religious dimension of Gagauz social and cultural forms are central to understanding the development of Gagauz national consciousness in interwar Romania. I will argue here that Çakir’s work and writings promoted the emergence of a Gagauz national consciousness that was

² In this study Çakir’s name appears in the modern standard Gagauz spelling. In references and bibliographical details from the period 1918 to 1945 his name is given in its Romanian form, Ciachir, under which he published his works in this period.

³ For an overview of Mihail Çakir’s role in both the Church and ethnic politics during this period see James A. Kapaló, “The Career of Father Mihail Çakir (1861–1838) – The Cyril and Methodius of the Gagauz,” *Solanus* 21 (2007): 5–18.

principally determined by a local pragmatic understanding of Orthodox principles worked out in response to the influence of Orthodoxist thought that took hold in the theological colleges in Bessarabia, especially the Faculty of Theology in Chişinău.⁴ Çakir assimilated these ideas and combined them with notions of pure Turkic origins and blood providing a strategy that allowed him to navigate the difficult political rivalries between Russia and Romania, whilst at the same time building ties with Kemalist Turkey. The result was a complex set of affiliations and allegiances that, due to the political and territorial changes that ensued, resulted in an identity composed of competing narratives that are still evident in the social and cultural fabric of contemporary Gagauz society.⁵ The path that Çakir trod, for a number of reasons, failed to influence significantly the allegiance or emotional orientation of the majority of the Gagauz population as well as failing to influence Romanian political opinion regarding the loyalty and trustworthiness of this problematic minority. Çakir's accommodationist path contributed to a generation of young Gagauz clergy and teachers, including the Çakir clan, going into exile in Romania after the war. Back home, under Soviet rule, there followed a wholesale rejection amongst the Gagauz of the cultural and historical affinities with the Romanian people and the Romanian Church that Çakir represented and had worked hard to sponsor.

This paper aims to achieve two things; firstly to explore Çakir's representations of Gagauz ethnic and religious identity to the new Romanian political and religious elite of Romanian Bessarabia. This he did through the publication of a series of articles in Romanian for the journal *Viaţa Basarabiei* between 1933 and 1936, amongst which were articles on the religion, morals, legal traditions, and origins of the Gagauz.⁶ Secondly, we shall also explore Çakir's efforts at fostering a distinct Gagauz national consciousness amongst an emergent Gagauz educated elite. We shall approach this mainly through readings of his publications in the Gagauz language, perhaps the most significant of which is his

⁴ Veronica Bâtcă, "Biserica Ortodoxă şi spiritualitatea românească în Basarabia interbelică," *Luminătorul*, 1999, no. 4:4–21.

⁵ The Gagauz of Moldova were granted wide-ranging territorial, cultural and political autonomy in 1994 following a brief armed confrontation between Moldovan and Gagauz militias. The Gagauz Autonomous Region, officially referred to as *Unitatea Teritorială Autonomă Găgăuzia*, or UTAG for short, is home to a population of 155,646 according to the 2004 Moldovan census, of which 127,835 are recorded as ethnic Gagauz.

⁶ Eight articles were published in total between 1933 and 1936. These are: "Originea găgăuzilor," *Viaţa Basarabiei* 2, no. 9 (1933): 15–24; "Originea găgăuzilor," *Viaţa Basarabiei* 3, no. 5 (1934): 3–20; "Religiositatea găgăuzilor," *Viaţa Basarabiei* 3, no. 3 (1934): 21–28; "Obiceiurile religioase ale găgăuzilor: Curbanele sau sacrificiile," *Viaţa Basarabiei* 3, no. 6 (1934): 4–8; "Obiceiurile religioase ale găgăuzilor din Basarabia: II. Obiceiuri la naştere şi botez," *Viaţa Basarabiei* 3, nos. 7–8 (1934): 37–40; "Moralitatea găgăuzilor din Basarabia," *Viaţa Basarabiei* 4, no. 2 (1935): 36–42; "Dreptatea la găgăuzii din Basarabia," *Viaţa Basarabiei* 4, no. 10 (1935): 11–14; "Obiceiurile găgăuzilor la nunţi," *Viaţa Basarabiei* 5, nos. 3–4 (1936): 41–44.

‘History of the Gagauz of Bessarabia’, which was first published in Romanian in 1933 and again in the Gagauz language in 1934.⁷ We shall also draw on the few known extant editions of the Gagauz language religious newspaper *Hakikatın Sesi*, which he wrote and distributed himself throughout the 1920s and 30s.⁸

Orthodoxy and the Gagauz Clergy

The Gagauz population were part of the general migration of Balkan peoples that arrived as colonists in the southern steppe region of Bessarabia, known as the Budjak, beginning in the late 18th century and continuing through the 1840s.⁹ The Gagauz were first officially distinguished from their Bulgarian neighbours as a separate ethnic group in 1854 and only recorded as such in the Russian census of 1897.¹⁰ However, the Gagauz themselves were by no means homogenous, having migrated from disparate parts of the eastern Balkans, including Thrace, Deliorman and Southern Dobrudja.

Our knowledge of the ethnic or linguistic identity of the clergy in Gagauz villages in this early period of settlement, who as we shall see played an instrumental role in the emergence of a Gagauz national consciousness, is limited. We have some evidence to suggest that members of an ethnic Greek or ‘Grecophile’ clergy accompanied Gagauz colonists from northern Bulgaria on their migration.¹¹

⁷ First published in the journal *Viața Basarabiei* in the Romanian language in two parts under the title “Originea găgăuzilor,” it was later published in the Gagauz language as: Mihail Ciachir, *Besarabială Gagauzlaran Istorieasa* (Chișinău, 1934), and most recently in Turkish under the title *Basarabyalı Gagauzların Tarihi* (Niğde: Tolunay Yayıncılık, 1998).

⁸ *Hakikatın Sesi*, or ‘The voice of the Truth’, began to appear as early as 1909. To date six separate editions have come to light numbered 6, 14, 15, 21, 24 and 25; none of these are dated. Early editions are printed in Cyrillic script whilst later editions use a script based on the Romanian orthography of the time. See M. Çakir (Ay Boba), *Gagauzlar: İstoriya, Adetlär, Dil hem Din*, ed. S. Bulgar (Chișinău: Pontus, 2007), 29–33. Bibliographical details of editions seen by the author: *Hakikatın (Dooruluun) Sesi: 6. Missionarlı yaprak*, Izдание HristoRozhdestvenskago Bratstva (Chișinău: Tipographia Eparhială “Cartea Românească”) [printed in Cyrillic]; *Hakikatın (Dooruluun) Sesi: 14. Missionarlı yaprak – Nazaretlilär için, eni çıkmışeretiklär için*, Izдание Hristo-Rozhdestvenskago Bratstva (Chișinău: Tipographia Eparhială “Cartea Românească”) [printed in Cyrillic]; *Hakikatın (Dooruluun) Sesi: 15. Missionarlı yaprak – Eniçikmiş, enigelmiş eretiklär için, bibliyalı studentlär için, hani laaplamerlar, denileerlar taa russellilar, millenistlär ekida binilliklar*, Izдание Hristo-Rozhdestvenskago Bratstva (Chișinău: Tipographia Eparhială “Cartea Românească”) [printed in Cyrillic]; *Hahicatân (Dooruluun) Sesi: 25. Misionarlı eaprac – Aios Eni Dimitrinin Basarabovun Iomiuriu Eașamasâ (Anâlâer Octombrieân 27)* (Chișinău: Tipografia Uniunii Clericilor Ortodocși din Basarabia) [printed in Latin script following Romanian orthographic rules].

⁹ I use the English spelling ‘Budjak’, in preference to the Romanian *Bugeac* or the Gagauz and Turkish *Bucak*.

¹⁰ Olga Radova, “Ethnic Identification of Transdanubian Migrants and the Gagauz Settling in the Budjak (The Late 18th – Early 19th Centuries),” *Eurasian Studies* 13 (1998): 55–56.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

From the records of the Çakir family we also know that whole dynasties of Gagauz clergy began to arise as early as the mid-nineteenth century, and that the language of the liturgy at this time was Romanian.¹² Some of these families continue to fulfil their priestly function right down to the present day. However, across Moldova the use of the Romanian language in the Orthodox Church had been in decline, especially since the Russification campaign of Archbishop Pavel Lebedev in the 1870s and 80s.¹³ By the time Bessarabia was incorporated into Greater Romania in 1918 many priests were unable to preach in Romanian. With unification came a break with the Russian Church and a return of ethnic Romanian and Moldovan clergy to positions of authority within the Bessarabia Church.¹⁴ The new Church authorities were keen to reverse the linguistic decline of Romanian in national and Church life. The new cadre of local Moldovan priests and clergy from other regions of Romania, who replaced the local Russian or 'russified' clergy, according to the accounts of elderly Gagauz I have interviewed, were extremely zealous in their attempts to promote the use of Romanian in the Church and local schools. Indeed, the clergy, together with newly appointed school teachers likewise imported from Transylvania and Wallachia,¹⁵ constituted the main instrument of the Romanian nation-building project in Gagauz villages. A report sent by self-professed representatives of the various ethnic populations of Moldova to the Russian general Denikin in June 1919 highlights the political nature of the language of the liturgy, 'Father Syboff, the priest of the village of Komrat, was dragged out of his church, insulted and sent to prison for having conducted service in the Slav language.'¹⁶

The earliest reports that we have of Orthodox religious practice amongst the Gagauz indicate that prior to Bessarabia's incorporation into Greater Romania

¹² See Dimitri Chakir, *Biograficheski ocherk roda i familii Chakir* (Chişinău, 1899).

¹³ I. Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000), 95.

¹⁴ The national and ethnic identity of the Romanian speaking population of Moldova has been the subject of much scholarly and political debate. In the nineteenth century Romanian speakers in Russian Bessarabia and the surrounding regions most commonly referred to themselves, and were referred to by other Romanian speakers, as Moldovans. In the interwar years, Greater Romania prescribed a uniform Romanian national identity that was intended to weaken or eliminate the traditional regional distinctions between Romanian speakers from the diverse territories of the new state. During the Soviet period there were concerted efforts to sponsor, through the nationalities and language policy, a specifically Moldovan national identity. In the political sphere these issues of the linguistic and ethnic identity remain unresolved to this day. To avoid ambiguity in this study I refer to Romanian speakers from the territory of Moldova as ethnic Moldovans and those from the other territories of Romania/Greater Romania as ethnic Romanians.

¹⁵ Direcția Arhivelor Naționale Istorice Centrale (Bucharest, Romania) (hereafter: DANIC), Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri (PCM), Ministerul Cultelor și Instrucțiunii Publice, 1919, inventar 2552, fond 254/1919, 1–2.

¹⁶ *The Romanian Occupation*, 179.

communication with the clergy and the language of the liturgy had become a significant issue. A 19th century report referred to by Charles Upson Clark, who travelled the region in the 1920s, states that ‘We find a priest named Muranevitch complaining to the consistory that the peasants of Comrat [today the capital of the Gagauz Autonomous Region] did not understand his preaching in Russian, and understood Roumanian better, although they are Bulgarians (Gagaoutz) and talk Turkish.’¹⁷ The Russian Army general turned-ethnographer V. A. Moshkov, who published several volumes of ethnographic and folkloric material collected amongst the Gagauz, wrote in 1900: ‘The weakest element of Gagauz religious life is that the Church religious service is conducted in unknown languages, in Old Church Slavonic and Moldavian.’¹⁸ Also, through his discovery of examples of *Karamanli* Turkish Christian literature in Gagauz homes, he gives us our first indication that the Gagauz themselves had a desire for official religious practice to be made more intelligible to them. According to Moshkov, some local priests encouraged the use of this literature to improve the ability of their parishioners to take part in the service and he also remarks at their delight on hearing the Lord’s Prayer and the Symbol of the Faith recited in *Karamanlica*.¹⁹

However, by the early years of the 20th century Mihail Çakir had begun the translation of essential liturgical texts into the Gagauz idiom and following his appointment to head the ‘Special Commission for Translation and Education of the Gagauz of Bessarabia’ in 1906, began publishing and distributing religious texts to Gagauz parishes. Therefore, from the point of view of at least some of the clergy and of lay believers there was a need and the will to increase the linguistic capital of the Gagauz language within the religious sphere.²⁰ All the contemporary reports we have suggest that the motivation for this was ‘intelligibility’ of the liturgy and enhanced ‘engagement’ in Church practice. Writing in the 1934 in the introduction

¹⁷ C. Upson Clark, *Bessarabia: Russia and Roumania on the Black Sea* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1927), 103.

¹⁸ Quoted in S. Bulgar, *Stranitsy istorii i literatury gagauzov XIX – nach. XX vv.* (Chişinău: Pontus, 2005), 10.

¹⁹ From V. Moshkov, *Gagauzy Benderskogo Uezda (Etnograficheskie obozrenie)* (Moscow, 1900), 42, quoted in Bulgar, *Stranitsy*, 5. *Karamanli* is the name given to Turkish language literature written with Greek characters published from the early 18th through to the 20th century in Istanbul and other centres around Europe to satisfy the desire of Turkish speaking Orthodox Christians of Anatolia and Istanbul for literature in their mother tongue. The language of this literature, referred to as *Karamanlica*, despite its name, is generally not considered to be a separate language, or even distinct dialect, discrete from the Anatolian Turkish of the Muslim majority. However, it is quite different from the spoken Turkish idiom that is used by the Gagauz and was only partly intelligible to Gagauz readers.

²⁰ Çakir appears to have had junior clergy in Gagauz villages that worked alongside him in his translation work. One *psalomşik* (*cântăreţ*, or *dascâl*) Stefan Grozav is named as a member of the translation mission in 1911 in a collection of private papers I discovered in the Gagauz village of *Tomay* (Tomai).

to the reprint of his 1909 translation of the Gospel of Matthew, Çakir gives an insight into his motivations for having undertaken the monumental task of translating the Holy Scriptures into the Gagauz language.

It is because our ancestors, our fathers and mothers, who didn't know how to read went to the monasteries and requested that the monks should read the advice of the New Testament and listened with all their soul. What joy for the Gagauz of today who know how to read! What joy for the Gagauz of today who can read for them themselves from the Holy Gospel God's words in the Gagauz language and find new help in difficulty and times of trouble.²¹

However, it is evident from both the written record and oral sources that Çakir's efforts to promote the Gagauz language in Church life were thwarted by the imposition of the Romanian liturgy. Religious life amongst the Gagauz, certainly from the 1870s until the 1920s, was dominated by a Slav clergy and the Slavonic liturgy. In the interwar period, despite the translation and publication activities of Çakir, the Slavonic rite was replaced by the Romanian liturgy and a predominantly Romanian-speaking clergy took the place of the previously largely Russophile priesthood. Throughout this period the Gagauz remained an almost entirely monoglot Turkish speaking community with very low levels of literacy, even by interwar Romanian standards.²²

It is important to note that Çakir was part of a small educated elite living in the provincial capital Chişinău. He had close family ties with Romania and appears to have had throughout his life a strong affiliation with the Romanian language and culture. Zaharia Çakir, one of his ancestors (his great uncle), was born in the Romanian town of Ploieşti sometime in the second half of the 18th century (his grandparents had moved there from Şabla, in what was then Ottoman Dobruđa). Although Zaharia had moved to Bessarabia in 1802 as priest of the village of Ciadîr in the county of Ismail, connections with the Romanian west bank of the river Prut continued as he served as a priest in the Eparchy of Huşi. We also know that in these early years Zaharia conducted the liturgy in Romanian.²³ It is clear that the Romanian language was central to Mihail Çakir's career in both the Church and education.

Mihail Çakir was educated at the Spiritual School for Boys in Chişinău before going on to study at the Theological Seminary. He also began his teaching career at

²¹ Mihail Ciachir, "Evangeliei ocueadjac Gagauzlara nasaat sioziu," introduction to *Ai (aiozlu) Evanghelieasâ hani Apostol Matfeidean eazâea ghecilmiş*, Gagauzlarân Popular Bibliotecasâ, no. 1 (Chişinău: Tipografia Eparhială – "Cartea Românească," 1934), v–x.

²² In this regard see Gheorghe Murgoci, *La population de la Bessarabie: Étude démographique* (Paris, 1920), 54 and Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics*, 94.

²³ See Chakir, *Biograficheski* and for the Çakir family tree (supplied by Mihail Çakir) see Nicolae Popovschi, *Istoria bisericii din Basarabia în veacul al XIX-lea sub ruşi/Din negura trecutului, crîmpeie de amintiri* (Chişinău: Museum, 2000), 316.

the Spiritual School and later, in 1884, became priest there.²⁴ From very early in his career he was concerned with the particular linguistic problems faced by students in multi-ethnic Bessarabia, especially those experienced by Romanian speakers in the Russian dominated capital. In 1896 he received official permission to print religious books and Moldovan language manuals and began publishing educational materials including a Russian-Moldavian dictionary (*Rusesc și moldovenesc cuvântelnic*, 1907) and a language primer for Moldovans studying the Russian language (*Ajutorul moldovenilor când încep a învăța limba rusă*, 1911).²⁵ This period is considered to be one of intense Russification in the Church and in education; it is therefore all the more remarkable that Çakir was able to work to improve the prospects of the Romanian speaking population from within the Church.²⁶

At the same time as working on educational materials for his Moldovan students he also began translating the Orthodox canon into the Gagauz language. We have already outlined above his expressed motivation for doing so. A familiarity with these two aspects of his early career, which demonstrate his concern for both the Moldovan and Gagauz linguistic communities in the Russian Province, is crucial when we approach his later works, written in the 1930s, which address more directly issues of identity and national consciousness. In this period, as well as continuing to translate biblical and liturgical material, Çakir works with two major themes in relation to Gagauz history and identity: Orthodoxy and Turkishness. From these two seemingly dichotomous elements Çakir crafted a synthesis that reflected both the pragmatic political concerns of the Gagauz minority and the religious sentiments of an Orthodox clergy influenced by the dominant Romanian national discourse.

National Identity and Clerical Agency

Çakir famously states in his ‘History of the Gagauz of Bessarabia’ that the ‘most renowned writers have clearly shown that the Gagauz have their origins in the Turkic Uz, in the Oguz, and in the family of the true Turk’.²⁷ Although Çakir recounts at some length many of the theories that historians have proposed on the origins of the Gagauz he settles on the Uz or Oguz hypothesis that is proposed, in one form or another, by the Czech historian Yiriček, the Russian Moshkov, and the Bulgarian Manov.²⁸ However, the main argument that he uses to support this

²⁴ Ion Șpac, “Un credincios al Basarabiei,” *Luminătorul*, 2001, no. 5:35.

²⁵ N. F. Costesco, “Apostolul: Protoiereu Mihail Chiachir (Necrolog),” *Viața Basarabiei* 7, no. 10 (1938): 65.

²⁶ Șpac, “Un credincios,” 36.

²⁷ Mihail Ciachir, “Besarabiyalı Gagauzların İstoriyası,” in Çakir, *Gagauzlar*, 79.

²⁸ The search for the origins of the Gagauz has consumed numerous Turkish, Bulgarian, Russian, Polish, Czech, Greek and Romanian historians, ethnographers and linguists. Many of these

theory are the comments of Metropolitan Makarii of Moscow, who on a visit to Bessarabia to see Archbishop Vladimir of Chişinău, asked to meet some Gagauz or to read something in their language as he was curious to know what kind of people they are. Makarii had been a missionary amongst the Turks and Tatars of the Russian Empire and was therefore familiar with Turkic languages. Upon reading Çakir's translation of Orthodox Church prayers and the Gospels, Çakir reports Makarii as saying,

The Gagauz language is a pure Turkic language, the true Turkic language, it is very similar to that of the Uygur, who live now in the Asian Altay Mountains, and to that of the Turks, who live on the banks of the Orhon River. The Uygur of the Altay and the Turks of the Orhon River are the ancestors of the other Turks, they speak just like the Gagauz. The Gagauz are also of the Turk family, they speak the same way as the Turks spoke Old Turkish a thousand years ago. History tells us that many Turkic tribes (nations) passed from Asia to the Russian lands from where they passed to the other side of the Danube when they were attacked by the Mongols and the Tartars. Amongst them were to be found the Gagauz.

Çakir goes on to state:

Metropolitan Makarii was delighted when he heard that the Gagauz are Christians of the true faith and that they are religious and pious and he said, 'true Turks are good spirited, open hearted, honest, hospitable people, they always make good Christians.'²⁹

In Çakir's report we can read explicitly how the positive qualities of the Gagauz, being 'true' Turks, become associated with their piety and propensity for the Christian faith. Turkishness, ordinarily associated in the Balkans with Islam, through this ancient connection with the ancestors of the Turkic peoples of the Russian lands, is a means by which the Gagauz acquire their Christian credentials.

In order to counter some of the other theories on the origins of the Gagauz that had been proposed by Bulgarian historians and ethnographers, Çakir turns to the 'folk' wisdom of the Gagauz people themselves. He goes to some length to recount the opinions of 'the old, the learned and the *Hacı* Gagauz' – those that had undertaken the *Hac* or pilgrimage to the Holy Land – with regard to their identity.³⁰ The answers Çakir presents point to reasons why the Gagauz do not belong to one or

scholars, especially those writing in the early part of the 20th century, were motivated by the more or less general concern of the emergent Balkan and East European nations to determine and secure the borders of the nation, both geographically and ethnically. The discourse that resulted from these efforts to determine and authenticate the ethnic origins of the Gagauz and align them with one or other of the nation states in the region is significant for contemporary political discourse and relations between the Moldovan State, the Gagauz Autonomous Region, Turkey and Russia. For an overview of the historiography on Gagauz origins see James A. Kapaló, *Text, Context and Performance: Gagauz Folk Religion in Discourse and Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 58–63.

²⁹ Çakir, *Gagauzlar*, 77.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

other of the neighbouring peoples. The Gagauz are not Greek, they merely presented themselves as Turkified Greeks who had lost their language in times of Ottoman oppression so that they would be accepted by Greeks and Phanariot Moldovans. Çakir concludes that the Gagauz are not at all like Greeks in either their facial features, their traditions, their customs, or their character. The notion that the Gagauz are Turkified Bulgarians can be discounted, according to Çakir, on the basis that the Gagauz themselves do not recognise the word 'Bulgar' but instead refer to Bulgarians as 'Tukan'. The 'Tukan' always live separately from the Gagauz, in their own villages or, when they share a village, in their own *maale* or quarter. Accordingly, the Gagauz of Bessarabia, unlike those in Greece or Bulgaria who have lost their mother tongue and mixed with other nations, are 'pure, true Gagauz'.³¹ Çakir, quoting a 'clever, wise and lean old Gagauz man', then goes on to describe the character of Bulgarians in comparison to that of the Gagauz. The Bulgarians are described in somewhat unfavourable terms as 'petulant, narrow minded, harsh, quarrelsome, angry, cold, solitary, stubborn, worthless in times of difficulty, greedy, always looking for profit, closed and secretive', and on the positive side, 'hard working, sober, and keen'. The Gagauz, in contrast, are 'religious, pious, good of faith, believers, willing to make sacrifices, honest, peaceful, open hearted, good spirited, calm, lyrical, agreeable, generous, happy, cheerful, hospitable and respectful'.³² However, all of these positive qualities are being undermined by credulous and naive tendencies, which according to Çakir were having disastrous consequences in the religious sphere, something to which we shall turn shortly. The conclusion he offers from this comparison of national temperaments is that the Gagauz, quoting an old man from the village of Avdarma, 'are nothing like Bulgarians in character, customs or temperament' and are therefore Turks.³³

As already mentioned, Çakir began his grand project of translating the Church canon into what he sometimes referred to as *Eski Türkçä*, or Old Turkish, in the first decade of the twentieth century. At this early stage this work does not seem to have been inspired by pan-Turkic ideals but rather by the general missionary zeal of the Russian Orthodox Church to translate the scriptures and prayers into the languages of the non-Slav peoples of the Russian Empire. In this he had the blessing of the Metropolitan Makarii of Moscow, referred to above, and the example of the missionary Church in the Russian east. As we have seen from the earliest reports of Gagauz religious life there appears to have been a genuine desire and need for the use of the Gagauz language in worship. However, with the creation of Greater Romania, what had been merely the vernacular idiom of a marginal and somewhat isolated people took on a new geopolitical significance.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 74.

³³ Ibid., 76.

The 'Turkishness' of the Gagauz, in the politics of the post-Ottoman Balkans, was now of interest to the Turkish Republic. Çakir's translation work reached the attention of the pan-Turkic intelligentsia; consequently, the Gagauz, along with other Turkic groups in the Balkans, began to figure in the political aspirations of the Turkish state. By the 1930s Çakir had formed a close relationship with the Turkish Ambassador in Bucharest, Hamdulla Suphi Tanrıöver, and was organising cultural and educational projects between Turkey and the Gagauz communities in Bessarabia.³⁴ Çakir's relations with the Turkish Republic were such that he is reported to have sent a copy of his *History of the Gagauz* to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk himself. The Turkish president was also said to have invited Çakir to come to Turkey and meet with him and to stay in Turkey for a year from the Autumn of 1938.³⁵

The deaths of both Atatürk and Çakir in 1938 prevented this from happening. It has been suggested that Tanrıöver's plans to bring Gagauz students to university in Istanbul and to settle whole communities of Gagauz in the Marmara region of Turkey were part of a broader scheme to people the Independent Turkish Orthodox Church, an institution that was set up following the creation of the Turkish Republic. The Church catered for a tiny Turcophile Orthodox Christian minority in the capital and was at times used as an instrument to undermine the influence of the Greek Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch.³⁶ The Istanbul press of the time praised Çakir for his pan-Turkic zeal. However, his enthusiasm for Turkey was not enough to induce him to shift his allegiance from the Romanian Orthodox Church, to which he belonged from 1919 until his death in 1938, to the Turkish Orthodox Church.

In his articles from the 1930s Çakir goes to some length to stress the cultural affinities that, through their religious practices, the Gagauz share with the Turkish nation. Principal amongst these in his view is the Gagauz tradition of *Hac* or pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Çakir represents the *Hac* as part of the Turkish Islamic

³⁴ Y. Anzerlioğlu, "Bükreş Büyükelçisi Hamdullah Suphi ve Gagauz Türkleri," *Bilig* 39 (2006): 31–51.

³⁵ See Mustafa Argunşah and Hülya Argunşah, *Gagauz Yazıları* (Kayseri: Turk Ocakları Kayseri Şubesi Yayınları, 2007), 46–53; Nicolae Cakir, "Gagauzlar hem Cakir senselesi prof. Dr. Nikolay Cakir," *Saba Yıldızı* 10 (1999): 42–47; H. Serarşlan, *Hamdullah Subhi Tanrıöver* (Ankara: Turk Kulturunun Araştırma Enstitüsü Yayınları, 1995), 151–156; O. Cobanoğlu, *Anavatan'dan anavatan'a bir Gagauz* (Istanbul: Yesevi Yayıncılık, 2003), 28; Yaşar Nabi, *Balkanlar ve Turkluk* (Ankara: Ulus Basımevi, 1936), 57–114.

³⁶ The overwhelming majority of Turkish-speaking Christians in Istanbul and Anatolia had been included in the population exchanges between Greece and Turkey in 1923 leaving only a tiny community comprised mainly of the family of the head of the Church, *Papa Eftimi* (Pavlos Karahisaridis). In this regard see Richard Clogg, *I Kath'imas Anatoli: Studies in Ottoman Greek History* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2004), 385–410. On the Independent Turkish Orthodox Church (*Bağımsız Türk Ortodoks Patrikhanesi*) see Y. Aygıl, *Hıristiyan Türklerin Kısa Tarihi* (Istanbul: Ant Yayınları, 1995).

heritage of the Gagauz, whilst ignoring the more obvious links with Russian and Ukrainian spiritual traditions of pilgrimage to the Holy Land, or indeed that of other Balkan peoples such as the Greeks.³⁷ The main route from Russia and Ukraine for Odessa and sea passage to the Levant passed close to the Gagauz region of Bessarabia. Çakir's representation of this tradition appears to be a curious downplaying of affinities with Russian spirituality in favour of the Turkish connection.³⁸ In the same article on Gagauz religion Çakir highlights further traditions that he suggests demonstrate the close spiritual and linguistic links with the Turkic world such as *Kurban* sacrifice and the tradition of *Allahlık*.³⁹ It is perhaps not surprising that Çakir's writings from this period inspired a new generation of Turkish scholars who have attempted to demonstrate the Turkish Islamic origins and affinities of the Gagauz based on their religious cosmology, vocabulary and customs.⁴⁰ Çakir concludes his discussions of these traditions by claiming: 'The religiosity of the Gagauz demonstrates the probability of their shared life with the Turks, who, as is well known, are religious to the point of fanaticism.'⁴¹

It is clear from the above examples of Çakir's formulations that he attempted to create a harmonious synthesis of Orthodox Christian religious piety and Turkish (or Turkic) ethnic purity. However, the picture is not complete without consideration of an important third dimension that was rooted in Gagauz popular consciousness. Çakir could not ignore the fact that the Gagauz, along with the other colonists from the Balkans, had fled precisely the same people, the Turkish Ottomans, with whom they were supposed to share such powerful ethnic and racial affinities. The Russian-Turkish wars, according to Çakir, had the 'character of medieval crusades [...] a war between cross and crescent, between Christianity and Islam' with the aim of liberating Christians from Turkish rule. He goes on to state that it was during this period that the 'religious feeling' of the Gagauz of Bessarabia developed.⁴² The religious character of the wars had the effect on the Gagauz, according to Çakir, of 'amplifying' even further the religious zeal that was to be found amongst the Russians.⁴³ The Russian colonial authorities, the generals, officers and administrators, sponsored and organised religious life in the new colonies and set an example for the settlers of strict religious and moral standards. The period of the colonial administration, from 1816 to 1872, was the golden age

³⁷ Ciachir, "Religiositatea," 21–28.

³⁸ I discuss this at greater length in Kapaló, "The Career."

³⁹ Ciachir, "Religiositatea."

⁴⁰ See in particular Harun Güngör, "Gagavuzların Hıristiyanlığı Kabulü ve İnanışlarıdaki İslami Unsurlar Meselesi," *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları* 27 (1983): 248–254 and Harun Güngör and Mustafa Argunsah, *Gagauzlar, Gagauz Türklerinin etnik yapısı, nüfusu, dili, dini, folkloru hakkında bir araştırma* (Istanbul: Otuken, 1998).

⁴¹ Ciachir, "Religiositatea," 25.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

of Gagauz religious and moral order in Çakir's view: 'The morality of the Gagauz was at its highest and most exemplary not only in the period of the colonial administration but in the whole time up to the World War.'⁴⁴

Çakir establishes a picture of the Gagauz as a religiously pious, moral and God fearing people. This construction of Gagauz national character is formed from three distinct components, the purity of their origins in the 'family of the true Turk' in Central Asia, which gives them the 'spiritual psychological' and biological basis on which the crusader spirit of the Russian Tsarist army could imprint the second component, a devotion to Orthodox Christianity that is enduring and steadfast combined with the influence of the religious 'fanaticism' of the Ottoman Turks.⁴⁵ These three elements form the basis of a construction of Gagauz identity that Çakir represents to both an elite Romanian audience and, in the form of advice and guidance, to the young Gagauz intellectuals, comprising mainly school teachers and priests, working in Gagauz villages.

In both his 'History of the Gagauz of Bessarabia' and his Gagauz language journal, *Hakikatın Sesi*, Çakir expresses explicitly what he perceives to be the most serious threats to the Gagauz people in 1930s Greater Romania. These arise from two sources that mirror the founding principles of Gagauz identity. The first and most dangerous is the threat to the soul, and to Orthodox Christianity, which comes from *Allahsız komunist*, the 'Godless Communist', and from Baptists and Adventists and other heretics and sects.⁴⁶ These are external threats that are the result of the new found 'liberality' that, according to Çakir, resulted from, amongst other things, the Russian revolution. Çakir writes:

Some Gagauz have begun shamelessly to abandon the religion of their mothers and fathers, to discard the true faith of Orthodox Christianity, like the Jew, to sell and discard the cross of Christ, and to become Baptists, Adventists, and join other sects ... Amongst the foolish Gagauz will be found such stupid men who shamelessly become atheist communists, godless wolves.⁴⁷

The threat to Orthodoxy is compounded by a fear of moral decay:

There is *one* reason that this small people could perish, if, at a certain time, they become restless, they are not disciplined, and they [do not] forget about the dangers of

⁴⁴ Idem, "Moralitatea," 106.

⁴⁵ Çakir, *Gagauzlar*, 79.

⁴⁶ The Gagauz language religious newspaper *Hakikatın Sesi* that Çakir produced throughout the interwar period is mostly devoted to attacking the new 'sects' of Baptists and Adventists and the Communists that he conceived posed a threat to Orthodoxy, the moral order and the Gagauz nation. However, these were not just the concerns of Çakir as the Moldovan Orthodox Church in general in its journal *Luminătorul* often devoted space during this time to reporting on the *lupta cu sectanții*, 'the battle with the sectists', in the south of Bessarabia. See for example I. Belodanov, "Activitatea misionarilor cerc. I jud. Ismail," *Luminătorul* 42 (1921): 79–82.

⁴⁷ Çakir, *Gagauzlar*, 79.

drunkenness and other vices. These, from year to year, are increasing and become hard stones that weigh on the decadent shoulders of the Gagauz and their social life.⁴⁸

These two factors are closely linked; the moral decay of the Gagauz, according to Çakir, would not only result in the decline of Orthodox spirituality but also the downfall of the Gagauz nation at the hands of the Russian Communist or the religious ‘other’. The distinctive qualities of the Gagauz, bequeathed to them by their Turkish ancestry, are indivisible from their Orthodox Christianity – they survive in and through each other. In this way, Çakir represents religious motivations and spiritual dispositions as indivisible from national motivations and sentiments and thus proposes a political ethnotheology akin to Orthodoxism.

The Gagauz and Romanian National Discourse

Çakir was undoubtedly influenced during this period by the religious dimension of the Romanian nationalist discourse. Çakir’s formulations, the style and the symbols he employed, are reminiscent of the political ideology of Orthodoxism of Nichifor Crainic expressed in the journal *Gândirea*, in which the Romanian peasant soul and true Orthodox belief combine to ensure the moral health of the Romanian people. Crainic was a lecturer at the new Theology Faculty in Chişinău from 1926 until the close of the war and Çakir would certainly have been exposed to his brand of nationalist ideology that drew heavily on the mystical resources of Romanian Orthodoxy. Çakir, in much the same way as Crainic, developed a form of mystical ethnotheology, particularly in regard to the Gagauz tradition of *Kurban*.

The idea of sacrifice, viewed in the context of the Gagauz mystical, envelops this people with a very interesting legendary atmosphere because the religious practices we will analyse denote a certain mentality, placing the people itself in a situation which (in actual fact) explains the resistance that this people has shown throughout history.

Kurban [sacrifices] are the secret means of connection between man and God. To speak about them in the context of the life of the Gagauz, means we realize the zeal that is revealed through these great spiritual acts.⁴⁹

Çakir’s Gagauz mysticism was much less developed than Crainic’s Orthodoxism, however, along with Crainic, he sanctifies the religious mentality and practices of the people, valorises the simple but wise common folk and confuses the nation and national values with Orthodoxy.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Ibid., 106.

⁴⁹ Ciachir, “Curbanele sau sacrificiile,” 4.

⁵⁰ Roland Clark, *Nationalism, Ethnotheology, and Mysticism in Interwar Romania*, The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies, no. 2002 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 2009), 25.

Çakir's representations of Gagauz identity and national consciousness may seem entirely natural coming from a priest of the Orthodox Church. However, as we have already mentioned, he was in an almost entirely unique position. He belonged to a tiny elite of Romanian speaking Gagauz clergy, and was located a long way from his people in the capital Chişinău, where he had spent the whole of his adult life, and was exposed to all the intellectual currents of the time. Despite these factors he affected profoundly the course of Gagauz national consciousness. Reports from the time suggest that he was incredibly active in disseminating his ideas and getting his message heard. He wrote tirelessly to priests, schoolteachers and administrators in Gagauz villages, sending them copies of his books and explaining his ideas to them. He regularly toured the Gagauz villages and preached sermons to large crowds of enthusiastic believers and he appears to have been a man of considerable charisma.⁵¹ A recent biography of Çakir appraised his role in the following terms,

In the soul of the Gagauz people there is always place for Mihail Çakir. As a result of his work as a religious and spiritual leader the Gagauz began to see themselves as a collective, as a nation. He was a spiritual shepherd of his people all his life and at the end of his life he became a symbol of the nation because he revealed the Gagauz national spirit.⁵²

In the post-Çakir era no longer could the Gagauz be considered part of an indiscriminate mass of Balkan colonists of dubious origin and uncertain faith. By the 1930s, Çakir had determined the basic ingredients of the 'idea' of Gagauz nationhood that would prevail and re-emerge after the Soviet period. Gagauz national identity was neither Bulgarian nor Greek, but wholeheartedly Turkish in origin and yet also fervently Orthodox 'to the point of fanaticism'.⁵³ The Gagauz national spirit that Çakir is credited with revealing in his writings is one inseparably bound to Orthodox Christianity yet also irreconcilably and tenaciously attached to Turkic ethnic and linguistic roots, a fusion of the ethnos with Orthodoxy.

Çakir's characterisation of his people serves two clear purposes: to strengthen a sense of ethnic identity in opposition to the other dominant local ethnic group, the Bulgarians, by stressing Turkish origins, as well as to emphasise Orthodox Christian similitude with the Romanian nation, at a time when Orthodox spirituality was at the heart of the ideology of the nation.⁵⁴ Nowhere does Çakir

⁵¹ See in particular V. Casîm, *50 de ani de activitate pastorală și profesorală* (undated) and Costesco, "Apostolul," 65–68.

⁵² Stepan Bulgar, "Mihail Çakirin Biografiası," in Çakir, *Gagauzlar*, 33.

⁵³ Ciachir, "Religiositatea," 25.

⁵⁴ Issue 25 of *Hakikatın Sesi*, which dates from the late 1930s, is largely devoted to sponsoring the cult of Dimitri Basarabov, the patron Saint of Bucharest, amongst the Gagauz and as such can be considered an attempt by Çakir to strengthen the religious bonds between the Gagauz and Romanians.

give expression to explicitly political ambitions for the Gagauz people. The role that the nation plays as virtually the sole legitimate means of cultural and political expression in Romanian public life in this period is accommodated by Çakir's almost total recourse to Orthodox spirituality and morality. This move was expedient due to the total subsumption or cooption of Orthodoxy within the body of the Romanian ethnic nation in Romanian national discourse.

The perceived external and internal existential threats to the Romanian nation, the predatory irredentist neighbouring states on the one hand and the suspect and treacherous minorities, against which intellectuals and activists were being mobilised,⁵⁵ stand in contrast to those that Çakir viewed as threats to the Gagauz. These come in the form of new 'liberties brought by the Russian Revolution' which were resulting in moral decadence and decay and the threat to Orthodoxy, caused by Baptists and other foreign missionaries.⁵⁶ The only threats to the Gagauz people that Çakir voices in his writings are solely to the prevailing moral and religious order and are divorced from issues such as language and territory which related directly to the effects of Romanian rule in state and church.

During the Second World War the discourse on the ethnic nation intensified. The place of ethno-linguistic and religious minorities within the Romanian state, and their relationship to the titular ethnic nation, became ever more precarious. The ideological discourse that underscored efforts to reoccupy and secure territory for the nation, both symbolically and physically, gave rise to racial policies that sought to identify alien elements within the national body that posed a threat, and develop plans to integrate them or expel them from the ethnic motherland. This discourse employed two distinct means of determining membership of the nation, one based on membership of the Romanian Orthodox Church, due to its role as the moral and spiritual centre of the nation, and the other based on the young sciences of eugenics and racial anthropology.⁵⁷ Nichifor Crainic, theologian and colleague of Çakir, was amongst the first to advocate such extreme measures as forced expulsion and population exchanges to ensure the success of the new order in Romania.⁵⁸

In the 1940s the Antonescu regime began to utilise eugenic and racial anthropological studies to identify non-Romanian stock within the state. The Gagauz were the subject of one such study published in 1940, which sought to

⁵⁵ W. van Meurs, *The Bessarabian Question in Communist Historiography*, East European Monographs (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 209.

⁵⁶ Ciachir, "Moralitatea," 106.

⁵⁷ See Maria Bucur, *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002) and Marius Turda, "The Nation as Object: Race, Blood and Biopolitics in Interwar Romania," *Slavic Review* 66, no. 3 (2007): 413–441.

⁵⁸ Chris Davis, PhD dissertation in progress, University of Oxford.

determine their 'origins and anthropological structure'.⁵⁹ The results of these studies were used to support racial policies of social engineering designed to fortify the nation. One recent commentator has revealed, based on a report that has recently come to light in the Romanian National Archives, that these plans equated to a systematic policy of 'ethnic purification' of the country of all ethnic minorities.⁶⁰ The main instrument in achieving this end was the potential for the exchange of populations between states. Population transfers of suspect and unwanted minorities had already been carried out between Romania and Bulgaria in 1940 and Romania and Hungary in 1941 with further exchanges planned.⁶¹

With the return of Bessarabia in 1941, and the hasty and brutal murder and expulsion of its Jewish population, Antonescu decided to make Bessarabia, along with Bukovina, 'model' Romanian provinces. Part of this scheme was to evacuate all ethnically alien stock in Bessarabia, namely the Bulgarians, Gagauz, Russians and Ukrainians, and replace them with Romanians. The report referred to above, which was drawn up by the 'Undersecretary of State for Romanianization, Colonization and Inventory' in 1942, designated the Gagauz, along with the Bulgarians and other Slavs, as an ethnic component that 'continue to cultivate a different ideology and maintain sentiments that are hostile to our nation'. The report goes on to state that 'they represent a great threat to Romanian culture and to the defence of the state'. The report concludes that 'a serious and urgent Romanianization, that is to say replacement of these foreign elements through Romanian colonization, is imperative'.⁶² The Antonescu regime's designs for the Gagauz, which revolved around the above mentioned potential agreement to transplant them to Turkey,⁶³ however, were never realised as the war on the Eastern Front began to go increasingly badly for the Axis and the Romanian leadership came to the realisation that the war might be lost.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Olga Necrasov, *Le problème de l'origine des Gagaouzes et la structure anthropologique de ce groupement ethnique*, Lucrările Soc. Geografice Dimitrie Cantemir III (Iași, 1940).

⁶⁰ See V. Solonari, "An Important New Document on the Romanian Policy of Ethnic Cleansing During WWII," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 21, no. 2 (2007): 268.

⁶¹ C. Davis, "Restocking the Ethnic Homeland: Ideological and Strategic Motives behind Hungary's "Hazatelepítés" Schemes During WWII (and the Unintended Consequences)," *Regio* 1 (2007): 155–174.

⁶² DANIC, Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri, Cabinetul Civil, Mihai Antonescu, 1942, inventar 2241, fond 78, dosar 244, p. 6.

⁶³ Following an agreement made in 1936 between Romania and Turkey, 70,000 Muslim Turks had already left Dobruđa for Turkey. See P. Ahonen et al., *People on the Move: Forced Population Movements in Europe in the Second World War and Its Aftermath* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2008), 55.

⁶⁴ For a full discussion of this issue see Solonari, "An Important New Document," 282–287.

Conclusion

Mihail Çakir died in 1938, before the extreme hardship and brutality of the war years. The existential threats to the survival of the Gagauz he warned against in his writings – moral decay, religious conversion and secular Soviet power – are in stark contrast to the threat of cultural and linguistic assimilation, persecution and deportation that characterised the treatment of minorities in Romanian Bessarabia. In this sense, Çakir's writings appear divorced from the political reality of the time. On the other hand, we can also read them as part of a pragmatic strategy to portray the Gagauz people as a brotherly Orthodox nation loyal to Romania and antagonistic towards her enemies, the Soviet Russians and the Bulgarians, in the face of an increasingly exclusionary Romanian national discourse propagated from within the institutions of the Orthodox Church in Bessarabia.

Initially, Çakir's 'canonization' or 'sanctification' of the Gagauz language through the act of scriptural translation appears inspired by concern for the spiritual welfare of his people. Sponsoring the use of Turkish in the religious sphere was a means to an end rather than part of a national ideological project. However, the legacy of what were later deemed his pan-Turkist activities is still felt in the political fabric of contemporary *Gagauziya*. The Turkish dimension of the geopolitics of the region is a complex issue but the political leadership, during both the Greater Romania period and today in the post-Soviet Republic of Moldova, has, with some small measure of success, used Turkey as lever to help prise the Gagauz away from the bosom of Mother Russia. The Romanian nationalist political ideology of the interwar years profoundly affected the course of the Gagauz national movement in the sense that the pragmatic 'Romanianism' and Gagauz 'Orthodoxism' it inspired in Çakir was decisive in forging the links between the Orthodox Christian Gagauz and the Turkish Republic.

The direct influence of the ethnic, racial and religious dimensions of the Romanian national discourse can be detected in Çakir's construction of a Gagauz identity. Çakir's personal empathy and affiliation with Romania and the Romanian nation is not in question. However, perhaps largely due to the return of Russian political and cultural hegemony after the war, despite investing the Gagauz community with its first 'narrative of the nation', his 'model' for Gagauz national identity failed to survive on the level of popular sentiment or historical memory.